

Fanning the Flames: Political Discourse Analysis of Anti-austerity Social
Movement Intervention in the UK General Elections of 2015 and 2017

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“Social change has two prerequisites: the burning flame of anger at injustice,
and the burning flame of hope at a better world”

Tony Benn

Abstract

Once thought of as sitting outside of institutional politics, social movements have been a consistent and dominant feature of the political landscape in the twenty-first century. Social movements, as political actors, can have a refining and reinforcing effect on conventional politics through the highlighting of specific issues that shape both political party and voter behaviour. However, in the field of political communication the literature has traditionally focused on the ways in which institutional political actors – political parties and politicians – have communicated, often via the media, with the electorate. Conversely, the social movement literature has tended to focus on extra-parliamentary politics that occur outside of election time and, as such, neglects this aspect of the political process. This thesis begins to address that lacuna by exploring the role of communication by the UK-based social movement The People's Assembly Against Austerity in electoral politics and assesses how far they can be seen as political actors in electoral campaigns.

The project examines the 2015 and 2017 general election campaigns, during which the notion of 'austerity' formed a major element of the political environment. The political issue of the National Health Service (NHS) forms the focus of the research because it was one of the few remaining areas of the Welfare State said to be protected from the full impact of austerity policies. To discover what role movement communication played in electoral debates on the NHS, a comparative analysis between The People's Assembly Against Austerity texts and the Conservative and Labour Party manifestos was conducted. In order to analyse what each of the political actors were arguing for, this research used Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) approach to Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). This methodology facilitated the explication of competing views that were circulating during each election and allowed for competing perspectives and claims for action to be foregrounded. What is contended in this thesis is that social movements can be publicly and politically influential by presenting discourses that challenge (or reproduce) established definitions, meanings and understandings of social reality.

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own independent work, except where referenced to others. It was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Nottingham.

I further declare that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for any other degree.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis examines the 2015 and the 2017 general election campaigns and analyses the practical arguments made by The People's Assembly Against Austerity (henceforth referred to as The People's Assembly) and the Conservative and Labour parties, in relation to the political issue of the National Health Service (NHS). During both elections the notion of 'austerity' formed a major element of the political environment. Austerity was broadly understood by its advocates as the need for cuts to public spending in order to reduce public debt. This definition of austerity was challenged by the UK-based social movement The People's Assembly who described it as a political choice rather than an economic necessity. In 2015, the use of the term austerity was entrenched in the electoral campaigns of both political parties (Atkins 2015; Cowley & Kavanagh 2016; Scammell 2015) and in media reporting on the NHS (Basu 2017, 2019; Berry 2016, 2019). By 2017, the term faced more robust challenges to its intellectual underpinnings by both the movement and one of the main political parties. The election of the left-wing MP Jeremy Corbyn to Labour leader in September 2015 represented a shift towards the political mainstreaming of an anti-austerity frame (Cammaerts 2018: 182; Flesher Fominaya 2017: 16).

This research asks whether these changes represent a paradigm shift in the UK political landscape and explores what role social movements, such as The People's Assembly, played as disseminators of counter-arguments and frames. This is achieved by asking the broad question: During elections, what arguments do social movements present to enter the political debate and to what extent do they challenge or complement electoral political messaging? Underlying this question is a sub-question that interrogates the role of framing by different actors to determine to what extent the arguments presented by The People's Assembly and the Conservative and Labour parties were based on (anti)austerity frames.

1.1 Overview of the Thesis

At its foundation, this research draws on the theoretical assertion that our social reality is linguistically constituted (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 2003, 2010; Fowler 1991, 1996; Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew 1979; Hodge & Kress 1979, 1988; Kress 1983, 1996; Lindekilde 2014; Wodak 1989, 2011; Wodak & Meyer 2009) and that our knowledge of the world is discursively constructed (Foucault 2001, 2002 [1969], 2002a, 2008 [1979]). Upon this theoretical basis it can be hypothesised that the way in which we discuss the world – how we use language to describe the world – can shape the political, cultural or moral landscape or circumstances that we live in. Language in a pragmatic sense is an “instrument of real agents holding their own systems of beliefs and values” (Macagno & Walton 2014: 47) within a wider community of language users and cultures. It constitutes meaning and cultivates established definitions of social reality which can determine the ways in which we interact and act toward events and the goals that we want to obtain. Often, though, there are struggles over preferred meanings between agents in different circumstances, with different conceptions of how a society is to be structured and different claims for action on how to achieve that. As Alan Finlayson notes, “[t]his contestability, intrinsic to democratic politics, concerns more than a simple clash of opinion: political disputes do not arise only out of misunderstanding or mistakes, nor simply from the absence of sufficient data, but because parties to a dispute emerge from different contexts with different criteria of assessment” (2007: 550).

The conception of politics, as it is applied in this thesis, is an arena in which actors express more or less conscious linguistic strategies for justifying their criteria of assessment (even if that criteria is not explicitly stated) and then attempt to persuade others of that justification (Finlayson 2007: 552). The role of language is recognised by political actors because “its use has effects, and because politics is very largely the use of language, even if the converse is not true – not every use of language is political” (Chilton 2004: 14). Following Norman and Isabel Fairclough (2012), politics is fundamentally about action – getting people to do something – and it is about deliberating over ‘what is to

be done' and arguing for particular ways of acting. In political discourse, actors participate in the production of political messages that are constituted by, and can seek to construct, particular ideational patterns, 'scripts' or frames (Bateson [1954] 1973; Entman 1993; Graber 1988; Lakoff 2014). These frames can be used to mobilize support for particular political goals or visions of the future, and during elections political actors compete to put forward these visions of the future to the electorate. From this perspective the principal function of language in politics is persuasion and all political actors, especially in a democracy, need to communicate with audiences in order to seek support for their justification on what it is that needs to be done and what action to take.

In democratic societies, voting is understood as a procedure by which a society determines "which proposed course of action will prevail" (Fairclough 2012: 327). As this research explores how social movement communication interacts with mainstream political parties' messaging, this thesis focuses on electoral campaigning. In the field of political communication, the genre of electoral campaigning is broadly understood as the analysis of political messages that occur during concentrated periods of political activity in democratic societies (Arbour 2014; Beers 2018; Lilleker 2006). In this thesis electoral campaigning is conceptualised as a tactic employed by political actors to put forward practical arguments designed to convince an audience (i.e. the electorate) not only to vote (or not vote) for a particular party but to (implicitly) accept a particular standpoint (e.g. austerity/anti-austerity) and any action proposed that supports that view. In combination, both conceptions of electoral communication extend the sphere of political communication beyond formal political and media institutions to allow for social movements to be considered part of the political landscape.

Today, in the West, social movements can be thought of as firmly rooted in the everyday reality of people's lives and are a normal part of the political process (Cox and Nilsen 2014; Goodwin & Jasper, 2009; Johnston 2014; Meyer & Tarrow 1998; Tarrow 2011; Tilly & Tarrow 2007; Tilly 2008). They are

defined, in this thesis, as a process in which people engage in order to discuss, define, and demonstrate over issues of common concern. This process is dialectical in that pressure is exerted upon the institutional context through the communication of concerns by movements, which may effect change in the constitution of Parliamentary politics and/or policies either directly or as a result of voting. Movements, therefore, can be understood as the “animating forces” that make and unmake the structure of society, by articulating needs and structuring capacities that form society (Cox & Nilsen 2014: 56).

Alongside Manuel Castells (2013), Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (2014), Hank Johnston (2014) and Lasse Lindekilde (2014), I conceptualise social movements as actors aiming for cultural change (a change in value and beliefs) through the communication of counter-narratives or arguments, which may lead to institutional adoption and therefore political change. Understood as political agents, social movements can be politically impactful by presenting discourses that challenge, or reproduce, dominant definitions of the political environment and offer alternative arguments about what is to be done. Upon this basis, it is contended here that social movements should be included in the field of political communication, and analysis of electoral politics included in social movement research.

Traditionally the political communication literature has focused on the ways in which institutional political actors – political parties and politicians – have communicated, often via the media, with the electorate. Conversely, social movement literature has tended to focus on extra-parliamentary politics that occur outside of election time and, as such, neglects this aspect of the political process. This thesis begins to bridge that gap by examining the role of communication by The People’s Assembly in electoral politics and positions them as political actors in two electoral campaigns. It also examines the concomitant Conservative and Labour Party manifestos in order to draw out any competing frames (discussed below). Although it is analytically difficult to evaluate the direction of normative social change, it is possible to analyse the

arguments that these political actors put forward to assess where there are similarities and differences between movement and political party messages.

The People's Assembly was initially launched in February 2013 with a letter¹ to *The Guardian* that called for campaigns to come together to challenge austerity measures, such as cuts and privatisation, and develop a "strategy for resistance to mobilise millions of people against the Con Dem [Coalition] government" (*The Guardian*, February 5, 2013). The main "austerity measures", referred to in the letter, implemented by the Coalition government were the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (HSCA), and The People's Assembly campaigned against the effects of both Acts. For example, the 'No More Austerity: demand the alternative' march held on Saturday June 21, 2014 highlighted the "squeeze" on living standards that the movement claimed was caused by changes to the welfare system, such as changes to Job Seeker's Allowances and Child Benefit². Another example is the national 'It's Our NHS' demonstration held on March 4, 2017 that attracted around 250,000 people³ and called for an end to the privatisation and underfunding of the health service that the movement, alongside Health Campaigns Together and Keep Our NHS Public, believed were being exacerbated by the legislation⁴.

Since its inception, the NHS has been regarded as a free, universal service that meets the healthcare needs of the majority of people in the UK. It plays a deeply symbolic role in British politics and symbolises "aspects of fairness,

¹ The letter featured in the business section of theguardian.com: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/feb/05/people-assembly-against-austerity> (last accessed 13/06/2019).

² For details of the demonstration see: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/events/no-more-austerity-demand-the-alternative-march/> (last accessed 13/06/2019).

³ This number of attendees was estimated by The People's Assembly. According to BBC reports no official estimate was made: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39167350> (last accessed 12/08/2019).

⁴ For details visit: http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/our_nhs (last accessed 13/06/2019).

security, commonality, and ‘solidarity’ ... [that] represents the high point and essence of social democratic traditions” (Cribb 2008: 223). As a social provision it is one of the few remaining aspects of the Welfare State that is still valued across society and the political divide. As such, the service carries a political and social weight to the extent that, in his memoirs, the former Conservative Chancellor Nigel Lawson described it as being “the closest thing the English have to a religion”⁵. It was in this context that the decision to focus on the NHS, over other welfare provision, was made.

To analyse what arguments about the NHS each political actor was communicating I apply Faircloughian Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) as a method. With its roots in Foucauldian discourse (Foucault 2002 [1969]), PDA is a method of analysing the practical arguments employed by competing political actors (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012). Actors or agents, it is argued, deliberate over possible lines of action – reasons for or against doing something – and make choices about how to act in response to, what Fairclough and Fairclough refer to as, “circumstances and goals” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 1). This methodology facilitates the explication of competing views that were circulating during each election and draws in counter-arguments from extra-institutional actors, which broadens the field of political debate.

1.2 The Structure of the Thesis

In this thesis, my overall goal is to demonstrate that a UK-based social movement actively engaged in political messaging during election campaigns and to establish what value their counter- or supporting arguments added to the broader debate. By analysing the practical arguments of both institutional and extra-institutional actors during election time, a more complete picture of the political landscape within which voters are acting can be provided. To achieve this the thesis unfolds as follows.

⁵ Nigel Lawson, *The View from No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical* (London: Corgi, 1993).

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on discourse and language relevant to the field of political communication and social movements. It also identifies the gap in this literature regarding social movements as non-institutional actors operating in the field of political discourse and electoral campaigning. Finally, the chapter identifies some of the linguistic instruments, such as framing and persuasion, used in electoral campaigning by political actors to get their message across to the voting public.

Chapter 3 establishes the historical underpinnings of the competing (anti)austerity frames communicated by the political actors to the electorate during the 2015 and 2017 elections. It outlines definitions of austerity, the utility of the concept (what policies it led to), and defines the conceptions of 'austerity' and 'anti-austerity' used in this thesis.

Chapter 4 explicates the methodology used to analyse what the political actors were arguing for during the two elections and gives the rationale for the use of Faircloughian PDA. It also outlines the field and timeline of study and the data collection and analysis methods, including the use of NVivo and the application of PDA to the data.

Chapters 5 and 6 are, respectively, the 2015 and 2017 case studies. Each chapter offers a brief overview of the electoral landscapes including the importance of the NHS in each election, reconstructs the practical arguments identified from the datasets, and critically evaluates them in relation to challenges made in articles from the mainstream media (press only).

Chapter 7 contextualises and discusses the findings and outlines the original contribution to the field of political communication made by this thesis.

This research will be of interest to an academic audience as a contribution to the fields of political communication and social movement studies, in that it extends the political context to incorporate social movements. In addition, by examining the political discourse of social movements and their arguments, this research has the potential to inform the language used by a wide range of groups when engaging in electoral communication, from charities, think tanks

and unions, to other third party or civil society groups. For example, it will offer these groups an indication of how to be argumentatively valid and/or rhetorically effective at gaining press coverage, or influencing or complementing party strategy and policy during elections.

Chapter 2: Language, Discourse and Social Reality

This chapter will review the existing literature on discourse and language relevant to the study of political communication and social movements, specifically electoral campaigning. The first section looks at existing theories on the construction of the social world via language and discourse, establishes a link between discourse, politics and communication, and considers the development of the field of political communication and electoral campaigning. The second section identifies a gap in the literature regarding non-institutional political actors, such as social movements, and explores existing literature in social movement research establishing movements as signifying agents. Finally, this chapter goes on to explore the linguistic instruments used in electoral campaigning by political actors to communicate their messages to the electorate, such as the use of frames and strategies of persuasion and negative evaluation.

2.1 Language and Discourse

How we communicate ideas, values and beliefs about the world around us – both natural and cultural (Fairclough 2010: 2) – is important because this is how social relations are built and maintained. The meanings and concepts we employ to do this constitute our social world, and both what we say and how we say it matter because language forms a crucial part of the formation of society. What exists in the world is mediated by how we talk about the world, which impacts on how we act in the world and, ultimately, how we structure it (Fairclough 2010; Foucault 2002 [1969]).

The notion that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman 2011 [1966]; Searle 1995, 2010) draws on the theoretical assertion that, via the interplay of texts, discourses and wider contexts, it is linguistically constituted (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 2003, 2010; Fowler 1991, 1996; Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew 1979; Hodge & Kress 1979, 1988; Kress 1983, 1996; Lindekilde 2014; Wodak 1989, 2011; Wodak & Meyer 2009). We create meaning in the world as we actively live within it and these meanings in turn condition our practical activity and behaviour. Hence the “relation between world and subject is

never simply unidirectional” and is mediated “through semiotic filters” that conceives the environment as being “of a certain kind” (Cox & Nilsen 2014: 35). This theoretical framework offers a perspective on language that includes an understanding of how social knowledge is discursively constructed and what effect this has on how we know what we know, understand ‘what is going on’, and act in the world. The philosopher Michel Foucault crystallises this in his concept of discourse, which is understood as social use of language, as language in social contexts, and as language contributing to the construction of social reality (2001, 2002 [1969], 2008 [1979]; see also Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 78).

Foucault conceives of discourse as an organised and organising body of “knowledge, with rules and regulations that govern particular practices (ways of speaking, thinking and acting)”, which work in three ways: enabling, constraining and constituting (Storey 2015: 133). In *Archaeology of Knowledge* he explains that discourses “are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 2002 [1969]: 54). So, for example, language as a discourse situates and produces my subjectivity because language *enables* me to speak, it *constrains* what I say and how I say it, and *constitutes* me as a speaking subject (Storey 2015: 133). There are other discourses (usually culturally constructed) that produce subject positions, such as being a feminist (to be a feminist you need to be familiar with the underlying principles of the concept that both enable and constrain your actions and, in so doing, also constitute you being a feminist), that we are invited to occupy (or are excluded from). Thus, discourses are social practices with ‘scripts’ (or frames) that structure (or constitute) our experience of the world.

To be able to read from these frames the subject requires knowledge, and discourses produce that knowledge. For Foucault, knowledge is always a weapon of power because it can be deployed to categorise and organise behaviour into what is acceptable or unacceptable. In this way then, “power produces knowledge ... there is no power relation without the correlative

constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault 2008 [1979]: 27). Here is the crux of Foucault’s argument: through discourses, power produces reality or the “truths” that any given society lives by (Foucault 2002a: 131). These ‘regimes of truth’ do not have to be objectively true, just epistemically true in that they have to be thought of and acted upon as if true: “If ideas are believed, they establish and legitimate particular regimes of truth” (Storey 2015: 135). This insight is crucial to understanding the significance of the arguments analysed in this thesis. As will be demonstrated by the case studies, even if some of the ideas in the arguments can be challenged and the arguments shown to be invalid, the overall meaning or viewpoint can be accepted by the broader public and used to legitimise decision-making.

Often there is an ongoing struggle for preferred meanings between agents with different situations, experiences and power to control the meaning provided by words (Steinberg 1998, 1999). Social reality can, therefore, be cultivated by certain actors, usually the most powerful in society, who repeatedly offer an interpretation of a given event that is then reiterated by other actors and absorbed by the interlocutor. In other words, the way in which social reality or an event is spoken about (or framed), discussed or debated in society can come to define how that event or reality is understood by people and can determine how they interact with and act toward the event (Castells 2013; Lakoff 2008, 2014). One example is that of the bailout of the banking sector during the financial crash of 2007/08 that was reworked as overspending on public services, which in the UK context was formulated as Labour Party profligacy and led to numerous policies to reduce government spending (see Chapter 3 for more details). How something is framed, then, determines what action is to be taken, i.e. what decision (if any) needs to be made.

It is this function of language – its ability to constitute patterns of thoughts and inform decision-making – that renders it a source of power. For example,

if we hear the same language over and over again, we are more likely to think in the “terms of the frames and metaphors activated in that language” (Lakoff 2008: 15). Thus, language has a dynamic quality in that it drives forward social change, rather than only reflecting our social world. Similarly, discourse, as Foucault’s conception acknowledges, can be transformative because competing discourses or frames may gain more traction at any given moment in time (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 6). As Foucault states:

... discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

Foucault in Storey 2015: 135

Foucault, then, understands power as enabling and transformative and conceives of reality as actively produced by discourse, rather than simply represented by it (Ruiz 2014: 34-5). It is this interpretation of reality and power by Foucault that “allows for the possibility of promotional forms of political resistance” (Ruiz 2014: 35) and is the reason this research draws on his work. Upon this theoretical basis, it is possible that the dominant discursive formation of reality can be transformed or replaced. The challenge is to understand that how we semantically describe the world can actually change it in practice, and how we act in the world can realign discourse (Fairclough 2010: 175). As Fairclough states: “Social transformations in contemporary social life are extensively ‘discourse-led’, in the sense that it is discourses which change first” (Fairclough 2010: 77). Understanding a society’s political, cultural or moral landscape can be achieved through the analysis of the language it uses, the way in which it frames issues, and the practical arguments social actors put forth when assessing and addressing issues faced in everyday life.

2.1.1 Discourse and Political Communication

Building on the philosophical foundations in the last section, it is now possible to argue that the way in which people think can determine the specific cultural norms and values that a society is constructed upon (Castells 2007: 238). Like Foucault, Castells sees this as potentially transformative in that social change is possible, “[i]f a majority of people think in ways that are contradictory to the values and norms institutionalised in the State and enshrined in the law and regulations” (Castells 2007: 238). Such a change comes about through communication, particularly socialised communication that has the potential to reach society at large, which takes the form of language, both written and spoken. One salient example is that of the Suffragette and Suffragist movements in the UK in the late 1800s and early 1900s. A number of studies maintain that the combination of both the militant actions of the Suffragettes (such as breaking windows and attacking art that were often reported in the national press) and the more moderate tactics of the Suffragists (such as circulating petitions and pressing for debates in Parliament) were instrumental in building up the legal and constitutional support for the enfranchisement of women that was represented by the passing of the Equal Franchise Act in 1928 (Bristow 2015; Gottlieb & Teye 2013; Pankhurst 2018).

As noted above, there is an ongoing struggle over communicating preferred meanings, which are cultivated by certain actors who are usually the most powerful in society. Such power holders have the capacity to invest meanings in discourse and to impose “authorised” ways of interpreting events or areas of knowledge on institutions and on other social actors who may want to offer different meanings (Steinberg 1999: 745). Traditionally it is the realm of politics that is understood as the site of this struggle for power, usually between those who seek to maintain their power and those who seek to challenge it (Chilton & Schäffner 2002: 5). This ‘function’ of politics (the maintenance of the status quo) is often considered to be accompanied by the institutions and practices of government or the State (i.e. Parliament, local government, legal institutions), which can be understood as how politics

operates in a democratic society to resolve clashes of interest. Political parties and professional politicians are mostly associated with these State institutions, yet other social formations – interest groups, charities, social movements – may interact with these institutions and civil society (Chilton & Schäffner 2002: 5).

According to Paul Chilton and Christina Schäffner, the State institutions and the professional politicians associated with them operate at the macro-level of political interaction (e.g. between Parliament, legal institutions, corporations), in which they serve to resolve conflicts of interests and assert the power of the dominant. At the micro-level there are conflicts of interests between the dominant groups in power and individuals that can be resolved by institutional intervention (e.g. by the police) or by social movements that may form to challenge the power of the dominant (Chilton & Schäffner 2002: 5). Whether at the macro- or micro-level or in the institutional or movement dimension, politics is fundamentally about action (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012) – getting people to *do* something – and “it is surely the case that politics cannot be conducted without language” (Chilton & Schäffner 2011: 338). As such, the principal function of language in politics is persuasion, which is vital to the process of transforming political will (usually, but not exclusively, the will of those in power) into social action (Partington & Taylor 2018: xvi). Agents deliberate (implicitly and explicitly) over possible lines of action – reasons for or against doing something – and make choices about how to act in response to what Fairclough and Fairclough refer to as “circumstances and goals” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 1). And this, they argue, is what politics is fundamentally about, making choices – “*choosing policies*” – based upon practical argumentation about what is to be done and about how to *act* (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 1-11). A discussion of the field of political discourse and Faircloughian Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) is expanded in Chapter 4.

Understood in this way, political discourse can inform and guide action and, therefore, can construct the (political) world we live in through the shaping of

social action. Political communication – defined as the “role of communication in the political process” (Chaffee 1975: 15; see also Kaid 2004) – builds up a body of knowledge about the realm of politics and this body of knowledge can be understood as political discourse. This is the conception of political discourse that is used in this thesis. Actors that participate in the production of political communication can include the State (e.g. the government and politicians), non-state actors with political motivations (e.g. NGOs, social movements, corporate bodies, Trade Unions, think-tanks, and voters perhaps via social media) and media outlets (e.g. the press and broadcasters) (adapted from Lilleker 2006: 1). All of these actors need to communicate effectively with their audiences, be it supporters, opponents or those remaining impartial, and convince them to not only listen but also to support the position offered in their message. This aspect of political communication is defined by its relationship to voters by foregrounding communication with voters as key to persuading the electorate to vote in a certain way.

The genre of political communication that concentrates on communication with the voting public is that of electoral campaigning, which is the area that this thesis focuses on. The field of electoral campaigning largely considers the interactions between politicians, political parties and the voting public, and focuses on coverage of party politics in the popular press, on television or on the internet (Beers 2018: 439). Campaigns are designed to communicate with an audience to garner support from that audience (Lilleker 2006: 49) and the analysis of these campaigns often considers “the attempt by political strategists and publicists to identify voters’ interests and craft a program and message designed to appeal to them” (Beers 2018: 439). The role of publicity, advertising, the propagandising of political messages and political marketing in electoral politics and campaigning, alongside “the use of lexical and stylistic linguistic instruments” that characterise electoral campaigning (Burkhardt 1996: 5 in Wodak & Forchtner 2018), has been closely examined in this genre.

This thesis follows that tradition and analyses the strategies and arguments employed by political actors when communicating with voters in election campaigns. But it extends the genre to include non-institutional interactions between social movements and broader publics, which are often not foregrounded within the field of political communication. Such an extension would draw in important political discourse that attempts to inform voters and present counter-arguments to the dominant ones. As detailed in the next section, the examination of social movements as part of the electoral landscape has been largely absent in the field of political communication and also social movement studies.

2.2 Political Communication and Social Movements

The study of the tactics of political communication as a discrete academic field in the UK⁶ came to the fore in the 1980s following the election of Margaret Thatcher (Beers 2018: 435) and the publication of the first volume in what would become a regular series, simply entitled *Political Communications: The General Election Campaign of 1979* (Worcester & Harrop 1982). In their introduction, Robert Worcester and Martin Harrop highlighted the dearth of academic attention that had been paid to political communication tactics prior to the 1979 election and brought together papers from academic observers, journalists, politicians and marketing consultants who had participated in that campaign. Since the 1980s, the relationship between political actors and the voting public using a range of communicative techniques has been analysed as phenomena by numerous scholars (Bartle, Crewe & Gosschalk 1998; Bartle, Mortimer & Atkinson 2002; Crewe & Harrop 1989, 1986; Crewe & Gosschalk 1995; Thompson 2013; Williamson 1999; Worcester & Harrop 1982; Wring et al. 2007, 2011, 2017, 2019). Close academic attention has been paid to political communication, which was

⁶ In the US the seminal *Handbook of Political Communication* was published by Nimmo and Sanders in 1981. In that edition they traced the development of the field as an academic discipline in the US in the latter half of the 20th century. Kaid (2004) continued the scholarly synthesis of the field in *Handbook of Political Communication Research*.

defined by Worcester and Harrop as “the interactive dialogue between the elected and the elector, the politician and the demos” (Worcester & Harrop 1982: vi).

The role of the mass media in mediating political messages has long been a consideration for academics that started with R.B. McCallum and Alison Readman who published a chapter on ‘The Daily Press’ in their book *The British General Election of 1945* (2008 [1947]). The book offered an analysis of the election alongside a detailed summary of the reporting of it by each newspaper and some broadcasts (radio and television) at the time, but little consideration was given to the impact of this type of mediated communication on voters. Since then, each election for the last sixty years has been chronicled in a series of books exploring elections, political campaigns and voters, which continues today under the editorship of Philip Cowley and Dennis Kavanagh (latest edition at time of writing was *The British General Election of 2017*) (Butler 1989, 2015 [1965]; Butler et al. 2015 [1971]; Butler & Kavanagh 1980, 1992, 1997, 1999 [1975], 1999 [1985], 1999 [1988], 2002; Butler & King 2008 [1965]; Butler, King & Hoey 2008 [1966]; Butler & Rose 2008 [1970]; Cowley & Kavanagh 2010, 2016, 2018).

What remains largely absent from this field is the role of communicative forms deployed by social movements during elections. Recent exceptions that contain chapters on the interaction between movement-led activity and political parties in an election include: *Political Communication in Britain: Campaigning, Media and Polling in the 2017 General Election* (Wring et al. 2019; see Rhodes 2019) and the *UK Election Analysis 2017: Media, Voters and the Campaign Early reflections from leading academics* (Thorsen et al. 2017; see Blumler 2017; Chadwick 2017). This thesis seeks to bridge the gap between extra-parliamentary communication and political party messaging during election campaigns and in doing so position social movements as political actors and challengers within the political landscape. Rather than the attainment of political power through electoral campaigning, social movement communication aims at influencing what people think about and

focuses on convincing them that certain issues need to be addressed by the government of the day (Císař 2015; Connolly & Hourigan 2006; Crossley 2002; Giugni et al. 1999; Ruiz: 2014; Tilly & Tarrow 2007). As such, they can be viewed as playing a similar, but less partisan, role as the media in electoral communication.

Prior to the 1980s and 1990s, the field of social movement research considered social movements as nothing more than sudden panics and crazes in response to social change (Blumer 1946, 1951; Smelser 1962) or as resource and mobilisation-focused entrepreneurial-organisations (Oberschall 1973; McCarthy & Zald 1973, 1977; Tilly 1978). Today, in the West, social movements can be thought of as rooted in the everyday reality of people's lives and are a normal part of the political sphere (Cox & Nilsen 2014: 56; Goodwin & Jasper, 2009: 11; Johnston 2014: 27; Meyer & Tarrow 1998). Jack Goldstone argues for the conceptualisation of social movements as "an essential element of normal politics" in modern society and claims that the boundary between institutional and non-institutional politics is fuzzy and intertwined (Goldstone 2003: 2). Along with Paul Burstein (1999), Elizabeth Clemens (1997) and Sidney Tarrow (1998), Goldstone states that "one cannot understand the normal, institutionalized workings of courts, legislature, executives, or parties without understanding their intimate and ongoing shaping by social movements" (Goldstone 2003: 2). In many cases, citizen and individual rights have been formulated and implemented thanks to social movement organisations (as presented in the example of the women's suffrage movements above; see also Tilly 2012 for examples on civil, human and gender rights, and environmental protection movements).

For Johnston, social movements are "key forces of social change" that are "characterised by big, change-orientated ideas" and important factors in driving history (Johnston 2014: 1). Cox and Nilsen define social movements as, "a process in which a specific group develops a collective project of skilled activities centred on rationality – a particular way of making sense of and relating to the social world – that tries to change or maintain a dominant

structure of entrenched needs and capacities, in part or whole" (Cox & Nilsen 2014: 57). Social movements are further described by Hanspeter Kriesi as "elusive phenomena which are inherently difficult to grasp" and are thus conceptualised in many different ways (Kriesi in Diani & Eyerman 1992: 22). He describes them as "an organized, sustained, self-conscious challenge to existing authorities on behalf of constituencies whose goals are not effectively taken into account by these authorities" (Kriesi in Diani & Eyerman 1992: 22). Two of the most prominent theorists in the field, Sidney Tarrow (2011) and Charles Tilly (2008), define social movements as sustained collective challenges against elites and authorities by people with a common purpose.

These abstract conceptions of social movements are augmented by more structural definitions of how social movements operate, mobilise and communicate. For example, Tilly uses the term *repertoire* to refer to the repertoire of tactics and strategies used to make collective claims forwarded by a movement, which depend on a base of connections among participants (Tilly 2008: 119; Tilly & Tarrow 2007). Tarrow makes a similar claim when he describes social movements as "dense social networks and connective structures [that] draw on consensual and action-orientated cultural frames" (Tarrow 2011: 16; Tilly & Tarrow 2007). Together they describe social movements as "a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities" (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 8). Joe Foweraker, mirroring Cox and Nielsen above, argues that social movements can be defined as a 'process' rather than just as a single actor and describes them "as a form of mass politics in close and strategic interaction with the state" and society (Foweraker 1995: 3). More recently, Colin Barker describes movements as "*collective achievements*" that entail "some kind of organisation" of collective projects and the "mutual sharing of ideas" (Barker 2014: 47-8; emphasis in the original).

Social movements can, therefore, be understood as sustained collective challenges against elites and authorities by people with a common purpose

who make collective claims that draw on consensual and action-orientated cultural frames (Tarrow 2011: 16; Tilly & Tarrow 2007; Tilly 2008). It is a process that people collectively engage in, in order to self-consciously challenge (or reinforce) the dominant structure through the making and unmaking of cultural codes or frames. As such, movements are involved in the formation of frames and, therefore, in a symbolic struggle, usually with the mass media and other political actors, over meaning and interpretation of a political theme. For Donatella della Porta, a fundamental characteristic of a social movement is its “ability to develop a common interpretation of reality” (della Porta 2007: 6) through communicative forms that challenge or change existing interpretations. Despite such an agentic view of social movements in the field of social movement research, there is “strikingly little interest” in the relationship between electoral politics and movements, with only a few scholars explicitly examining the source of opportunity or threat to movements that elections may present (McAdam & Tarrow 2013: 326-327).

What is contended in this thesis is that social movements, as signifying agents, can be publicly and politically influential by presenting discourses and messages that challenge (or reproduce) established definitions, meanings and understanding of social reality (Castells 2013: 300; Lindekilde 2014: 198), and that they seek to do this during elections. With this in mind, the next section returns to the genre of electoral campaigning and considers some of the linguistic instruments, such as framing, persuasion and negative campaigning, that characterise political communication as a field of study and a field that this thesis contends includes social movements.

2.3 Election Campaigning

Although written about the US political landscape of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dan Nimmo’s analysis of election campaigning techniques in his book *The Political Persuaders* still offers an insight into long-standing political communication strategies and tactics. For example, it is still a widely held view that “election campaigns are essential features of democratic politics” and that a “candidate’s conduct in an election campaign determines [her/]his

success or failure” (Nimmo 2001: 33). Although a number of other key factors, such as the socio-economic conditions at the time of balloting, will determine the outcome of elections, campaigns are thought to form an essential element of the outcome (Arbour 2014; Norris 2004).

Communication is a key aspect of political campaigning and campaigns are ultimately directed towards winning an election (Lilleker 2006: 49-54; Nimmo 2001: 38). Electoral campaigns seek to frame their message to voters in a way that will persuade undecided and supportive voters, and may aim to highlight the weakness of their opponent or promote recognition of a candidate (Arbour 2014: 604; Lilleker 2006: 53). Campaigners use strategies to communicate with the electorate in order to persuade them to vote for one candidate or party over another. Such strategies can be negative, attacking the opponent through the use of *ad hominem* attacks (an attack aimed at a person rather than the argument or position that they are maintaining) or a process of delegitimisation, or positive, elucidating one’s own policies and credibility, but both are utilised to communicate information to voters. The information is communicated not for its own sake but as a way to produce a shift in voting behaviour. In short, electoral campaigns are a form of “persuasive communication designed to influence the actions of people” (Nimmo 2001: 41).

How a campaign frames its message to voters is important when seeking to understand the linguistic and discursive strategies used by different political actors. Campaigns are most effective when they employ persuasion techniques to construct and reinforce a “brand image” (Savigny 2004: 29), recall “an accepted set of values that are easily accessible for voters and that can be activated by the rhetoric of other political actors” (Arbour 2014: 607), or raise the salience of an issue that is central to a political actor’s programme (Lilleker 2006: 53). Political parties have reputations and credibility that have been built up over the years, which produces that party’s ownership advantage on specific issue (Bélanger & Meguid 2008; Budge & Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et al. 2003). Issue ownership theory holds that

campaigns have an “effect when a candidate successfully frames the vote choice as a decision to be made in terms of problems facing the country that [she/]he is better able to ‘handle’ than [her/]his opponent” (Petrocik, 1996: 826). For example, the Labour Party in the UK are historically associated with the issue of the NHS (Beckett 2016; Cowley & Kavanagh 2016, 2018) and have often based their core campaigning messages around healthcare. One notable example from the 2015 election (explored in more detail in Chapter 5) sought to highlight the weakness of the Conservative Party’s record on the NHS with a poster showing a long line of people queuing for the waiting room with a claim that “The Tories have made it harder to see a GP”. In contrast, the Conservative Party have historically owned the issue of the economy (Beckett 2016; Cowley & Kavanagh 2016, 2018) and as such, built their most recent electoral campaigns around this. In 2010 economic stability played a major role in the Conservative campaign (Wilson 2011; Cowley & Kavanagh 2010), which was built on in 2015 with references to a ‘long-term economic plan’. One example from the 2015 campaign was a poster, see Image 1 below, that claimed Labour would wreck (what the Conservatives considered to be) a recovering economy.

Image 1: A Conservative Party poster for the during the 2015 general election designed by M&C Saatchi



Since polling began, the Conservatives had always “scored ahead of Labour in voters’ perceptions of economic competence” (McLean 2001: 228). According to Iain McLean, they lost that lead abruptly in September 1992 and by 2001 – the year McLean’s book was published – had not regained it. The financial crisis of 2007/08 was utilised by the party to reinstate voters’ perceptions of Conservative economic competence by focusing attention on Labour’s perceived profligacy in office and thus their economic incompetence (Wilson 2011; Cowley & Kavanagh 2010, 2016a). From 2010 onwards, Labour were described by the Conservatives and the media as having spent too much on public sector services, a practice that was deemed by pro-austerity actors to be intrinsically economically irresponsible (Hay 2010; Finlayson 2010). This message, that Labour were to blame for the financial crisis, was first expressed by David Cameron in his ‘age of austerity’ speech and repeated so often in campaigns that it became part of the austerity frame that dominated the 2015 and 2017 elections and, potentially, voters’ opinions. As explored in more detail in Chapter 3, ‘cuts to public spending’ were successfully rebranded as ‘austerity’ in order to change any negative association with ‘cutting back’ into a more patriotic Second World War forbearance and ‘make-do-and-mend’ spirit.

The purpose of this thesis is not to demonstrate whether or not electoral campaigning achieves a shift in people’s opinions or directs their actions; rather, it focuses on the language used in tactics employed by political actors to get their messages across.

2.3.1 Linguistic Instruments

The linguistic choices of a speaker or writer can have a political function (Fairclough 2003, 2010; Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Machin & Mayr 2015; Wodak & Forchtner 2018) and some *strategic functions* of political discourse include (but are not limited to) the framing of an issue and persuasion through positive or negative evaluations, which can include *ad hominem* attacks, the use of dysphemisms and euphemisms, and tactics of delegitimation and binary oppositions (‘us’ versus ‘them’).

Frames

In linguistics a frame (synonymous with script, mentioned above) is a metacommunicative device that is an essential part of understanding “what is going on” (Bateson 1973 [1954] in Oliver & Johnston 2005: 188) and is treated as though it is either a fixed template or as flexible and emergent. A fixed conception of frames considers them an “aspect of cultural knowledge, stored in the memory, that permits social actors to move in and out of different experiences as though they were not completely new” (Oliver & Johnston 2005: 188). From this perspective, frames are cognitive structures and form part of the tool kit of everyday cultural life. On the other hand, the emergent conception sees them as “instruments by which we infer ‘what’s going on’, with the caveat that they are under constant revision based on new occurrences and unexpected actions by others” (Oliver & Johnston 2005: 188).

By these definitions a frame forms part of the interpretative framework that is involved in interactions between people: how participants define and situate the words and actions of each other and promote ideas to a wider public (Oliver & Johnston 2005: 188). Frames simultaneously structure what will be perceived, and perceived as naturally occurring together in society (e.g. love and marriage; money and power) and are usually always already present in the perceiver’s culture or society. There are many competing frames within society, with some groups, usually those with vested interests in maintaining the current system, employing the dominant symbolic systems and meanings prevalent in society at any one time (Tarrow 1998: 116). Whether the function is to maintain or challenge, a frame is a way of presenting an issue or an idea in a message and evoking a particular worldview based on a set of values or beliefs (Lakoff 2014: xi-xii).

Framing does not persuade individuals to adopt a candidate’s position on an issue, but instead increases the weight given to a particular aspect of an issue (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980; Anderson 1981; Clawson, Nelson & Oxley 1997; Nelson & Oxley 1999). The weight given to a particular aspect is a feature of

the theory of issue ownership discussed above, and in the 2015 and 2017 election campaigns analysed in this thesis, issue ownership and frames converged with electorally successful results for the Conservatives. As will be detailed in later chapters, the austerity frame, which positioned economic growth and cuts to public spending as compatible processes rather than mutually exclusive ones, and as the only way to reduce a public debt that *must* be lowered, dovetailed with the Conservative's longstanding ownership of the issue of the economy. That the Conservative Party was conceived of as economically competent following the financial crisis, and, crucially, more economically competent than Labour, was already present in the voting public's framework and so the positioning of them as the only political grouping that could handle the issue of public debt was more readily developed and accepted. As such, the message became part of heuristic thinking on the part of voters, and when people process information heuristically, the "content or logic of a message is not as carefully considered; instead past experiences and more superficial aspects of a message can cause (or prevent) opinion change" (Chaiken 1980; Chaiken & Trope 1999; Westwood 2015: 511-12). The analyses in Chapters 5 and 6 draw out further the pro-austerity framing inherent in the practical arguments from the Conservative 2015 and 2017 manifestos and elucidate aspects of heuristic thinking in the communicative tactics of The People's Assembly. These chapters also draw out the pro- or anti-austerity frames inherent in the Labour Party manifestos and in The People's Assembly's messaging.

To sum up, framing is a linguistic device or cognitive shortcut through which we understand and interact with the discursive reality around us, and certain frames in public debate inculcate certain interpretations of that reality. In the genre of election campaigning, framing will "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient" (Entman 2004: 417). Social movements can play a role in electoral campaigning by offering frames that may contain some of the information omitted or obscured by the dominant framing of an issue (Alexander 2006; Cox & Nilsen 2014; Dean 2016;

Fairclough 1992; Johnston 2014; Johnston & Noakes 2005; Staggenborg 2015). In doing so, they challenge the dominant frames at play and the political elites that control the framing issues.

Persuasion and negative evaluations

This thesis considers communicative tactics that use techniques of persuasion to present practical arguments, the structure of which can be intimately linked with their capacity to persuade (Toye 2013: 38) and to ground decision-making (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 1). To persuade someone or some group involves advancing reasons (through argumentation) for action (Burnell & Reeve 1984: 403). It is this *process* of ‘advancing reasons through argumentation’ that is the focus of this thesis over the success or otherwise of the interlocutor being persuaded by the arguments.

Persuasion as a concept is not only about the success of an argument in convincing an interlocutor that a particular claim for action is the best and only route to resolving an issue (Burnell & Reeve 1984: 395). It is also about the framing of the issue and the explication of a claim for action through the medium of practical argumentation. This latter characteristic of persuasion allows for the application of argumentation analysis (specifically PDA in this thesis) to non-institutional actors who are usually thought of as powerless. As noted below, persuasion is a process of convincing someone or some group that *X* is good or the right action to take (Burnyeat 1994; Finlayson 2007; Westwood 2015). Whether that process is completed (i.e. the person or group is convinced) is not the only measure by which to assess the persuasive nature of the argument. An unsuccessful attempt at persuading someone to do something is still an attempt at persuasion and the argument can be analysed for its composition rather than its result (Burnell & Reeve 1984).

Simply conceptualised, persuasion is a process of attempts to change attitudes (Westwood 2015: 511). The linguistic strategies involved in this process can draw on tactics aimed at legitimating one’s own argument or delegitimising those of other actors (Chilton & Schäffner 2011; Foster 2010; Partington & Taylor 2018). The task of political persuasion is to convince

others to see things in the same light as the initial proposer has defined them (Finlayson 2007: 550; see also Burnyeat 1994). This proposer could be, and in a democracy often is, the government who seek to convince the populace that a specific action or policy direction is the best one. Arguments form part of the strategic nature of political decision-making (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012) and persuasion (or rhetoric, as the art of persuasion) is one linguistic instrument assisting the process of political action (Finlayson 2007).

According to Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), argumentation is used to persuade people to make choices, which, as noted above, they argue is what politics is all about.

This approach to PDA is fully expounded in Chapter 3, so for now attention is turned to a model of persuasion that invites us to compare and contrast an argument, policy, politician, or product etc. with one or more others (Partington & Taylor 2018: 51). During election time, the incumbent party usually warns of the dangers of the opposing side (such as the Conservative Party's 2015 wrecking ball poster above). This is defined as 'negative' campaigning, in which a party attempts to reveal and attack the presumed failings of their opponent (Partington & Taylor 2018: 51). Conversely, 'positive' campaigning is when a party heralds its own virtues by promoting them. In 'first-past-the-post' style electoral systems, such as those of the UK and US, the two main parties usually engage in negative campaigning (Freedman & Goldstein 1999; Nai & Walter 2015; Partington & Taylor 2018: 52). The 2017 election proved an outlier in this respect. In this election, the opposition Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn, offered a more positive message of itself to the electorate (Beckett 2017: 42; Flinders 2017: 19) despite negative campaigning by the incumbent Conservative Party (Beckett 2017: 42; Shephard 2017: 98). It was the social movement, The People's Assembly, who commissioned a campaigning billboard during the 2017 election that sought to negatively evaluate Theresa May and the Conservatives (see Chapter 6).

Negative messaging might be a key component of political campaigning but research has shown that negative campaigning not only lowers voters' evaluation of the attacker's target, it also increases cynicism and decreases trust in politicians and the political system (Lemert et al. 1999; Fridkin & Kenney 2011; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland 1989; Nai & Walter 2015). In addition to this, exposing voters to such campaigning tactics results in them being less likely to participate in the electoral process (Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995). Although the function of negative campaigning is to "diminish the positive feelings voters might have towards a political opponent" (Nai & Walter 2015: 12), research has found that voters dislike trait attacks and, indeed, consider them to be unfair (Fridkin & Kenney 2011; Kahn & Kenney 1999). However, contemporary political campaigning abounds with negative messages and attacks on opponents' traits, character, values and issues (Nai & Walter 2015; Freedman & Goldstein 1999). Such campaigning can include examples of *dysphemism*, which is described as using language to "portray some entity, event or policy in an exaggeratedly negative light" or *euphemism*, described as the "deliberate renaming of negative, controversial or downright harmful actions in neutral terms in order to sanitise them" (Partington & Taylor 2018: 75). These linguistic instruments are epitomised by the George Orwell quote: "Political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (Orwell 2013 [1945]: 20).

An example of both of these expressions is found in the case of healthcare. Some political actors euphemistically talk about *modernisation* in healthcare when they refer to privatisation and reduced access to services (Cribb 2008; Gray 2008; Fairclough 2000), while others talk dysphemistically of the *destruction* of the NHS in response to such changes (Glennerster 2015; Leys & Player 2011; Pollock 2005; Timmins 2012). The anti-austerity actors analysed in this thesis often refer to the destruction, dismantling or wrecking of the healthcare service in England in their evaluation of the impact of austerity politics. Another example are references to *efficiency savings* by the

government when referring to measures that pay off the deficit, which others refer to as *cuts* (Chapter 3).

When used in relation to politicians, dysphemisms are “a form of what is called rhetorician delegitimation”, which is defined by Alan Partington and Charlotte Taylor “as the attempt to discredit the right or ability to hold a certain power” (2018: 76). The delegitimation of political actors is usually identified through the negative presentation of others and/or opponents, and techniques include “the use of ideas of difference and boundaries, and speech acts of blaming, accusing, insulting, etc.” (Chilton & Schäffner 2011: 347). A form of attempted delegitimation of an opponent is *ad hominem* arguments, which are defined as “attacking a person rather than his or her arguments” (Partington & Taylor 2018: 76). Personal attack in argumentation is always dangerous, and often leads to heightened emotions and bitter quarrels instead of reasoned discussion of an issue (Walton 2008: 170). However, political debate is an adversarial arena wherein “questions of personal character and veracity can be highly relevant”, primarily because we “must place our trust in elected politicians to be our representatives, and we rightly expect them to be honest” (Walton 2008: 173). In some cases, then, questions of personal conduct and character are relevant to the consideration of an argument.

Another tactic in negative campaigning is the “creation of ‘them’ (negatively evaluated or delegitimised) and ‘us’ (positively evaluated or legitimised)”, which is a particularly pervasive binary opposition in persuasive political discourse (Partington & Taylor 2018: 83). The effects of this sort of binary opposition is the exclusion of holding the position of being “against both sides” or of being able to take the middle ground wherein there is some “sympathy with both sides” (Partington & Taylor 2018: 83). The use of pronouns, or first person deixis, establishes this binary opposition through the creation of a sense of a ‘shared view’ (Fairclough 2015; Flores-Ferrán 2017). The use of *I, you, we, they* (and their variants) or *we, us, our, ours* “have a special function in producing a social and political ‘space’ in which the

speaker, the audience, and others are ‘positioned’” (Chilton & Schäffner 2011: 350; See also Flores-Ferrán 2017). Political actors will position themselves – their parties, their government, their supporters – in relation to others – other parties, governments, potential electors, and the nation – through the use of inclusive forms (*we, us*) or exclusive (*they, them*) (Chilton & Schäffner 2011: 350; See also Flores-Ferrán 2017). Pronouns can thus be used in electoral and political communication as way of inculcating a rhetoric of ‘us versus them’ by inducing “interpreters to conceptualize group identity, coalitions, parties and the like, either as insiders or as outsiders” (Chilton & Schäffner 2002: 30).

2.4 Conclusion

The literature examined above lays the foundation for the philosophical framework that the social and political world is discursively constructed and that the principal function of language in politics is persuasion, which is vital to the process of transforming political will into social action. It also identifies that there is a gap in the fields of political communication and social movement research regarding the role of extra-parliamentary communication in the electoral process. In electoral campaigning actors participate in the production of political messages that can be used to mobilise support of particular political goals within an existing political landscape. Social movements are important actors that operate in this landscape and, as the analysis below will demonstrate, do engage in electoral campaigning in order to offer counter-arguments for action.

To understand the landscape during which the political actors analysed in this thesis were operating, the next chapter explores the long-standing backdrop to the 2015 and 2017 elections: the concept of austerity.

Chapter 3: The Birth of the (Anti)Austerity Frame

This chapter outlines in detail the pro- and anti-austerity frames that were drawn on in the 2015 and 2017 elections by different political actors and how these frames were constructed in the preceding years. Firstly, it outlines how austerity was proposed by the Conservative Party in 2009 as the best course of action that the UK could take following the financial crash of 2007/08 and how the language used by David Cameron and other pro-austerity actors aimed at convincing the public that national belt-tightening was the best route out of financial difficulties. Secondly, it explores the meanings of the concept of austerity (economic and normative) and its relationship to neoliberalism. Thirdly, it discusses how the concept and the pro-austerity frame, which blamed the last Labour government and public sector spending on the deficit, has been developed and communicated by politicians and the mainstream media to the broader public from 2009. Fourthly, an exploration is undertaken of the changes to legislation that were made using the concept of austerity and what impact this had on public services, with a focus on the NHS and the implementation of the Health and Social Care Act. Fifthly, and finally, this chapter develops the conceptions of ‘austerity’ and ‘anti-austerity’ as they are used in this thesis.

3.1 The Age of Austerity

There are deep, dark clouds over our economy, our society, and our whole political system.

Steering our country through this storm; reaching the sunshine on the far side cannot mean sticking to the same, wrong course.

We need a complete change of direction.

I’m not just talking about changing one group of Ministers for another.

Or one set of policies, plans and proposals for another.

I’m talking about a whole new, never-been-done-before approach to the way this country is run.

Why?

Because the world has completely changed.

In this new world comes the reckoning for Labour's economic incompetence.

The age of irresponsibility is giving way to the age of austerity

Cameron 2009

This speech, given by David Cameron as leader of the Conservative Party in April 2009, is widely regarded as ushering the 'age of austerity' into UK politics (Basu 2017; Bramall 2013; Clarke & Newman 2012; Levitas 2012; Seymour 2014). He delivered the speech a year before the 2010 general election, which resulted in a hung parliament that paved the way for a Coalition government formed of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties. The vision of a gathering storm over the whole of the UK – its economy, society and political system – offers a salient metaphor for the global financial crisis that hit international economies in 2007/08. As highlighted in his speech, Cameron thought that “reaching [for] the sunshine” was the only way out of the darkness and that this would require a dramatic change in the role of the government. This, he proclaimed, could be achieved through “a return to traditional public spending control” and “a new culture of thrift in government” (Cameron 2009). Thus, “irresponsible” (Labour) government spending would be replaced by a culture of thrift that, by its juxtaposition to such irresponsibility, was positioned as the “responsible” approach.

In this speech, Cameron began the UK's political virtue signalling of austerity as responsible politics (Bramall 2012). The early political rhetoric moved between austerity being considered an 'economic necessity' and a 'moral responsibility', which developed the “paradoxical position of 'virtuous necessity'” (Clarke & Newman 2012: 300). By 2010, these aims were

developed further when the Coalition conjured up the image of being ‘all in it together’⁷:

We are all in this together, and we will get through this together.

We will carry out Britain’s unavoidable deficit reduction plan in a way that strengthens and unites the country

Cameron 2010: 5

During the pre-election campaign of 2010 the Conservatives positioned themselves, in a somewhat moralising register, as the “guardians of Britain’s much needed return to austerity after decades of excess” (Hay 2010: 395). A need for fiscal rebalancing was at the heart of Conservative policy during the campaign, as it still was in 2015 and, to a lesser extent, in 2017 (see Chapters 5 and 6). The claim that the deficit reduction plan was unavoidable and somehow inevitable ensured that Cameron’s rhetoric would strengthen consent for spending cuts to public services and welfare. Fairness was a value invoked early on in the debate on austerity. As Isabel Fairclough highlights, according to the Emergency Budget speech in 2010 the Coalition government was “committed *both* to being effective in reducing the deficit *and* to doing so in a way that was fair to the population” (2016: 62; emphasis in the original). Fairclough’s research reveals that in the speech and concomitant mainstream media reporting, “fairness was understood according to a meritocratic, ‘desert’ conception – one that accords with popular common sense – and not in relation to justice or equality” (2016: 62). This conception, she argues, may explain the widespread acceptance of the argument that public spending cuts *had* to be made for the sake of fairness: we all have to bear the burden of paying off the deficit and so the pain must be shared fairly (Fairclough 2016: 63).

⁷ A phrase first used by the Chancellor-to-be George Osborne at the Conservative Party conference in 2009: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8292680.stm> (last accessed 13/06/2019).

With the necessary and fair nature of austerity came the evocation of the memory of post-war hardship. A nostalgia for remaining positive in the face of hardship and the resonance of the motivational slogan 'Keep Calm and Carry On' provided an easily identifiable and artistic backdrop to the age of austerity. The boom in 'Keep Calm and...' mugs, t-shirts, key-rings, fridge magnets, bags, tea towels, pencil cases and posters cultivated an industry fuelled by the selling of post-war nostalgia. In turn, this provided a neat aesthetic for the age of austerity (Bramall 2013; Hatherley 2016) that, alongside a "well-framed, well-crafted and often repeated" story, dominated the political landscape from 2009 (Afoko & Vockins 2013) and is still pervasive in British politics today. Through its use of vivid imagery (e.g. the maxed out national credit card) and emotional metaphors (e.g. the economy being like a household purse) that invoke the comradely belt-tightening of time-gone-by, the notion of austerity portrays a "coherent vision of the kind of society that we should live in" (Afoko & Vockins 2013: 2). The vision is of a society that does not live beyond its means, which is the moral basis of austerity politics. The term austerity carries with it "overtones of moral virtue", echoes of which have been used when discussing cuts to government spending (Hay, 2010: 395; see also Finlayson, 2010: 24-27). This narrative set the stage for ensuring that the necessity of cuts to public spending was clear and provided an historical lens through which we were asked to cope with them (Bramall 2013: 19-21). But what exactly is 'austerity'?

3.2 What is Austerity?

The term 'austerity' has many meanings. It is an economic model that is discussed in technical terms. The technical economic term for austerity is 'expansionary fiscal consolidation' and the reasoning underpinning its logic is that economic growth will supposedly occur if government spends less, because private capital and consumer spending will be stimulated (Berry 2019: 132). As Mark Blyth highlights, austerity is "the deliberate deflation of domestic wages and prices through cuts to public spending", which is "designed to reduce a state's debts and deficits, increase its economic competitiveness, and restore what is vaguely defined as 'business

confidence” (Blyth 2013a: 41). According to Nick Anstead, at the economic level austerity is a debate for the economists that takes several forms: too much public spending can ‘crowd out’ the private sector; high levels of government debt leads to an increase in the cost of borrowing afforded to the State; and high government spending, as a product of political pressure, undermines the outcomes that would be generated by the market, which requires cuts to restore equilibrium (2017: 3). The rationale is that cutting the State’s budget, debts and deficits will inspire market confidence and lending and spending will resume. In this sense, austerity is conceptualised as purely an economic procedure that comes down to nothing more than the fiscal need to cut the deficit and reduce public spending. It is this conception that is most associated with austerity policies in the UK (Bramall 2013: 1).

This economic approach was originally employed in the UK context in the aftermath of the Second World War to confer a need to rebuild and get back on track (Cammaerts 2018: 47; see also Kynaston 2007). As already noted, this nostalgic reflection of the ‘make-do-and-mend’ era was used as a way to present austerity to a twenty-first century audience. Austerity, then, is also a normative model that is discussed in moral, political and ideological terms (Afoko & Vockins 2013; Basu 2017; Berry 2016; Blyth 2013; Holland 2016; Seymour 2014; Wren-Lewis 2011). As a normative concept, austerity is understood as part of the broader and ongoing ideological project of neoliberalism (Blyth 2013; Blackburn 2011; Bramall 2013; Cahill 2011; Crouch 2011; Harvey 2007, 2014; Holborow 2013; Levitas 2012; Peck 2014), which requires governments to function as little more than overseers of the market, overseeing that, above all else, it continues to function well. The neoliberal project is as much about regulating the process of government and governance⁸ as it is about economic relations. It forms the art of government

⁸ Governance, or governmentality in Foucauldian terms, is “the activity that consists in governing people’s conduct within the framework of, and using the instruments of, a state” (Foucault 2010: 318). To govern therefore “is to conduct the conduct of human beings, on condition of specifying that this

as well as the art of economics and, in fact, conflates the two (Dardot & Laval 2013: 46).

Neoliberalism can be understood as both political theory and political action that aims to bring about a particular version of society through concerted political effort and organisation (Mirowski 2013: 42 & 53). The theory has many institutional actors that advanced its core idea of the State that is both producer and guarantor of a stable market economy and overseer of the rolling back of the Welfare State and the conversion of State services to private provision (Mirowski 2013: 48-57). The objectives of neoliberalism – to weaken and disassemble the social State, to privatise public services, to deregulate the markets – are to be achieved through a “neoliberal strategy” that involves realigning discourse, “practices and power apparatuses” in order to establish political conditions and to change social relations so that they are conducive to attaining these objectives (Dardot & Laval 2013: 149). Austerity policy is the tool by which to achieve this objective: Welfare States must be slimmed down; public resources must become privatised; and public goods must be produced by private initiative. The political ideology of austerity emphasised this need for cuts to public spending in order to reduce public debt (Blackburn 2011: 10), and, as proponents of this view, the UK Coalition Government saw the financial crisis as an opportunity to advocate for policies that were geared towards reducing the role of the State and diminishing the reach of the Welfare State (Seymour 2014).

However, at the time (2010), there were possible alternative choices being proposed that would have driven down the deficit without the need to cut public spending. These included: State investment in industry and jobs that would generate growth (Chang 2010; Public and Commercial Services Union

conduct pertains just as much to oneself as to others” (Dardot & Laval 2013: 5). The focus of this thesis is on the analysis of the practical arguments for and against austerity in relation to the action of cutting of public services, rather than the model of subjectivity inculcated by neoliberalism. I mention it here because it is an important element of the success of neoliberalism as an economic model and a normative system.

(PCSU) 2009); increased taxation through either VAT rises or a clamp down on tax avoidance and evasion (Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) 2009; PCSU 2009); a reduction in the use of private consultants or the outsourcing work to the private sector (PCSU 2009); increasing the top rate of income tax or removing the ceiling on national insurance contributions (IPPR 2009); introducing land or wealth taxes (IPPR 2009; Philo 2010; Wolf 2009); and eliminating tax relief on company borrowing (Sikka 2009) or levying a financial transactions tax (PCSU 2009; Stiglitz 2009). Despite these alternatives, the financial crisis that sparked the age of austerity was, according to anti-austerity proponents, ideologically reworked, in the UK, into a “political problem of ‘how to allocate blame and responsibility’” (Clarke & Newman 2012: 300). The reworking focused on the profligacy of government spending on public services and welfare and provided “ideological cover for the process of reform” in public provision by presenting the changes as economic necessity (Speed 2016: 3).

The utility of both meanings of austerity – economic and normative – was to ensure consent for the implementation of such reforms through policies that resulted in changes to public spending in areas such as welfare, education and healthcare. In the UK there was a wealth of policies implemented after the 2007/8 financial crisis by both the Labour government in 2009-2010 and the subsequent Coalition (2010-2015) and Conservative governments (2015-present), each with a different view of the crisis and solutions to it. Two far-reaching examples were the Welfare Reform Act 2012⁹ and the Health & Social Care Act 2012 (HSCA)¹⁰ which, respectively, reformed receipt of disability, housing and child benefits and made legislative changes to the

⁹ For details of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 visit:
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/5/contents/enacted/data.htm> (last accessed 05/06/2018).

¹⁰ For details of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 visit:
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/contents/enacted> (last accessed 05/06/2018).

operation of the NHS. These are discussed in more detail below. It was in response to the real-world outcomes of these reforms executed by the Coalition government that The People's Assembly was launched in 2013.

On the whole, anti-austerity movements have argued that austerity policies are a political choice rather than the only available policy options, as policy-makers have tended to portray them. In particular, they have "emphasized the social costs of the enactment of public spending cuts and the fact that not all sections of the population bear the costs of austerity equally" (Giugni & Grasso 2015: 57). It is the effects on UK citizens that cuts to public services have had and the normative (and ideological) justification for austerity that formed the central focus of campaigns by The People's Assembly in the 2015 and 2017 general elections. As will be explored in detail in the case study chapters, The People's Assembly's repertoire of contentious actions aimed at communicating with the electorate and not at directly engaging with the mainstream media or politicians, which have largely ignored the group and the anti-austerity movement as a whole in the UK (Cammaerts 2018: 101-134). As the group's National Secretary, Sam Fairbairn, told me in an interview in 2017:

I think part of it [movement organising] is always thinking, for me, how are we going to change society? It can't just be about relying on the politicians to do it for us otherwise we would be lobbyists basically or we wouldn't bother with a lot of what we are doing

Fairbairn May 2017, see Appendix 3

It is with this in mind that a focus on direct communication with voters by The People's Assembly is explored in this thesis, rather than the mainstream media reception of the arguments or the impact of the arguments on policy. However, a content analysis of the media in each election forms part of the critical evaluation of the practical arguments of all the political actors in order to examine the extent to which the various arguments were amplified and endorsed or challenged. This is in recognition of the vital role that the

mainstream media, alongside other actors, played in the development of the idea of austerity in public consciousness (Berry 2019) and the role they play in election campaigns (Deacon & Wring 2016, 2018; Cowley & Kavanagh 2016, 2018; Wring, Mortimer & Atkinson 2016, 2019). The role they played in austerity is explained briefly below.

3.3 The Development of the Idea of Austerity in the UK

The UK occupies an interesting place in the post-2009 austerity landscape. As a country it was not required, in the same way that Greece, Portugal or Spain were, to implement austerity policies. Rather, the Conservative-led Coalition government pursued a pro-austerity line of its own volition, often exemplifying Greek economic failure as a warning to the UK (Schifferes & Knowles 2015): a caution that was often recounted in numerous newspapers throughout 2009 (Berry 2019: 140-141). The rhetoric suggested that if we did not get our public spending under control then we, as a country, would end up as bankrupt as them. As George Osborne warned in his Chancellor's Budget speech of July 2015: "You only have to look at the crisis unfolding in Greece as I speak, to realise that if a country's not in control of its borrowing, the borrowing takes control of the country" (Osborne 2015).

Following the financial crisis of 2007/8, politicians, financial elites and the UK's mainstream media used the term 'austerity' to describe an era of spending cuts that had been proposed as inevitable (Bramall 2013: 19). In her article on UK television news and print news articles, Laura Basu argues that the "mainstream media have played a central role in communicating austerity to publics" (2017: 2). Her article, 'Living within our means', analyses the construction of the austerity frame in the UK mainstream media over time, from the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, until 2015 (Basu 2017: 2). She shows that in relation to the 2008 financial crisis, the austerity frame did not become established until April 2009. During the week 20-26 April 2009, a number of rapid changes took place that brought to life austerity framing. As Basu's research identifies, "at the beginning of the week, the Labour government was still defending an expansionary approach, investing in the

housing market, jobs and green technologies – though it had already planned ‘efficiency savings’” (2017: 8). Alistair Darling’s 2009 budget¹¹ laid out ‘efficiency savings’ that were examined by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). The Institute was reported in the press as stating that the proposed cuts were worse than anything that Thatcher had imposed¹². It was by the end of that week that David Cameron gave the speech referred to above, wherein he argued for the responsible politics of austerity.

Basu’s research illustrates that ‘austerity’ became a buzzword from 2009 onwards and Mike Berry’s research (2019: 145) shows that, in the same year, austerity measures (i.e. public spending cuts) were by far the most reported on solutions to the financial crisis across almost all newspapers. His research found that the same was also true in broadcast media. BBC reports largely focused on the “dangerous” size of the debt and deficit but made little reference to the cause of them, and the majority of reported solutions to the deficit discussed the ‘inevitability’ of “cuts to spending and regressive tax increases” (Berry 2016: 856). There were very few reports that presented counter-arguments to austerity measures, the consequence of which, for Berry, is “that viewers were presented with a highly restricted debate on the range of policy responses” (Berry 2016: 859). In the press there were infrequent accounts of the need for the government to spend and invest during a recession but, in the right-wing press, these were either directly challenged or “placed in the midst of articles strongly advocating austerity” (Berry 2019: 148). The implications of such limited parameters of the debate were revealed in a YouGov poll conducted shortly after the 2010 general

¹¹ For video and audio of this budget see:

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2009/04/chancellor-to-make-budget-statement/> (last accessed 05/11/2018).

¹² Watt, N., ‘Spending: The party’s over – cuts will wipe out decade of growth’, *The Guardian*, 24 April 2009.

election, which found that 60% of those that took part considered cuts to be unavoidable with 48% believing that the cuts were the fault of Labour¹³.

It has been argued elsewhere that a reason for the widespread acceptance of austerity and subsequent public sector cuts was the “genuinely felt sense that we the public, collectively and individually, had been living beyond our means for some time” (Gilbert 2011). Arguments were made during the 2010 general election campaign, and continued in 2015, that too much money had been spent on public services and it was such profligacy that was responsible for the financial chaos that we found ourselves in (Anstead & Chadwick 2018). For example, in 2010 *The Times* made it clear that public borrowing had gotten so out of hand that “the bills had been shoved into the drawer without opening the envelopes” (Wring & Deacon 2010: 437). And while the *Daily Mail* “acknowledged that bankers were primarily responsible for the economic crisis”, it also blamed an expanding public sector for the UK’s financial deficit (Wring & Deacon 2010: 441). The only solution to the “shameful, reckless excess” (Osborne 2009) of overspending on the public sector and welfare was deficit reduction and communal belt-tightening.

The dominant narrative circulated in the media surrounding the financial crisis in the UK was of a fiscal (public debt) crisis caused by public spending on an expensive welfare state (Berry 2019: 135-6). This narrative, argue John Clarke and Janet Newman (2012), was an obfuscation of the true picture of the accumulation of (private) debt by the banking and private sector financial services that required a bailout from the State in order to restore market stability. In the UK context, some £101bn of public money was pumped into the banking sector in 2008 (Cammaerts 2018; Treanor 2012) to bail out banks such as Northern Rock, Bradford & Bingley, Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS and Lloyds TSB. What this austerity narrative did was to facilitate the reworking

¹³ YouGov (2010) Unavoidable cuts. Available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2010/10/19/unavoidable-cuts-story/> (last accessed 05/11/2018).

identified by Clarke and Newman above of an economic problem into a political one – a reworking that Blyth claims was achieved through an ideological twist in the neoliberal tale, which he refers to as the “greatest bait and switch in modern history” (2013: 73). Business leaders, bankers and European politicians sold a private banking crisis to citizens as a sovereign crisis. The ‘sovereign debt’ crisis that followed the financial crisis in the UK was caused by bailing out the banks and, in doing so, transferring private debt to public debt. The result was that private-sector risks became public-sector liabilities (Blyth 2013: 73) and what started as a global banking sector crisis morphed into a public financial crisis that called on the whole of society to make cutbacks in social provision (Holborow 2013: 97).

3.4 The Function of Austerity

As stated, the dominant concept of austerity positions economic growth as the only way to handle public debt, and the only way to achieve this is to cut public spending. The buzzword ‘austerity’ became “the justifying mantra” for Coalition and Conservative government’s economic and social policies, all of which were guided by the imperative to force down public sector spending (Levitas 2012: 322). Cutting spending becomes the government’s primary task and all public-spending decisions are then informed by this austerity imperative (Speed 2016: 2). It is here that austerity framing accords with Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth’ and reveals its function. The idea that the UK needed austerity-based policy to pay down its debt came, through repetition, to be believed by the public and politicians as true and acted upon as if there were no alternative. It became an established ‘fact’ that the UK needed to make-do-and-mend and a wealth of policies were implemented to ensure just that. As noted above, the two policies with the most lasting impact were the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (HSCA).

The main changes to the welfare system contained in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 were the introduction in April 2013 of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) that replaced Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Universal Credit. The introduction of the ‘Jobseeker’s Allowance Claimant Commitment’, if

breached, leads to punitive sanctions that can leave people without money from anywhere between four weeks to 156 weeks¹⁴ (Bond & Hallsworth 2017). It also brought in sweeping changes to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) that required anyone claiming ESA to have a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to assess their capability for work. In many cases the assessments, conducted by private companies such as Atos from 2008 and Maximus from 2015, resulted in people being forced back to work when they were not well enough to do so (Pring 2017). Also implemented were new rules for the size of accommodation that Housing Benefit will cover that was quickly dubbed the 'Bedroom Tax', and increased penalties for those who commit benefit fraud, which included financial penalties lasting anywhere between 13 weeks and three years if a claimant is convicted¹⁵.

This thesis focuses on the issue of the NHS because, unlike welfare provision, which is still selective in who can and does receive financial assistance or benefits, the NHS is still universally provided and accessible to all UK citizens. The debate around the NHS has also avoided the 'skivers' versus 'strivers' distinction that is readily associated with benefits claimants that has corroded societal views of the welfare system (Afoko & Vockins 2013; Jensen 2014) and, as such, the service is still supported by the majority of people across all sections of society (Gershlick et al. 2015). Since its inception in 1948, the NHS has been run following the principle of collective provision and a guarantee of equitable access. Underlying this is the presumption of a conception of healthcare as a public good that is based on the *obligation* of the State to provide for the health of the community (Klein 2013: 4), and that it is a provision that would not only be publicly funded but would also be publicly-

¹⁴ For details on the rules for Job Seekers Allowance visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions-leaflet/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions-how-to-keep-your-benefit-payment> (last accessed 05/06/2018).

¹⁵ For details on the financial penalties for benefit fraud visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/loss-of-benefit-as-a-penalty-for-benefit-fraud/loss-of-benefit-as-a-penalty-for-benefit-fraud> (last accessed 05/06/2018).

provided (Cribb 2008: 222). Within the logic of austerity, however, health and social care were construed in terms of costs and benefits (Speed 2016: 1) and their budget seen as an expenditure that needed to be tightly controlled to prevent waste.

The reform of the NHS in the age of austerity was instituted through the HSCA, which was introduced by former Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley, in May 2010, and affects only the NHS in England (Glennerster 2015: 292). The large UK deficit provided the rationale for the need to implement the HSCA and to fundamentally reform the NHS and reduce its budget by £22bn (Department of Health [DoH], 2010; Pollock, Price & Liebe, 2011; Speed 2016). However, the reforms underpinning the HSCA have a long history that began with the Thatcher government and continued under Tony Blair's stewardship of the Labour Party. Publicly-provided services were perceived by the Thatcher government as a burden to the State and one of the causes of the economic difficulties experienced in the early 1980s, and as such should be replaced with the private sector in the belief that the latter is "more efficient and innovative" (Hunter 2008: 96). The first building blocks of the HSCA was the introduction of an internal market in 1989 that split the NHS into self-governing hospitals, known as NHS Hospital Trusts that 'sold' services, such as hospital or community care, and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) that purchased those services (Hunter 2008: 96). Under New Labour the internal market and the purchase/provider split expanded. New Labour retained the Conservative model of limiting spending on public services and the construction of agencies¹⁶ and called for the NHS to modernise. This modernisation called for the NHS to compete within a real market, to provide competitively priced care, and make radical improvements in the way services should be run (Leys & Player 2011: 1). According to New Labour, the way to

¹⁶ Such as the Modernisation Agency that would inspect hospitals every four years to see if they were operating within 'best practice' guidelines (Pollock 2005: 67).

achieve this was for the internal market to be opened up further to private providers (Leys & Player 2011: 12)

The narrative that the NHS will have no future unless it modernises crystallized in Simon Stevens' report *Five Year Forward View* (NHS England 2014). This document, published in collaboration between six leading NHS groups¹⁷, lays out the details of the 'possible futures' facing the NHS. The document's key arguments were that the NHS was facing a £30bn budget shortage that NHS England must attempt to avoid by implementing £22bn in 'efficiency savings'; greater attention is to be given to prevention and public health; greater controls over care should be held by patients; and barriers in how care is provided should be broken down. In effect, the *Five Year Forward View* sought to implement budget savings and new models of integrated care similar to ones developed in the US¹⁸. These changes to the organisation and management of the NHS and the legislation that supports the institution were implemented by the Coalition. Under their stewardship, the NHS budget was to be 'protected' from the financial pressures faced by other public services but, as Howard Glennerster points out, it "was expected to do more with roughly the same resources" (Glennerster 2015: 292). With the introduction of the HSCA, however, the capacity for Hospital Trusts to earn private fee income was increased although this had to be less than half their total income (Glennerster 2015: 299). This presented Trusts with a funding stream separate to that of the government-provided budget.

The Act, therefore, also changed the nature of the relationship between the government and the health service from funder-provider to that of funder-regulator. As set out in the Act, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs – these

¹⁷ The groups include Monitor, Health Education England, the NHS Trust Development Authority, Public Health England, the Care Quality Commission and NHS England.

¹⁸ Shortell, Stephen M., Addicott, Rachael, Walsh, Nicola and Ham, Chris, 'The NHS five year forward view: lessons from the United States in developing new care models', *British Medical Journal* (2015).

replaced PCTs) control the NHS budget and are responsible for commissioning local services. It is NHS England that allocates funding to CCGs and not the Department of Health. NHS England was established in April 2013 and is the operating name of the NHS Commissioning Board that is referred to throughout the HSCA. At its core, the HSCA stripped the powers of the Secretary of State and the Department of Health of their capacity to oversee the running of the service and severed the State's role in the provision of healthcare for the nation. In effect, it absolved the Health Secretary of responsibility for the running and financial regulation of the service and transferred it to NHS England and Monitor¹⁹. The result is a positioning of the government as funder-regulator, as opposed to its original role of funder-provider, which distances them from the provision of healthcare to citizens and discharges decision-making and responsibilities to other non-elected bodies (Cribb 2008: 228). As such, there has been a devolution of "political and parliamentary accountability" to individual trusts and CCGs who operate as corporate entities, required to partner with other (private) providers, in competition with one another (Pollock 2005: 240). What this effectively does is shift the responsibility for managing the NHS budget (or its funding) on to NHS England and repositions the government 'funding of' the service as government 'spending on' a service (see analysis in Section 6.2.2 for the role of this change in the 2017 election).

Today, the NHS is still free at the point of use and funded primarily by the taxpayer, yet due to the HSCA, its services – GPs and hospitals – are increasingly being provided by private healthcare companies (Davis et al. 2015; El-Gingihy 2015; Leys & Player 2011; Pollock 2005; Tallis 2013). A report by the British Medical Association (BMA), published in March 2017, revealed that "between 2013/14 and 2015/16 the amount spent on non-NHS

¹⁹ NHS England allocates resources and commissions services for the NHS, such as primary care and highly specialised services. Monitor is the economic regulator that regulates prices for NHS services and prevents anti-competitive practices (Glennester 2015: 295-6).

healthcare provision grew by £2.6 billion, from £9.6 to £12.2 billion, an increase of 27%” (BMA 2017: 2). It must be noted that in the BMA study local authorities, the voluntary sector and private providers were classified as non-NHS provision. This increase can be defined as privatisation, which “involves arranging for a service to be provided for in the competitive marketplace rather than government providing the service” through taxation (McGregor 2001: 85). With the introduction of private healthcare companies as an additional revenue stream, it appears that there is an increasing attempt to erode the boundary between public and private provision (Cribb 2008: 222). It is in this way that NHS provision is converted into a “publicly-funded / privately-run” model (Cribb 2008: 227), with the NHS (as NHS England) becoming nothing more than an organisation purchasing healthcare services.

For the proponents of the anti-austerity frame explored in this thesis, this link between the public and private forms part of their view of the circumstances and of their value system. As will be shown in the forthcoming case study chapters, a concern for anti-austerity actors was that cuts to public spending could be a way of obtaining public consent for full privatisation of the NHS in the future. For The People’s Assembly, austerity was a way of normalising the underfunding of public services across broader society (austerity-as-covert-privatisation) and could be utilised by a government to encourage public acceptance of the (further) privatisation of public services (privatisation-by-consent). A return to Foucault’s notion of ‘regimes of truth’ is helpful here. The repetition that cuts to public spending were essential was, for the movement, a necessary step in the process of obtaining privatisation-by-consent because, as the 2016 British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA 34) revealed, 67% of those surveyed held the belief that healthcare should be funded by the tax payer and implemented by the government²⁰. But, if it

²⁰ For the full report visit: http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39145/bsa34_role-of-govt_final.pdf (last accessed 15/09/2018)

became an established ‘fact’ that austerity was a necessary condition for a recovering economy, then it would be possible for any future government to claim that, due to the restrictions of austerity, it would be unable to increase spending on the NHS. One consequence of this is that the service would need to be delivered by an alternative, non-State, non-NHS provider. Such a view was articulated by Sam Fairbairn in his interview (Appendix 3) when he stated: “That’s what we talk about when we [The People's Assembly] talk about austerity. The main drive I think, and the most important thing really, is privatisation because that is the big threat and cuts are a way of, you know you cut a service back so much that you spend zero on it and a private company has got to come in and take it up” (Fairbairn 2017).

Another concern is that the increase in privatisation will lead to unequal access to treatment and limit the quality and quantity of care that patients can expect to receive. One example is the capacity for CCGs to raise funds through the treatment of private patients that could lead to richer patients paying to jump the queue to access care more quickly. This stands in opposition to the principle of collective provision, the guarantee of equitable access, and the understanding of healthcare as a public good. For proponents of the austerity frame, however, the link between the public and private in healthcare is essential because “private ownership of formerly public assets (hospitals, clinics, etc.) generates economic growth” and without this growth there will be no money for public services (McGregor 2001: 86). In order to make the case for implementing austerity, the Coalition government needed to find a way to resonate with the public and the repetition of the austerity frame was a way of achieving this. Discussed below are the frames that have been identified as pro- and anti-austerity, both of which are drawn on in the subsequent case study chapters.

3.5 Framing (Anti)Austerity

As noted in Chapter 2, frames exert power through the selection and omission of information and features in a situation. As Murray Edelman highlights, “[t]he character, causes and consequences of any phenomena become

radically different as changes are made in what is prominently displayed, what is repressed and especially in how observations are classified” (1993: 232).

Frames call attention to some elements of reality while obscuring others and provide a lens through which to encode situations, events and objects, and offer a “shared cultural construct that gives meaning and direction” to action (Johnston 2014: 17; Snow & Benford 1992: 137). The implication of this in elections is that certain frames, such as austerity, inform perceptions of events or policies that can cause voters to read those events and policy decisions in ways that lead them to vote in one way rather than the other.

On the one hand, there is a narrative that posits excessive public spending as detrimental to the country’s economy, indeed, as something that brought about the UK’s deficit in the first place (Hay 2013; Wring & Deacon 2010). From this perspective cuts to spending are positioned as an economic necessity and described as efficiency savings. In this thesis, this view is pro-austerity and is categorised as the ‘austerity’ frame that is consistent with the dominant neoliberal discourse on public services. This is distinct from the ‘anti-austerity’ frame, which posits public services as public goods that should be publicly funded and owned, and positions cuts as detrimental to the overall well-being of society. Table 1 briefly summarises these two frames, which are described in more detail below and drawn on in the subsequent case study chapters.

Table 1: Austerity and Anti-austerity frames	
Austerity	Anti-austerity
The (economic) argument for austerity is simple: you cannot and should not spend more than you bring in and any debts incurred must be paid off as soon as possible (Seymour 2014: 2). This is the basis of the ‘State is like a household’ metaphor that leads us to think of austerity as nothing more than national belt-tightening (Afoko & Vockins 2013: 2). In this (normative) view, spending is understood as costs, as household bills that need to be paid for from the household budget, income or wages. <i>Economic</i> - the UK has a financial problem: there is a large public deficit and debt is not OK; - the deficit was caused by (a Labour) government overspending on public services and welfare; <i>Normative</i> - the Labour government was reckless and irresponsible and cannot be trusted with the economy; - the solution to the debt problem is to cut back on public spending and lowering taxes because that will stimulate economic growth; - national belt-tightening is the fairest way to share the burden of the debt across all citizens; - a responsible government must ensure a growing, debt free economy that can provide for all.	The (economic) anti-austerity argument is simple: government spending is essential to economic recovery following a crash (Seymour 2014: 31). You cannot cut your way to growth (Keynesian ‘paradox of thrift’). The government must step in to ensure that the wheels of the market are greased through public investment. Commitment to spending on and fully funding of public services avoids an economic downturn and avoids adversely affecting the poorest who are hit the most by cuts to public services (normative). <i>Economic</i> - the UK faces an enlarged deficit that was the result of (a Labour) government bailing out the banking sector; - Government spending is required to stimulate growth, which will reduce the deficit; <i>Normative</i> - reducing the debt through cuts is a political choice, not an economic necessity; - cuts to the funding (underfunding) of public provision is unnecessary and unfairly disadvantages the poorest in society; - the government has a duty to fully fund public services that help everyone in society and provide jobs.

3.5.1 Austerity

The (economic) argument for austerity is simple: you cannot and should not spend more than you bring in and any debts incurred must be paid off as soon as possible (Seymour 2014: 2). This is the basis of the 'State is like a household' metaphor, which was designed to resonate with most people's lived experience and lead us to think of austerity as nothing more than communal belt-tightening. This is austerity's intuitive appeal: it appears logical to claim that when you are in debt, as the UK was, you should minimise your spending. Thus reducing the State's liabilities (no matter how they were caused: bank or public spending) makes sense and the fairest way to share the burden is to cut state spending.

This framing considers government spending (which incurs debt) as an impediment to economic recovery following a slump (normative). In the case of the UK, the austerity frame claims that the UK has a financial problem in that there is a large public deficit that was caused by government overspending on public services and welfare, and such overspending is understood as reckless and irresponsible. The responsible solution to the debt problem is to cut back on public spending and lower taxes because that will stimulate economic growth. This, it is advocated, is because when a government borrows money, that money is diverted from trade and cannot be used by private investors to stimulate recovery through producing goods for consumption and employment.

In effect, proponents of the austerity frame are arguing that the government's action (reducing public spending on services) will lead to the goal of reducing the deficit. This will have the positive consequence of a stable economy, which will help the NHS in the long-run.

3.5.2 Anti-austerity

There are two main arguments underpinning the framing against austerity that need to be unpacked. One is based upon the notion that government spending is essential to economic recovery, which points to the logical inconsistency within the argument for austerity (economic). The other

focuses on the full funding of public services as a way of benefiting the poorest who are often hit hardest in an economic downturn (normative). These two aspects are closely intertwined.

The distributional effects of fiscal austerity are felt differently across society's strata, with those at the bottom feeling the impact most acutely. Those with higher incomes rely less on State-provided services and have the ability to absorb a reduction in income due to higher VAT or inflation (Blyth 2013). Those on lower incomes rely more heavily on government-provided services, such as education and healthcare, and have little to no extra in savings with which to cushion any blows, such as higher costs of food and utilities. As a result, they are disproportionately affected by cuts to public provision. In addition to the unequal distribution of the effects of austerity on the population, there is an economic case against it too. The Keynesian 'paradox of thrift' states that, if one person cuts back on their spending during a downturn then they can cope by saving money. But if *everyone* were to save at the same time, the "reduction in aggregate demand will drive down growth, incomes and thus also aggregate savings" (Seymour 2014: 123). To say that we should all collectively tighten our belts or 'cut our cloth' according to our means does not make economic sense. If we all cut our spending at the same time then trade ceases to function because someone has to spend for another to sell. It is, therefore, counter to the laws of economic recovery to suggest that 'we are all in it together' – if we all cut at once, there is no one left to do the necessary spending to drive growth (Blyth 2013a: 44). Isabel Fairclough's assessment draws attention to this when she states: "based on all available information about particular cases in the past – which indicates that, in similar situations, by killing demand, austerity has always worsened the economic situation – it is not rationally acceptable that austerity can in principle deliver economic recovery" (2016: 61).

In effect, proponents of the anti-austerity frame are saying that cuts to public spending will lead to a downturn in overall spending with people spending less in the economy, which reduces overall consumption. In the long run, this

approach would further damage the economy and harm public finances, and have a negative impact on citizens and unfairly disadvantage the poor. To avoid these consequences, the government should be committed to spending on and fully funding public services, such as the NHS, and this requires implementing alternatives to spending cuts, such as raising taxes and removing loopholes that enable tax avoidance and evasion. Such a view foregrounds the anti-austerity movement's assertion that austerity is a political choice and not an economic necessity.

3.6 Conclusion

The conceptions of austerity and anti-austerity that are outlined here formed the political landscape within which all of the political actors examined in this thesis were operating. As will be explored in the case study chapters, each frame served to organise and structure the facts that were deemed pertinent to each actor's arguments and, therefore, shaped their electoral messages. The prevalence of the austerity frame in the political discourse of 2015 and 2017 would also have shaped the social reality of the voting public and potentially have informed their decision-making, i.e. who to vote for. As Fairclough and Fairclough make clear, one purpose of determining perceptions through a dominant frame, such as austerity, is because it "gives people a reason for favouring or accepting certain lines of action and policies rather than others" (2012: 4). Within the genre of deliberative decision-making (or practical argumentation), framing can be viewed as "the selective salience given to certain premises" that are "intended to direct an audience towards a particular conclusion (and potentially towards a particular decision and course of action)" (Fairclough 2016: 68). This view of framing, which complements the definition of frames in Chapter 2, is taken from the Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) approach that conceives of politics as action (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 1-11). PDA is the overarching methodology used in this thesis. It allows me to draw out the practical arguments made by each of the political actors during the 2015 and 2017 general election campaigns. How PDA applies to my research data is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Building on the philosophical foundations asserted in Chapter 2 and the overview of the political landscape in Chapter 3, this chapter outlines the methodological approach of the research. It starts with an overview of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and how this thesis is oriented in relation to a specific approach to PDA. Following that, it will state the field of the specific research context and the timeline of the elections. The chapter then moves on to the data collection methods and sources, which will be discussed with an overview of social movement communication, the analysis of manifestos and the selection of newspaper articles. Finally, an account of data analysis will be given, including the use of computer-aided analysis software to facilitate analysis.

4.1 Political Discourse Analysis (PDA)

In order to analyse what The People's Assembly and the Conservative and Labour parties were arguing for during the 2015 and 2017 UK general elections, this research uses Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) approach to Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). In the development of their approach, they focus specifically on practical reasoning, which is concerned with drawing conclusions from arguments about what to do and how to act. The framework, outlined in *Political Discourse Analysis* (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 10-16), is underpinned by critical discourse-analytical concepts developed in relation to Foucault's conception of discourse as the use of language in social contexts to construct reality, and in conjunction with the analytic framework of argumentation theory (Macagno & Walton 2014; Walton 1995, 2006, 2007, 2008).

According to this approach, political discourse is a form of argumentation that involves "practical argumentation, argumentation for or against particular ways of acting, argumentation that can ground decision" (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 1). Conceived of in this way, political discourse can inform and guide action and can provide agents with reasons for or against doing something, such as deciding on what policies to implement or who to vote for

in an election. Fairclough and Fairclough's conception of *politics as action* is key to their methodology and distinguishes it from other approaches to political discourse that have often focused only on questions of political representation or how political actors represent reality through language (Chilton 2004; Wodak 2011).

Paul Chilton and Ruth Wodak have developed important and influential contributions to political discourse analysis. These two well-established approaches consider the social use of language, centred around questions of how political actors represent reality through language (Chilton 2004; Wodak 2011), which Fairclough and Fairclough have incorporated into their approach. Chilton's treatment of PDA is anchored in Cognitive Linguistics (Chilton, 2004) and metaphor theory (Chilton & Lakoff 1999; Lakoff & Johnson 2003) and seeks to explore what language use in political contexts tell us about human behaviour in general (Chilton 2004: xi). Wodak's approach concerns the 'staging' of politics through the analysis of the "backstage" and the public or "frontstage" performances by politicians (Wodak 2011: 1-27). Political speeches, televised press conferences, debates on the radio and TV, videos and commentary on social media and the mediation of politicians in the press are all signposted as political discourse that we are "confronted" with in our daily lives (Wodak 2011: 3). Such an approach limits politics to the imposition of representations of the political world by those in power and offers little room for expanding politics to include non-institutional political actors. As Teun Adrianus van Dijk highlights: "it is not only official or professional politics and politicians that are involved in the polity. Political activity and the political process also involve people as citizens and voters, people as members of pressure and issue groups, demonstrators and dissidents, and so on" (1997: 13; see also Verba, et al., 1993).

Other approaches to PDA include the western classical tradition of rhetoric that codified the way public orators used language for persuasive and other purposes (Aristotle 2012; Kennedy 1991; Plato 2002; Posch 2018); the philosophy of language and its relationship with political science derived from

the recognition of language as a form of action that was developed by J. L. Austin (1962) and John Searle (2012 [1969]); and the social-psychological approaches that aim at studying political behaviour and the political function of language, such as the neuro-scientific method that considers the link between the effects of neural patterns that, it claims, structure emotions and consciousness, and individual and collective political action (Castells 2013; Lakoff 2008; Lakoff & Johnson 2003). Other specifically linguistic approaches to PDA cover a broad literature such as the 'French approach', which is a principally Marxist analysis of society and discourse (Althusser 1970; Foucault 1971); the 'German approach', which is largely motivated by the study of language and fascism, right-wing extremism and xenophobia (Matouschek et al. 1995; Pörksen 2000; Krzyzanowski & Wodak 2008; Wodak 1989); and the 'Anglophone approaches', which have mainly drawn on the functional linguistics of Halliday (1978) but also on pragmatics, especially the theory of speech acts (Richardson 1985; Blommaert and Verschueren 1991, 1993), power relations (Fairclough 1992, 2003, 2010; Castells 2013), corpus linguistics (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2005; Musolff 2004; Semino 2008), and the critique of racist discourse in the media and other domains (see van Dijk 1989, 1994, 1995, 1997a, 2002, 2005). Fairclough and Fairclough's most recent approach brings the literature back to the recognition of language as action and incorporates linguistic representations of the political world in the development of Political Discourse Analysis as argumentation analysis.

4.1.1 Faircloughian Political Discourse Analysis (PDA)

Faircloughian PDA views *politics* as a site of deliberation and decision-making that answers the fundamental question 'what is to be done' and understands *political discourse* as "primarily argumentative discourse" (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 17). It is this view of politics (as action, as involved in the process of decision-making) that distinguishes the Faircloughian approach to political discourse from the other approaches noted above. It builds on questions of representation by incorporating an agent's way of representing the world as premises in practical arguments (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 86). Faircloughian PDA goes on to consider argumentation as a "complex

speech act” that is intended to convince others to do something, such as accept a standpoint, rather than a “discursive strategy” employed to positively or negatively represent political actors or perspectives (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 23) .

In the development of their approach, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) focus specifically on practical reasoning, which is concerned with drawing conclusions from arguments about what to do and how to act. In Faircloughian PDA, the genre in which practical reasoning is the main type of reasoning is “deliberation” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 50). The relationship between practical reasoning and deliberation is given as follows: agents deliberate on their own (single-agent) or together with others (multi-agent). In either context, “deliberation involves balancing considerations in favour of one proposal for action against considerations that support various alternatives (minimally, the alternative of not doing the proposed action, but also other actions)” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 50). Deliberation, therefore, involves considering “alternative practical arguments, supporting different claims [for action] and examining and weighing considerations that support these alternative claims” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 50). Such reasoning offers arguments for action or for solving a practical problem, unlike theoretical reasoning that offers reasons for believing something to be true or could possibly be true. What this distinction draws out is that there is a “fundamental difference in purpose” between the two types of reasoning and a “corresponding difference in the kind of conclusion that is reached” from the premises offered (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 35).

From theoretical (or epistemic) reasoning, a conclusion can be drawn about what is (most likely) to be true in light of what we know, which Fairclough and Fairclough describe as a “descriptive conclusion” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 35). From practical reasoning, a conclusion about what is to be done, what we should do or what is good to do is reached in light of our current circumstances and our goals (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 35). What the agent wants to achieve – what goals s/he wants to attain and how s/he will

realise them – are the concerns of practical reasoning. A simple example of practical reasoning would be:

I want to avoid getting wet (Desire / Goal)

I will avoid getting wet if I take an umbrella (Belief / Means)

So, I will take an umbrella (Action)

As shown by this simple example, and explained via Fairclough and Fairclough:

“Practical *reasoning* (as a *process*) is a way of responding to a practical problem or question and a practical *argument* is a premise-conclusion *structure* that corresponds to that reasoning. The conclusion of a practical argument, called practical *judgement*, is the agent’s *answer* to the problem (question)” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 40; emphasis in the original). This simple example and description are indicative of value-based (normative) practical reasoning. In such a process, the values (beliefs and desires) that an agent holds may inform or motivate the agent’s actions so that s/he can solve the problem at hand. As Fairclough and Fairclough argue, “something only becomes a problem to solve because of certain things that matter to us, because of what we value or care about” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 41). So, in the simple example above, another agent may not care about getting wet – s/he does not value being ‘dry’ or obtaining the goal of staying dry – and so they would not take the umbrella with her/him, preferring instead to get wet. Or, another agent may care about staying dry but may dislike umbrellas so much that the action of the first agent would be undesirable to her/him, thus they may decide to put on a hooded raincoat instead.

Again, from this simple example, it is easy to see how two agents may hold the same desire or goal (to avoid getting wet) but hold different beliefs on how to achieve that state (staying dry) which ultimately leads to two different actions being taken. A more abstract and pertinent example for this thesis is given by Fairclough and Fairclough, regarding how different actors may respond to the financial crisis. They state that:

Depending, for example, on how the current situation in the UK is described (e.g. as a state of economic bankruptcy brought on by decades of excessive spending encouraged by previous Labour governments, or by decades of neoliberal Thatcherite financial deregulation), certain claims for action (e.g. cutting spending and borrowing or, on the contrary, intensifying state intervention) will be more reasonable than others.

Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 47

It can be argued that which narrative of the financial crisis came to prevail keenly affected what policies won out and, therefore, what the effects of the crisis would be in the long run. Following Fairclough and Fairclough, the austerity frame, employed in this thesis and outlined in Chapter 3, is underpinned by the view that in order for the UK to return to equilibrium (the pre-financial crisis status quo), priority must be given to public deficit reduction via the cutting of government spending rather than the raising of taxes. By contrast, the anti-austerity frame considers government spending on public services to be essential to economic recovery following a financial crash.

Balancing several practical arguments, in favour of different claims for action, against each other can lead people to decide to remain with one line of action or pursue an alternative, depending on the one best suited to realising a goal (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 51). When performing practical argumentation, agents weigh up different considerations that are relevant to them, because of their values and goals. Such differences often occur in politics, where political agents have conflicting but, within a framework of argumentation, equally reasonable values or goals. For example, as Fairclough and Fairclough state: “[c]ertain political values and goals will rank higher as priorities for a left-wing party than for a right-wing one, and both left-wing and right-wing goals and values can sometimes (though not always) be argumentatively defended as reasonable” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 60).

Structure of practical arguments

In the Faircloughian approach to PDA, the analysis of political discourse should focus on the generic features of the whole text, the practical argumentation that it makes, and how the discourse provides agents with reasons for action. Analysis, they argue, is “a matter of identifying within an argument its premises and its conclusions and the relations between them” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 11). Practical reasoning involves the two primary premises of circumstantial and normative, with the latter corresponding to “the goal premise, underlain by the value premise” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 43). Therefore, practical reasoning within this approach takes the form:

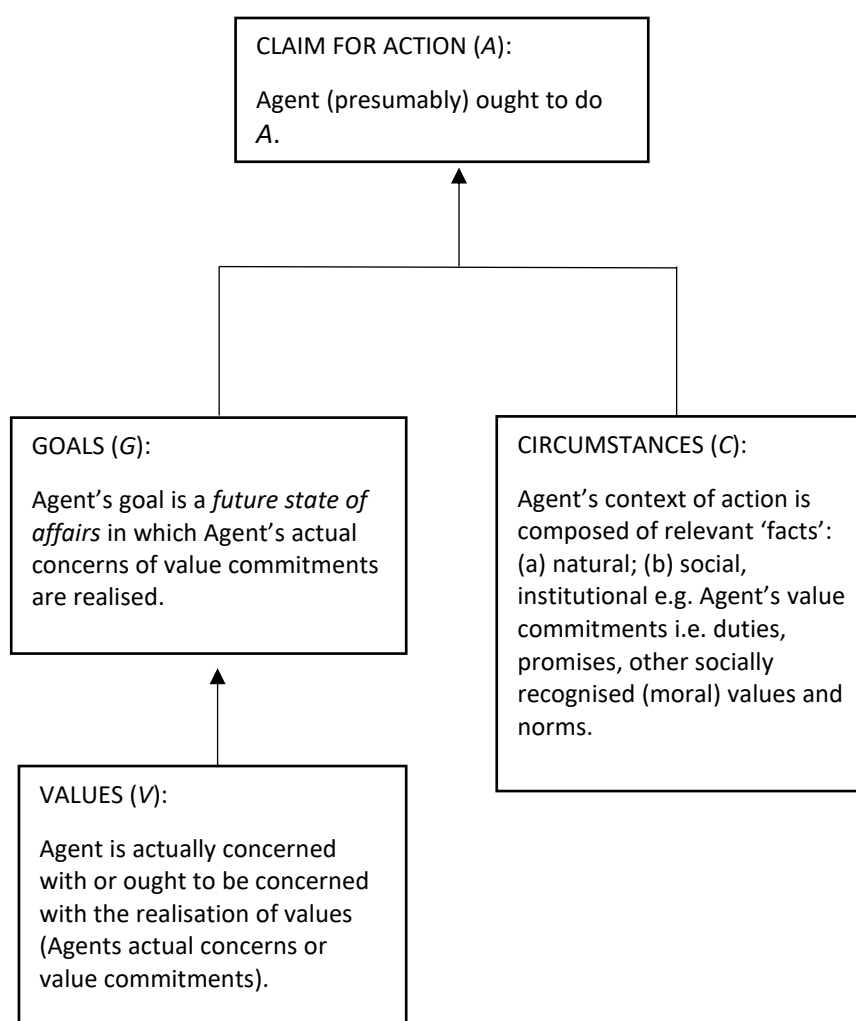
... given the circumstances I find myself in and a certain goal (this may be a future situation I desire or one that I don't particularly desire but think I ought to bring about), and given that I am or ought to be concerned with the realization of this goal, I ought to do [action] A.

Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 43

A certain action (A) might connect an agent's present circumstances (C) to a future state of affairs (G) that s/he may wish to bring about. Within the goals premise there may be goals that, once attained, become the means to further goals (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 143); these are referred to in this thesis as supporting-goals. Underlying (G) is the agent's values (V) that s/he is concerned with (or *ought* to be concerned with) realising, which are described as *internally* motivating the agent. An agent can be *internally* motivated to action by a *concern* (or value, e.g. fairness or justice) in which case s/he will perform an action because they are internally driven by a certain set of values. Even if the agent is not concerned to act (s/he is not motivated by values), there are *external* reasons that the agent has to act, such as obligations and duties. They provide agents with reasons for action independent of, or external to, the agent's individual concerns. A certain action might connect an agent's present circumstances to a future state of affairs (or goal) that s/he may wish to bring about, or s/he can perform the action because of a recognised *external* reason, such as duties or norms, even

if they choose not to be concerned with the realisation of the value. These concerns belong to the circumstances premise (C). An overview of the structure of a practical argument is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Faircloughian proposal for the structure of a practical argument in *Political Discourse Analysis* (2012: 58)



Belonging to the circumstances premise (C) are morally, socially and institutionally recognised *facts*, such as being honest, making promises or being law abiding, as too are *propositions* that include rights, duties, obligations, requirements etc. (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 48). The circumstances premise stands in relation to what the agent values (V) or is concerned about, and the facts and propositions that people reason from and with “are not divorced from what they value but have evaluative content”

(Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 46). The context of action (C) in a practical argument is, for Fairclough and Fairclough, inherently seen by the agent as a “problem” that needs to be resolved (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 40-41). The selected facts in (C) are only a problem because they are often informed by the values an agent holds. A different agent with different values may select different facts in (C) and, therefore, have a different problem to solve (as exemplified by the staying dry argument above).

The significance of this methodology to this research is as follows. Given the theoretical assertions established in Chapter 2 – that the social world is discursively constructed – it is argued that how we understand ‘what is going on’ or experience the world is informed by how we talk and write (communicate) about it (Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth’). How we communicate about it informs and reinforces what we think about the world and what values we hold or how we think the world should be. What relevant facts we select in (C) will be underpinned by these values and concerns (V) and this constitutes, and is constitutive of, the frames that we employ (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 93). In turn, what is included in the (C) and (V) premises inform the practical argument put forth and give reasons to pursue certain goals and actions. An example within this thesis is that if we are concerned with healthcare as a public good and equality of access to that good (V), then what we select as relevant facts in (C) would be reflective of our concerns, i.e. privatisation of the NHS leading to unequal access would be chosen as a relevant fact and would give us a reason to pursue a goal that leads to the ending of such a process. In this way, there is a strong link between what we value (V) informing what facts are chosen (C) and what goals (G) we are going to pursue.

Critical Evaluation

The reconstruction of a practical argument is the first step in the process of applying Faircloughian PDA and the second is an evaluation of the argument. As an approach, PDA seeks to offer analysts a way of critically examining practical argumentation by interrogating an argument’s premises in three

ways. First is to challenge the rational acceptability (or truth) of one or more of the premises. The authors give an example that “it may not be rationally acceptable that [a situation] is to be described in such-and-such terms” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 63). In other words, if the ‘facts’ in (C) can be shown to be untrue or a mistaken view of the situation then the argument is unsound because the hypothesis for action does not correspond to what the facts actually are (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 63-66). Second is to challenge the inferential link between premises and claims. It is possible to think that an agent should do (A) as a necessary way of achieving her/his goal, but if a better alternative emerges that will also fulfil (G) then the inference that the agent should do (A) will no longer follow from the premises (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 63-66). The argument is thus invalid as it will not support the claim that the agent should do (A) but, Fairclough and Fairclough argue, it also does not support the claim that the agent should *not* do (A) either and so the argument may still be a reasonable one. Third is to produce a counter-argument to the claim and/or to question whether the action being proposed will have negative consequences that would undermine or invalidate the stated goal (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 63-66). If the production of a counter-argument and possible negative consequences result in the goal being compromised, then (A) can be said to be rebutted.

The authors illustrate part of this process in the following example:

The government’s goal is to pull the country out of recession (Goal)

If the government cuts public spending, then the goal will be achieved
(Means-Goal)

Conclusion: The government should cut public spending
(Recommended Action)

Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 64

The simple argument is not valid, they claim, because it is possible to “imagine a situation in which the conclusion above would be false, although the premises would be true” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 64). While it may be

true that cuts to spending may pull the country out of recession, it is also possible that some other strategy could achieve this more efficiently, or that a lot more is needed besides cutting spending to achieve (G). In this case, the conclusion would be false and the argument invalid (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 64). An example that relates to the anti-austerity frame will help to illustrate the point. Possible negative consequences are that, although cutting public spending might achieve the stated goal, it is possible that this action may lead to high-unemployment or a double-dip recession. This would negatively impact the goal because if fewer people are employed there will be lower tax receipts and a deeper recession may ensue. So, once additional considerations are taken into account, the conclusion reached by the original argument can be considered false and the claim rebutted. An alternative counter-argument could make the counter-claim that instead of cuts to public spending, a strategy of investment in job creation could achieve the stated goal. Such a change to the argument offers a different conclusion and recommended action:

The government's goal is to pull the country out of recession (Goal)

If the government invests in job creation then the goal will be achieved
(Means-Goal)

Conclusion: The government should invest in job creation
(Recommended Action)

As shown, Faircloughian PDA seeks to reconstruct arguments for the purpose of carrying out normative or explanatory critique and such reconstruction, it is claimed, provides a basis for non-arbitrary evaluation (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 23). However, to reconstruct an argument, the analyst needs to evaluate the content of a text and assign parts of it to the different premises in the Faircloughian schema and, as such, Faircloughian PDA suffers from some of the same limitations applied to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Limitations of PDA

When reconstructing a practical argument from a text – political speeches, budget reports and transcripts of debates in the case of Fairclough and Fairclough – the analyst must read the text and assign elements of it to the different premises outlined above. It is the analyst's evaluation of the linguistic features in that text that decides which aspects of the text are to be placed in which premise. It could be argued by the producers of a text that a reconstruction of an argument by an analyst does not reflect the intention behind a speech or report because "no attempt is ever made to establish empirically what writers might have intended by their texts" (Widdowson 1998: 143). This can be countered somewhat through the provision of a robust manual that categorises the linguistic features of a text in order to determine how and why the analyst assigned certain elements of a speech or report to a particular premise. An example of this would be the categorisation of a *commissive speech act* (e.g. 'I will do x') as denoting an intention on the part of the speaker to do something or to act, which could be assigned to the claims for action (A) or goals (G) premises.

Leading out of this is another limitation to PDA that concerns how an argument is received by readers other than the analyst. Remaining with Widdowson's assessment of CDA, there is no "consultation with the readers [or interlocutors] for whom texts are designed. Their understanding is assigned to them by proxy, which in effect means that the analysts use the linguistic features of the text selectively to confirm their own prejudice" (Widdowson 1998: 143). The reception of a text or an argument – whether an argument motivates people to act or accept the claim for action – is not rigorously tested or determined by empirically measured assessment. Such a limitation could be countered with the use of focus groups, wherein lay people could be asked by the researcher to assess the effectiveness of an argument or the research could be conducted by a number of analysts. It could be argued that the results of an election could also be an indicator of the effectiveness of an argument. The 'winner' of an election could be deemed to have been the actor with the most persuasive or most sound

practical argument, but as noted in Chapter 2, and as will be shown in the following analysis, that is not always the case. Issue ownership, repetition of frames and pre-existing discourses (e.g. neoliberalism) all constitute the political landscape within which arguments are put forth and people are asked to make decisions to act, hence to assume that an argument alone will persuade people to act is to think of decision-making as occurring in a vacuum.

Another critique is that Faircloughian PDA has, to date, focused exclusively on the institutional context of the political world. For Fairclough and Fairclough, political contexts (the space wherein political discourse occurs) *are* institutional contexts and outside of these contexts “the discourse of politicians or any other ‘political actor’ is not ‘political’” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 18). They argue that this is because the institutional context enables (some) political actors to exert their political power and agency, which empowers them to act in ways that “has an impact on matters of common concern” (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 18). Drawing on Foucault’s conception of discourse as transformative, it is argued in this thesis that the power of political discourse isn’t solely the preserve of the institution and institutional actors. Extending the political context to include social movements, understood as a *process* in which concerned citizens actively engage, opens up the analysis of non-institutional political discourse in which political actors discuss matters of common concern and collectively exert political power upon the institutional context. Following van Dijk (1997), political discourse is attached to political actors who are engaged in political processes and events in a political context, and campaigns by social movements can add to the process through the spreading of ideas or norms between individuals, groups and political parties. This in turn informs political discourse and may have electoral repercussions (della Porta & Kriesi 1999: 21).

It must be noted, however, that institutional actors – e.g. Parliament or government – are inherently constituted in such a way as to have “unequal

and asymmetrical effects on the ability of [some] social groups to realize their interests through political action” (Jessop 1982: 224). Social movements and other civil society actors do not possess the same power or institutional resources that are possessed by these actors, or other institutional actors such as the media (Barker et al. 2014; Císař 2015; Gamson 1990 [1975]; Giugni 1998; Giugni et al. 1999; Lipsky 1968; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001; Nilsen & Cox 2014; Staggenborg 2015; Tarrow 2015, 1998; Tilly 1978). However, as argued in Chapter 2, they do deliberate about what is to be done and can put forth counter-arguments and normative conclusions to those offered by political elites (Barker et al. 2014; Foweraker 1995; Johnston 2014; Kriesi in Diani & Eyerman 1992: 22; Tarrow 2011: 16; Tilly & Tarrow 2007; Tilly 2008). Social movements form part of the general political process and it is as part of this process that they challenge powerful opponents (Barker et al. 2014: 5; Lipsky 1968: 1144; Tarrow 1998: 10) and do change its constitution, as with the women’s suffrage movement exemplified in Chapter 2.

With this approach and its limitations in mind, I applied the structure of Faircloughian PDA to several texts²¹ created by The People’s Assembly and the healthcare sections of the manifestos of the two main political parties (Labour and Conservative) in the 2015 and 2017 UK general elections. These texts constitute my corpus, discussed below, from which I reconstructed each actor’s argument, which were then critically evaluated by drawing on public debates on the NHS found in the mainstream media and other institutional contexts.

4.2 Field of Study

This thesis takes as its field of study the UK general election campaigns of 2015 and 2017 and considers the role of (anti)austerity frames in practical arguments from three political actors around the issue of the NHS: The

²¹ Texts are understood in a broad sense here, including podcasts, websites pages, social media posts, songs, and other events.

People's Assembly and the Conservative and Labour parties. The substance of the field is the content of texts from The People's Assembly's campaigning during the elections and the healthcare sections of election manifestos from the Labour and Conservative parties. By analysing and comparing the social movement campaigning around the NHS with the Labour and Conservative party manifesto positions on the same issue, this research draws out potential discrepancies and similarities between electoral political messaging and movement campaigning. It does so by analysing the practical arguments for action by each of the political actors and situates the arguments in a broader political landscape. The broader political landscape is constructed from media reporting during the elections on the issue of the NHS and reports from other institutional actors therein such as think tanks and unions.

4.3 Timeline

The UK general election of 2015 was held on May 7, 2015 at the end of a fixed-term Parliament. Following the 2010 election, the newly formed Coalition Government of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats introduced the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. This Act scheduled general elections to occur at five-year intervals unless a new government legislated to change this (Rogers & Walters 2015: 22) or an early general election was triggered by either a vote of no confidence in the government (Rogers & Walters 2015: 120), or by a motion calling for an election that received a two-third 'super-majority' of the whole House (Norton & Thompson 2015: 130). Prior to this Act, Parliament would be dissolved by royal proclamation at the advice of the Prime Minister who decided on the date of the general election (Rogers & Walters 2015: 22). As stated by the mechanisms in the Act, in 2015 Parliament was dissolved a minimum of 25 days prior to the election date on March 30, 2015. The State Opening of Parliament occurred on May 27, 2015.

In 2017 the UK held a snap general election on June 8, 2017. This surprise election followed an 'early Parliamentary election motion' put forth by the Prime Minister to call an election, which was agreed upon by a majority of 509 in the House (522 votes for and 13 against)²². The election, called on April 18, 2017, was agreed upon by Parliament on April 19 with the dissolution on May 3. The State Opening of Parliament occurred on June 21, 2017 (initially planned for June 19, 2017).

In the British electoral process there are two regulated periods for candidates contesting general elections, known as the 'long campaign' and the 'short campaign'. The long campaign period comprises the three months preceding the dissolution of Parliament and the 'short campaign' is the period between dissolution and election day (Johnston et al. 2013: 115). During the short campaign political parties release their manifestos, intensify their messaging and focus on seeking the votes of the electorate and getting supporters out to the ballot box (Johnston et al. 2013: 115). In light of this and in order to accommodate the unexpected nature of the 2017 general election (more time was afforded to the long campaign in 2015 because the election was expected), I decided to concentrate on collecting data from within the short campaign period, which meant that directly comparable data was analysed. As such, the data collection from the 2015 general election covered March 30 to May 7, 2015 and collection for 2017 covered May 3 to June 8, 2017.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

4.4.1 The People's Assembly

Social movements communicate with a range of other political actors and organisations, such as the mass media and government and its officials, in coalition with other social movements with similar aims or other third party organisations that may be sympathetic to the issues being communicated, and broader publics which may include existing supporters of the movement

²² For full details visit: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2017/april/mps-to-vote-on-an-early-general-election/> (last accessed 24/04/2019).

(Curtis & Zurcher 1973; Klandermans 1992; Lipsky 1968; Staggenborg 2015). They use a wide variety of collective action strategies and tactics to communicate, which have traditionally included street demonstrations or rallies, public statements, press releases, petitions, strikes, occupations, leaflets and posters, and all manner of other creative tactics (Tilly 2008: 121). These tactics are part of a 'repertoire' that society understand as aspects of contentious politics, which Tilly and Tarrow (2007) describe as a "repertoire of contention" and Kriesi et al. (2009) and Teune (2011) describe as a "communication repertoire". Each communicative tactic can be part of a conventional toolkit that already exists or can be created by inventive organisers or participants of social movements (Tarrow 1998: 21).

With the emergence of digital technologies, social movements have expanded their repertoire to include online forms of communication. Beginning with the 1999 anti-World Trade Organisation protests in Seattle that used listservs to coordinate action and activists, many different campaign groups have shared information using internet-supported²³ practices (Atkinson 2017; Cammaerts 2015; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). Such practices today regularly include emails to supporters, website articles, blogs and social media posts, which, as well as making it easier and less costly to connect with and mobilise members and supporters, function as crucial information dissemination platforms that have the potential to broaden movements' impact and reach (Atkinson 2017; Bennett & Segerberg 2013; Cammaerts 2015; Flesher Fominaya 2014).

Digital and social media are now integral to social movements' communication tactics (Atkinson 2017; Bennett & Segerberg 2013;

²³ Van Laer and Van Aelst make a distinction between internet-based practices and internet-supported practices. They state that the former exist only because of the Internet and, according to Cammaerts, modify the activists' toolkit by enabling them to "surveil the surveillers and preserve protest artefacts" (Cammaerts 2015: 5). The latter "refer to the traditional tools of social movements that have become easier to organize and coordinate thanks to the Internet" (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010: 1148). As this thesis focuses on communication tactics, something that social movements have always engaged in, internet-supported practices are discussed.

Cammaerts 2015; Cammaerts et al. 2013; Kidd & McIntosh 2016; Flesher Fominaya 2014; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). These platforms can provide space for possible novel tactics, such as culture jamming, hacktivism and podcasts, to be transmitted with ease across ever wider networks (Cammaerts 2007; Flesher Fominaya 2014; Van Laer & Van Aelst 2010) and play an important role in facilitating the mobilisation and coordination of offline action (Cammaerts 2015). For example, Twitter as a communication organisation tool has the capacity to direct traffic with symbols such as #, @ and URLs, to allocate resources to participants of collective action, and to increase transnational advocacy around globally resonant issues (Bennett & Segerberg 2013: 8). As Tarrow (2005: 103) identifies, this is not a new phenomenon. He points to the worldwide circulation of Ghandi's tactic of non-violent direct action and civil disobedience, but acknowledges that networked technologies, such as social media, have both "increased and accelerated" such circulation (see also Cammaerts 2015).

The role of social media in the field of social movement research has already produced a plethora of studies, particularly in the wake of the 2010 Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and the 2011 Occupy movement (Castells 2012; Christensen 2011; Kidd & McIntosh 2016; Kreiss & Tufekci 2013; Lotan et al. 2011; Flesher Fominaya 2014; Stokel-Walker 2011). This thesis does not focus on the value of digital or social media for social movements or the role that it plays in facilitating mobilisation and recruitment. Rather the focus is on the technology as a means to a long-standing social movement end, that of communicating information and distributing movement agendas to a broad range of audiences. With this and the focus of the thesis on electoral campaigning (communication aimed at the voter) in mind, I decided to gather both the public-facing online texts and any offline material referred to that were produced by The People's Assembly during the election dates laid out in the timeline above. There were five different types of text across the two election campaigns. These are displayed in the Table 2 below and an explanation of each given in the following subsections.

Table 2: The People's Assembly data 2015 and 2017			
The People's Assembly	2015	2017	Total
Billboard	N/A	1	1
#ManifestoOfMisery Twitter	N/A	670 tweets	670
Podcasts	3	N/A	3
Protest song	N/A	1	1
Website	19	9	28

Billboard

On 22 May, 2017, The People's Assembly launched a nationwide political advertising-style billboard campaign. The billboard was initially funded by a single donor and displayed in 40 key marginal seats. This was followed by the movement organising crowdfunding to raise money for more billboards. Due to the nature of the billboard as image and text combined it was not analysed in Nvivo (discussed below), instead multimodal discourse analysis was conducted by the researcher manually.

#ManifestoOfMisery Tweets

The night before the Conservative Party launched their 2017 manifesto, The People's Assembly launched their #ManifestoOfMisery hashtag on 17 May and was actively shared until 13 June, 2017. There were only four tweets that lay outside of the 2017 timeframe (May 3 to June 8, 2017) and these were discounted in the final number analysed. Using Google's Twitter Archiver, 1,197 tweets containing the #ManifestoOfMisery hashtag were collected in an Excel spreadsheet. In the first round of analysis, each tweet was read through manually by the researcher and a decision was made as to whether to analyse the tweets further with a simple Yes/No/Don't know column. Tweets were classified as 'yes' if they had substantive commentary on the manifesto, policies, or the election, 'don't know' if they referred to the manifesto or

policy in passing, and rejected for further analysis if they were composed of only multiple hashtags or offered only retweets without substantive commentary alongside. All of the tweets with a score of '1 for yes' and '0 for don't know' – 670 in total – were then imported into NVivo and coded using the PDA framework.

Podcasts

During the 2015 general election The People's Assembly engaged with its supporters and broader publics via podcasts hosted on SoundCloud (<https://soundcloud.com/the-peoples-assembly>) and disseminated through their website. There were three in total during the short campaigning period with one 'Elections Special' airing on the April 24, 2015. The podcasts were fully transcribed by the researcher in Word with the exception of musical interludes, and each individual document was imported into NVivo and coded using the PDA framework.

The protest song – Liar, Liar GE2017

A protest song called *Liar, Liar GE2017* reached number one in the iTunes chart and number four in the UK's official Top 40. It was re-mastered by the British ska/reggae band Captain SKA from their 2010 anti-cuts single aimed at the Coalition government and re-released on the 26 May, 2017 in association with and promoted heavily by The People's Assembly. This text was also not analysed in NVivo, instead qualitative content analysis was conducted by the researcher manually.

The People's Assembly Website

The People's Assembly published numerous articles on their own website during both general election campaigns. I decided to gather articles from the website only, rather than include email communication to supporters due to the public-facing nature of the website. In 2015, 19 articles were published during the short campaigning period and in 2017 there were nine. Each of these were downloaded as PDFs from the website and imported into NVivo as separate sources and coded using the PDA framework.

4.4.2 Political Party Manifestos

To get a succinct and clear understanding of the party's election message and argument therein I concentrated on the manifesto content only. Studying the content of a manifesto can be thought of as a shortcut for researchers interested in a party's election message (Nai & Walter 2015: 65). Accessing and coding the content of the manifesto is more efficient than analysing the content of each speech or message delivered by a party leader during an election campaign and more controlled, in that a researcher is analysing like-for-like content (Nai & Walter 2015: 65). Furthermore, it is assumed that the content of a manifesto is known well by the party leader and its representatives and that they will often repeat this content in interviews, speeches and comment in the media (Budge 1987; Butler 1989; Eder et al. 2016; Nai & Walter 2015).

The manifesto is an important document in election campaigns as not only does it set a party's political messages for the duration and signal the campaign's "hot phase" (Eder et al. 2016: 77), it also considered a "promissory note" to the electorate (Butler 1989: 87). It is traditionally held that the electorate decide a party's fitness to govern based on the promises set out in the manifesto, which in turn confers a mandate to the party elected (Butler 1989; Eder et al. 2016). That the electorate vote according to these promissory notes is contested by analysts who have observed that although manifestos are widely circulated, they are rarely read (Budge 1987; Butler 1989; Eder et al. 2016). That voters do not access and read the manifesto in the same way as the researcher highlights a discrepancy between the researcher's interest and that of the voter. However, it is argued that manifestos constitute an indirect effect on decisions to vote because they "form the basis of comment in the mass media" regarding each party's staple issues (Budge 1987: 18 quoted in Eder et al. 2016: 6). In addition to this indirect effect is the overall function of the manifesto: they serve to put political pressure upon politicians to keep their promises and exercise prudence when in government (Butler 1989: 87; Eder et al. 2016: 75).

Labour and Conservative Manifestos

The latest available data²⁴ showed that the two biggest parties by membership figures in the UK were the Conservatives and Labour (Conservative 149,800, as of December 2013; Labour 552,000, as of June 2017). Therefore, I decided that the Conservative and Labour Party manifestos would be chosen for analysis.

In 2015, the Conservative manifesto was 84 pages long, with four pages (1,781 words) given to the NHS: the 'Protecting and improving our National Health Service' (pp. 37-41) section fell within the broader Chapter 4 entitled 'The best schools and hospitals for you and your family'. The Labour manifesto was 86 pages long with 12 pages (1,780 words) given to health and education services: 'Providing world-class health and education services' (pp. 31-43).

In 2017, the Conservative manifesto was 88 pages long, again with four pages (1,888 words) dedicated to the NHS: the 'Our National Health Service' (pp. 66-70) section fell within a broader Chapter 4 entitled 'A restored contract between the generations'. The Labour manifesto was 128 pages long with nine pages (1,809 words) dedicated to healthcare: Chapter 7 'Healthcare for All' (pp. 65-74). Each section was extracted from the full manifesto documents (see bibliography for access details) and imported into NVivo and coded using the PDA framework. These are displayed in the Table 3.

Table 3: Conservative and Labour Party manifesto pages 2015 and 2017		
Manifestos (<i>Healthcare section only</i>)	2015	2017
Labour	1,780 words	1,809 words
Conservative	1,781 words	1,888 words

²⁴ For full details see: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05125> (last accessed 16/11/2018).

4.4.3 Media

The analysis of news media during elections is important because elections are “key moments in which politics and politicians are most visible and when citizens need reliable information about politics” (Harmer & Southern 2019: 100). Despite the continuing decline in the circulation of daily newspapers (Barnett 2017: 55; Harmer & Southern 2017: 62) and the doubt surrounding the compensation that online readership is extending their political reach (Starkey 2017: 49; Wring & Deacon 2018: 348), the print press still possesses a considerable voice during elections (Barnett 2017: 55) and remains the main source of political information for people generally (Flesher Fominaya 2014: 115). I decided that qualitative content analysis of newspapers would be conducted over television news broadcasts because national newspapers continue to set the news agenda of broadcasters (Cushion & Sambrook 2015)²⁵. As Steven Barnett explains, print headlines frequently make appearances on newspaper review programmes and newspaper commentators are regularly “invited onto discussion panels of news magazine programmes such as *Newsnight*, *Marr*, *Peston* and *Daily Politics*” (Barnett 2017: 55). Another factor was the low ranking of the NHS as a subject in election news broadcasts (seventh in 2017 with 5.1% of all coverage and featuring prominently only in week two of 2015 coverage), whereas newspaper coverage of ‘health and healthcare’ was slightly higher (ranked third in the coverage at 6.9% of all coverage in 2017 and sixth in 2015 at 3.7%) (Cushion & Beckett 2018: 326; Wring & Deacon 2018: 375).

It is contended that the political messages that the mainstream media disseminate are the ones expressed within the mainstream political establishment (Castells 2007: 241; Bennett 1990, 2007), with publishers, editors and other media professionals indexing, or ranking, the importance of

²⁵ Research into the influence of press reporting on television news was conducted by Cardiff University in 2015. For the full report visit: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/find-a-project/view/188437-tv-news-coverage-of-the-2015-uk-general-election-campaign> (last accessed 29/04/2019).

specific issues based on the viewpoints of elites (Castells 2013: 159). Often news produced directly from government communications, particularly policy issues and election speeches, receives special attention in the indexing process (Castells 2013: 159; Fowler 1991). Thus, during election campaigns newspapers will report on the official statements of political party representatives, who, as noted above, will repeat manifesto content. In addition to the focus on party political actors, newspaper articles only occasionally refer to other institutional or civil society actors who are commenting on policy issues, such as think-tanks and some trade unions (Birks 2014, 2015; Anstead & Chadwick 2017). These voices can provide confirmation or critiques of the agenda set by the politicians and the editorial stance of the newsroom that selects the information through its own social, economic and political lens (Fowler 1991; Hall et al. 2000). An acknowledgment of this feature of media reporting supports the case made in this thesis for analysing social movement communication during elections. As noted above, by employing communicative tactics to transmit their message, social movements can contest institutionalised meaning, which would allow researchers to offer a more comprehensive evaluation of the political landscape.

The Selection Process

The press in this thesis provides a political backdrop to the manifesto and movement arguments and offers a broader context of action with which to critically evaluate the reconstructed practical arguments. Publications chosen for this research were limited to: the *Daily Mail* including online content from *MailOnline* and its sister paper *The Mail on Sunday*; the *Daily Mirror* including online content from *mirror.co.uk* and its sister paper the *Sunday Mirror*; *The Sun*; and *The Guardian*. The basis for the choice of newspapers was distribution and partisanship figures as it is important to choose newspapers with a high circulation rates in order to remain representative of what is both numerically and ideologically dominant in the UK today. The data for this choice came from various sources. Initially I consulted *News consumption in the UK: 2018*, published 25 July 2018, which presents the findings of a news

survey of 4,618 people across the UK commissioned by Ofcom and conducted by Jigsaw Research from November to December 2017 and March to April 2018. The report²⁶ found that 40% of those surveyed consumed their news via printed newspapers, with television news being the most favoured at 79%. Among those who consume news through newspapers the most-used titles are the *Daily Mail* (31%), *Metro* (23%), *The Sun* (21%) and the *Mail on Sunday* (20%), followed by the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, the *Evening Standard*, *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror* (12%). The data shows that with print and online combined, the *Daily Mail* is the most widely-read news title in the UK and *The Guardian* is the most widely-read digital newspaper. The latest audience measurement data from PAMCo, which has replaced the National Readership Survey (NRS), shows that when print and digital are combined the four brands with the highest monthly reach are the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror*²⁷.

This sample is reasonably representative of the quality, mid-market and popular papers, with two right-leaning and two left-leaning, and of different ownership (Wring & Deacon 2018: 349). Analysis of the political partisanship of the British national press in the 2017 general election reveals that the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* remained consistent in their partisan declaration: very strong Conservative in both 2015 and 2017. The *Daily Mirror* declared as strong Labour in both 2015 and 2017 and *The Guardian* remained moderate Labour in both elections (Wring & Deacon 2018: 349). Each of these positions finds agreement in a 2017 YouGov survey of 52,615 UK adults on the subject of 'vote by newspaper readership'²⁸. The survey revealed 74% of *Daily Mail*

²⁶ The full report can be downloaded at: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/116529/news-consumption-2018.pdf (last accessed 29/04/2019).

²⁷ The report accessed is PAMCo 1 2019: Jan '18 – Dec '18 (Nov '18 Comscore data) <https://pamco.co.uk/pamco-data/data-archive/> (last accessed 29/04/2019).

²⁸ For the full report see: <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/13/how-britain-voted-2017-general-election/> (last accessed 29/04/2019).

readers and 59% of *The Sun* readership voted for the Conservative Party, with 73% of *The Guardian* and 68% of *Daily Mirror* readers voting for Labour.

Nexis

To gather the newspaper articles from each publication identified, I accessed the Nexis database of global newspapers and ran multiple search terms delineated with AND / OR connectors²⁹ for the keywords: NHS AND spending OR funding OR cuts. These keywords, excluding 'spending', were chosen as being the most prominent themes from the social movement data. The term 'spending' was chosen to incorporate the dominant austerity framing of reductions in public spending as identified in Chapter 2. The search dates followed the timeline of the elections set out above (March 30 to May 8, 2015 and May 3 to June 8, 2017). The search included UK national newspapers, grouped duplicates of high similarity and excluded newswires. Further searches within the results boundaries included 'newspapers' as the source type and 'government and public administration' as the subject.

To ensure that each article referred to the field of study they had to have the following features: a substantial reference to the discussion of the NHS, e.g. a minimum of three hits for the keyword NHS; more than one sentence referring directly to NHS spending, NHS funding and/or cuts; and an analysis of party manifestos in relation to NHS pledges. For practicalities of scale a threshold of 3,000 words per article was set. All articles referring to the NHS in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland were discounted; this is due to the recent changes to the NHS encapsulated by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 only affecting England. The chosen articles were separated out by newspaper name and downloaded as four Word documents per year and

²⁹ In Nexis (<https://www.nexis.com/>) these connectors are defined as follows: And: Both words/phrases must appear in the article | Or: At least one of the words/phrases entered must appear in the article.

added to NVivo for coding. The final number of newspaper articles analysed are displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Newspaper data for 2015 and 2017		
Newspapers	2015	2017
<i>Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday and MailOnline</i>	43	26
<i>The Mirror, The Sunday Mirror and mirror.co.uk</i>	21	13
<i>The Sun</i>	15	6
<i>The Guardian</i>	19	27

4.5 Data Analysis Methods

This section will detail the methods used to analyse the datasets laid out above. The use of the computer-assisted qualitative software program NVivo to facilitate data management and analysis is discussed, followed by the application of the structure of PDA and the creation of nodes with reference to examples for illustrative purposes.

4.5.1 The Use of NVivo

The use of computer-assisted qualitative software programs (CAQDAS) as a data management tool to facilitate (but not perform) analysis is time-saving, transparent and allows checks and balances, especially regarding consistency (Bazeley & Jackson 2013; Bringer et al., 2006; Woolf & Silver 2018). As this research was conducted using PDA as a method and a conception of discourse based in Foucault as a theoretical framework, CAQDAS was used only to help with the organisational aspects of managing qualitative data. The software's capacity for categorising (presented as 'nodes') and linking text assisted in ordering the data without losing access to the source data or context from which the data came, which provided new ways of seeing the data that might be missed without the software (Bazeley & Jackson 2013; Woolf & Silver 2018).

The material was coded in NVivo (version 11), which was chosen for its capacity to facilitate indexing and retrieval, and followed a predominantly inductive coding strategy, producing categories/nodes from the text (Lindekilde 2014). The software's ability to categorise which 'nodes' were the most heavily populated using the Matrix Coding query function provided a guide to further manual analysis. It was possible to perform a search of each of the datasets (stored as individual 'sources' in respective folders) to identify which of the propositions or claims (coded to the 'child nodes' detailed below) in each actor's text constituted each premise in their argument. The use of this function offered a clear visualisation of the salient aspects of practical arguments from multiple texts (See Appendix 2).

4.5.2 Applying PDA

The four premises that form a succinct practical argument, as outlined in PDA above, were used to create four parent nodes: circumstances (C), values (V), goals (G) and claims for action (A). An NVivo project was created for each general election. In each project the relevant datasets were imported. Each article in the sets were imported into NVivo one-by-one, read through and coded *in vivo* to create child nodes. Each child node was given a full description that was amended as additional data was added. A record of these changes was kept in Word, which served to organise thinking and create a transparent audit trail in digital hard copy form. A coding manual of the final categories and their descriptions can be found in Appendix 1.

Coded to 'circumstances (C)' were particular circumstances – including institutional and empirical facts – within which the political actors were acting. For example, any mention of pressures facing the NHS, such as IT problems, waiting time increases, a lack of beds and staff numbers, plus references to the broader political landscape, including the programme of austerity. Also included in 'circumstances (C)' were references to privatisation because it forms part of the landscape within which the NHS was operating at the time and is based on the institutional fact: that the universal and

equitable nature of the NHS in England is based on the State's socially recognised, normatively binding *duty* to treat all its citizens *equally*.

Coded to 'values (V)' were references to the values with which the actors were concerned. Three child nodes were coded: trust, equality and fairness. The child nodes that populated 'goals (G)' were proposed solutions to the issues identified in (C) that would bring about a possible future state of affairs in accordance with the values of each political actor. Two types of goals were identified during the coding cycle and so the subheadings 'overarching goals' and 'supporting-goals' were created. These reflected the sequential relation between goals, where one goal, once attained, would create the context (circumstances) for the attainment of another goal (see Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 143). For example, the overarching goal of ensuring patients received the "best healthcare" identified in the 2015 Conservative Party manifesto would be achieved through the supporting-goals of patient empowerment and a seven-day NHS.

Coded to 'claims for action (A)' are any reference to what the political actor presumably ought to do or that presents (A) as presumably the right thing to do in order to achieve their goal(s). Any claims made that were expressed as an intention to act (a commissive speech act, i.e. *I will do X*) or any actions that would directly bring about (G) were included. For example, any references to a change to the current government, to future financial increases or to changes to or creation of legislation were coded as an action.

Once no further findings from the data were forthcoming a project was deemed to have been fully populated. A Matrix Coding query for each election was then exported to show how many words were coded to each parent and child node (Appendix 2). From this query I considered the importance of each child node: the higher the number of words, the more important that child node was to the premise of each actor's argument. The identified child nodes were then exported as individual Word documents and from these I began to reconstruct the practical argument.

Once reconstructed I critically evaluated the arguments using the media data set. A new project was created in NVivo for both the 2015 and 2017 elections and the Word documents for each newspaper downloaded from Nexis were imported into the relevant project. The same analysis method as above was applied to the media data.

4.6 Conclusion

The methodology adopted in this research follows the discourse analytic tradition and employs the structure of practical arguments as outlined by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) to facilitate the exploration of the electoral campaigns of political actors. It also examines the newspaper articles that made up the mediated political landscapes at the time of each election. In the next two case study chapters the reconstructed practical arguments and the links with the austerity and anti-austerity frames are outlined, followed by a critical evaluation.

Chapter 5: The 2015 General Election Campaign

This chapter reconstructs the practical arguments made by the Conservative and Labour parties and The People's Assembly in the 2015 general election. It starts with a brief overview of the short campaigning period and identifies the importance of the NHS as an issue in the broader political landscape at the time. The chapter then outlines the reconstructed practical arguments followed by a comparative analysis of them in a dialectical framework. It then turns to a critical evaluation of the arguments through their relationship to the broader landscape. This is conducted through a qualitative content analysis of the media coverage at the time, which shows the extent to which various arguments were amplified and endorsed or challenged. Finally, an evaluation of the arguments to determine their validity is conducted.

5.1 The Short Campaign and the Issue of the NHS in 2015

The 2015 general election was called five years into the age of austerity, at the end of the period stipulated by the Fixed-term Parliaments Act. It was an expected election but one that proved to be unpredictable for the polls, which had consistently pointed to a hung parliament. Instead, the result was a massive swing in favour of the Conservative Party (Jackson & Thorsen 2015: 8).

The short election campaigning period started with a focus on health for both parties (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016: 172). A few days ahead of the dissolution of Parliament, on March 27, 2015, Labour launched their NHS policy at Olympic Park by pledging a 5% profit cap on NHS contracts worth over £500,000. According to Cowley and Kavanagh, the Labour Party's own polling had found that health was an important issue with voters, but the concerns of the electorate lay more in long waiting times and the quality of care than with privatisation (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016: 172-3).

The Conservatives focused on plans for a seven-day NHS and agreed to deliver the additional investment that was asked for by the Chief Executive of NHS England, Simon Stevens, in the *Five Year Forward View* (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016: 173). The report identified a £30bn black hole in the NHS budget that

required £22bn in 'efficiency' savings to be found by the NHS with an additional £8bn to come from the government. Labour chose not to match the Conservative's offering because they did not wish to break their spending limits. Instead their 'Budget Responsibility Lock' (a promise to reduce the deficit) manoeuvred the party into a difficult position leaving them with room to only offer £2.5bn a year to the NHS, which ensured that they were to continue fighting the election on the perceived profligacy that had lost them the 2010 election (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016: 71-72). As a result, in 2015, Labour were being outspent on the NHS by a Conservative Party that often declined to explain where the money was going to come from to meet their healthcare spending commitments. Instead, the Conservatives traded on the image of economic competence that they had built up in the 2010 election (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016) and asserted that it was only with a strong economy that the UK could hope to have a strong NHS.

In the mainstream media the economy was the major substantive policy issue in terms of reporting and stood at 10.5% of all coverage, with the NHS appearing sixth with 3.7% coverage (Deacon & Wring 2016: 322). According to David Deacon and Dominic Wring, it was the Labour-leaning newspapers that tried to move the debate onto the future of the NHS. The *Daily Mirror* "ran a series of stories alleging the Conservatives had broken promises on GP recruitment ('Dr No', 7 April) and a warning from Labour-supporting celebrity chef Delia Smith that the health service could not go on being 'treated like a supermarket' (4 May)" (Deacon & Wring 2016: 329-330).

Away from the mainstream media, The People's Assembly were discussing why austerity was important in relation to the NHS and other public services. In their podcasts and website articles they considered the impacts that cuts to funding on the NHS had on waiting times and patient care, but also the effects that privatisation and the Health and Social Care Act (HSCA) had on the service. Mostly these debates centred around what austerity was, the effects of austerity and its basis in neoliberalism. None of this featured in the broader media, with the exception of challenges to austerity made by Nicola

Sturgeon of the SNP during the leaders' debate, which drew media attention (Birks 2015: 61).

5.2 The Reconstructed Arguments and Analysis

This section foregrounds the argument from the incumbent Conservative government and presents the challenges made by the Labour Party, as the Official Opposition, and The People's Assembly, as non-institutional political actors. A detailed comparative analysis is presented below and a concise overview of each actor's argument follows and is visually represented in Table 9.

5.2.1 Comparative Analysis

This section presents a comparative analysis of the arguments from all three political actors. It follows the structure of Faircloughian PDA as outlined in Chapter 4 and unpacks the summarised arguments above. At the start of each section is a table of the data from which the analysis is drawn.

Circumstances

Table 5: Matrix Coding Circumstances Premises General Election 2015			
	Conservative Manifesto 2015	Labour Manifesto 2015	The People's Assembly (combined) 2015
Circumstances (C)	203	121	2647
A Privatisation	0	0	711
B Underfunding OR Cuts	0	45	703
C Patient Suffering or Care	123	30	289
D Staff	28	25	108
E IT	0	0	0
F Waiting Times	52	21	93
G Hospital Closures	0	0	0
H Ideology	0	0	743

The context for action for the Conservatives in 2015 is that the party, as part of the Coalition Government, had improved the NHS and patient care because they were strong on the economy. The manifesto focused on the economy (the party's owned issue) by promising to "deliver a strong NHS through a strong economy" (Conservative 2015: 38). A strong economy is referenced three times in relation to building an economy that would enable a

Conservative government to continue to “increase spending” on the NHS (Conservative 2015: 37). This alludes to the normative argument of the austerity frame: that a growing (strong) economy can provide services for all, which is the responsible thing to do. But the Conservatives also invoke the view that Labour were reckless when in government, which was something that the party needed to remedy.

In their manifesto the Conservatives signalled this through the claim that they were “putting things right” in the aftermath of a Labour government that had “clogged-up the system”, allowed “appalling standards of care” to go unchecked and let “cancer survival rates” lag (Conservative 2015: 37). The ‘de-clogging’ of the NHS involved “clear[ing] out bureaucracy” and ending the habit of “chasing managerial targets” (Conservative 2015: 37). The effect of this was in “generating savings” and focusing “on outcomes and performance”, which resulted, the Conservative’s claimed, in “patients [...] reporting the highest levels of satisfaction for years” (Conservative 2015: 37). The party also claimed that the independent think-tank, the Commonwealth Fund, had stated that “under the Conservatives the NHS has become the best healthcare system of any major country” (Conservative 2015: 37).

Other claims in the manifesto as to what the party had done whilst in power to ‘put things right’ included an increase in staff numbers: “Over the last five years, we have hired thousands more doctors and nurses” (Conservative 2015: 38), and “slashed” waiting times with “the number of people who wait over a year for the treatment they need, [down] from over 18,000 to under 500” with “fewer patients waiting longer than the 18, 26 and 52 week targets than in May 2010” (Conservative 2015: 37).

The 2015 Labour manifesto challenged these claims over staff increases and waiting times. Labour stated that “[t]he NHS is struggling with staffing shortages” (Labour 2015: 33), which The People’s Assembly described as “staff cuts” (The People's Assembly website, 23 April, 2015), and that “Accident and emergency is in crisis, and more people are facing long waits for tests, treatment, or to see a GP” (Labour 2015: 33). The parties’ focus on

different elements of NHS treatment in 2015 – A&E versus scheduled surgery – could explain this discrepancy, although neither refer to lengthy GP waiting times, which were discussed by The People’s Assembly, the mainstream media, and bolstered by official NHS surveys during the 2015 election campaign.

A guest on The People’s Assembly’s ‘Elections Special’ (Podcast 5, 24 April, 2015), Dr Walker, offered a detailed reason for lengthy GP waiting times:

... I organised a talk [and] what GPs were saying was, they are finding themselves in a position where the queues are getting longer and longer and people are waiting longer and longer for a waiting time. And when they were asked by a member of the public “why is this the case?” what they said was [...] the reason that the GP’s waiting times are increasing so much – or a big reason – is due to the massive cuts in social care.

Here Dr Walker is claiming that, from the GP’s point of view, the lengthening of GP waiting times is down to a reduction in funding (“cuts”) for social care. He goes on to state in the same podcast that the social care budget had been reduced under the Coalition by “something in the region of 30%”. This, he claims, reduced the accessibility to care services for “people who are elderly or vulnerable or in some sense need support” who then “end up either going to their GP or going to A&E” instead. These cuts to social care are also referenced by Labour who use it to attempt to undermine the Conservatives. According to Labour, the Conservative’s claim that they protected the NHS budget is undermined by the cuts of “billions of pounds” to funding for adult social care (Labour 2015: 32). Labour’s context of action here reflects that of The People’s Assembly, in that ‘cuts’ in one area of healthcare are impacting the ability to provide effective services in another area. The overall knock-on effect of this is that, Labour claimed, “patients are finding it harder to get the care they need”, which is because the “Conservatives have put the wrong values at its [the NHS’s] heart” (Labour 2015: 32).

What these values are is not overtly stated. Instead Labour, as part of the party's claims for action, stated that repealing "the Government's privatisation plans" and capping profits will "put the right values back at the heart of the NHS" (Labour 2015: 40). From this it can be argued that the 'right value' for Labour is similar to the normative anti-austerity argument that it is government that has a *duty* to provide healthcare, which The People's Assembly claimed was being eroded by private providers.

Equitable access and collective provision are based on a social fact: that of the State's socially recognised, normatively binding *duty* to provide equal access to good, free healthcare for all its citizens. For The People's Assembly, this duty was being eroded by austerity because, as the underfunding of public services was becoming normalised across society, it was becoming easier to advance the idea of an increase in the private provision of public services (austerity-as-covert-privatisation). In 2015, the context of action for the movement is this "programme of austerity", which is referred to in a podcast as an "ideological assault that goes beyond cutting some spending, it is an ideological assault that is going to the root of the idea of public service or [the] Welfare State" (Podcast 3, 6 April 2015). This view is summed up more succinctly on the movement's website:

Cuts are not only unnecessary but are a deliberate strategy to undermine state involvement in any form of public provision ...

The People's Assembly website, 23 April, 2015

Such a programme, for the movement in 2015, was a political choice rather than an economic necessity. This is articulated by Matt Willgress of the North London People's Assembly in Podcast 3 when he states:

I think that when there was the financial crisis and the economy entered recession there was a debate and a choice to be made about who should pay for that crisis, whether it should be the people who caused it in the financial sector and so on, or whether it should be people as a whole in society and the ideological choice of the

government here, but in lots of other countries as well, was to try and make the population pay for a crisis that the population didn't create.

The People's Assembly Podcast 3, 6 April, 2015

Here Matt Willgress rearticulates Blyth's (2013) notion of 'bait and switch' that, as noted in Chapter 3, lays bare the ideological twist that saw an economic problem turned into a political problem of where to allocate blame. The ideological choice of making "the population pay" for a crisis it didn't create is implemented through the austerity imperative of cuts to public services. For the movement, the consequence of this choice was that access to services that people needed were being denied and this was adversely affecting people in society and causing them distress. The standard of the material life of the population – the quality of their everyday access to public services – forms a part of the context of the movement's action and patient suffering is referenced as an effect of austerity measures. How patient suffering comes about is outlined in an article on The People's Assembly's website, which claims:

The past decade has been littered with scandals from across Britain where basic levels of support and care were not available or not delivered within NHS establishments. Notably the Mid-Staffordshire Foundation Trust (half privatised at the time) and Hinchingsbrooke Hospital (the first privately run hospital in Britain), both of which failed as a result of staff cuts and increasing workload ... There are reports of critical life-saving equipment being brought out of retirement in place of buying newer models, increasing numbers of patients being treated in corridors or car parks ...

The People's Assembly website, 23 April, 2015

The movement here were claiming that patients suffering was due to staff cuts, increasing workloads and old equipment, which, it is implied, are the result of privatisation. The normative anti-austerity argument is invoked here to position cuts to public spending as unfair, undesirable and avoidable. In his

recent publication, *The Circulation of Anti-Austerity Protests*, Bart Cammaerts identifies this as the “unnecessary cuts frame”, which is as an element of the diagnostic frame of the anti-austerity movement as a whole (2018: 52-53). For Cammaerts (2018), the positioning of the cuts as unnecessary by the anti-austerity movement ideologises them and situates them as part of the broader neoliberal agenda of reducing the role of the State in welfare provision (see also Brown 2005; Crouch 2011; Seymour 2014). The movement as a whole, of which The People’s Assembly is a part, sees cuts to the funding of public provision as an attack on “the social, cultural and democratic fabric of UK society” (Cammaerts 2018: 52) – an attack that has a real-world impact on the population with privatisation (or a lack of equally accessible provision) highlighted as the most serious manifestation of that attack.

Values

Table 6: Matrix Coding Values Premises General Election 2015			
	Conservative Manifesto 2015	Labour Manifesto 2015	The People's Assembly (combined) 2015
Values (V)	99	127	965
A Trust	0	0	335
B Equality	99	0	257
C Fairness	0	127	373

The only value to appear in the 2015 Conservative manifesto was equality (of access). This value was shared by The People’s Assembly who expressed it through the lens of privatisation. The Conservatives use first person – ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’ – to express their concern for equality and to position themselves as the author or speaker within the group or referent that they are addressing. The People’s Assembly employ the same linguistic device in their repeated use of ‘our’ in reference to the NHS. Both actors’ uses of these personal pronouns is an example of inclusive first person deixis that refers to a group including both the author and the referent, which serves a persuasive function by creating a sense of a ‘shared view’ (Fairclough 2015; Flores-Ferrán 2017).

In the Conservative manifesto the NHS is inscribed as “ours”, as “vitally important to *all of us*” and as “[f]ounded on the principle that no one should ever have to worry about their ability to pay for their healthcare, [which] is a profound *expression of our values as a nation*” (Conservative 2015: 37; emphasis added). This is expressing what Aneurin Bevan understood as the collective principle, that the NHS should be available to all in accordance with medical need, which “money ought not to be permitted to stand in the way of obtaining” (Bevan 1946: §44). The party’s use of ‘us’ and ‘our’, however, is only applied to the values that underpin the NHS rather than the ownership of the service itself, which stands in contrast with that of the movement. The use of “our” in conjunction with “NHS” by The People’s Assembly is an inclusive one in that it includes both the movement and the public in the same grouping and designates the NHS itself as belonging to or being owned by both the speaker and referent (i.e. the public). The movement also often use ‘our NHS’ in conjunction with the verb ‘save’ (The People’s Assembly website, April 23, 2015), which connotes that the NHS is in need of help and draws parallels with the Labour Party’s use of the verb ‘rescue’ in their goals (discussed below). Used in this way by the movement, the phrase ‘Save our NHS’ implies that the service needs protecting *from* something (a ‘them’ usually associated with the ‘Tories’) and, when used as a rhetorical device, can engender a feeling of protectionism in the interlocutor. As noted in Chapter 1, the NHS is often thought of as the closest thing to a national religion in the UK and is a social provision that is valued across society and the political divide. As such, if a perceived ‘them’ is attempting to undermine the NHS in a way that may prove detrimental to a conceived ‘us’ then it will be defended.

A similar sense of protection can be found in the Conservative manifesto, but it is constructed in a way that presents them as gifting rather than defending the NHS. The use of ‘we’ in the Conservative manifesto section on the NHS is exemplified in a promise to “continue to increase spending on the NHS, supported by a strong economy, so the NHS stays free *for you to use*” (Conservative 2015: 37; emphasis added). Here a separation occurs – “free for

you to use” – between the author and the referent. The author (we the Conservative Party) is positioned as distant from the referent (you the public), which places the former outside of the group (Flores-Ferrán 2017). By positioning themselves outside of the constructed inclusive group, it can be inferred that the Conservatives (as a government-in-waiting) are emphasising their role as provider rather than user of healthcare. There is a sense that ‘we’ – as a government – are spending on services for ‘you’ – as a citizen – and in this way the Conservatives express that they are delivering the healthcare of the nation.

The notion of a government delivering the NHS is the cornerstone of the normatively binding duty discussed above. It is also unsurprising that the Conservatives would state this given that all political parties in the UK claim to be committed to spending on the service so that it continues to be free for citizens to use. The notion of protecting the NHS *budget* from cuts to public spending is one that was emphasised greatly in the age of austerity. When launching the 2010 election, Cameron set the theme for Conservative health policy of caring about the NHS and protecting it from public sector cuts (Glennister 2015: 292). In a speech in early January 2010, he made claims that the Conservatives were the “only party committed to protecting NHS spending” and went on to state that he would “cut the deficit, not the NHS” (Cameron 2010).

As noted in Chapter 3, the counter-argument from The People’s Assembly is that cutting the deficit under austerity provides a convenient cover for giving the NHS less funding, which may lead to an increase in private provision to fill the gaps. During the 2015 election, the movement attempted to communicate to the electorate why they were concerned with privatisation by highlighting its stealthy implementation:

Beginning with Tony Blair’s New Labour and continuing under the current coalition regime privatisation of health services has crept in like knotweed, spreading silently and barely noticed across all aspects of care systems nationwide. Where profit is the main motive standards

invariably decline as corners are cut and pennies are saved to maintain the happiness of shareholders, whilst patients become increasingly seen as numbered 'assets' instead of people in need of medical assistance.

The People's Assembly website, 23 April, 2015

The use of similes/metaphors to describe privatisation ('crept in like knotweed'/'silently spread') emphasise the movement's argument against the process in that privatisation comes in covertly and pushes out public provision, which is in keeping with their challenge to austerity-as-covert-privatisation. Building on this, the movement try to demonstrate that such a process will lead to patients being seen as simply "numbered 'assets'" rather than as people that need healthcare. Describing the effects of privatisation in such a way not only renders the process more emotive and easily accessible to voters, it also simplifies a more complex concern for equality: that a profit imperative shifts the focus of healthcare from "people in need of medical assistance" onto the cost of the treatment. Such a shift, it is thought, detracts from treating people with equal concern and dignity and foregrounds *how* healthcare is provided over *why* it is.

Presented in this way, the movement's concern for equality contests that of the Conservatives whose explicit commitment to the collective principle (noted above) is challenged by the claim that the "coalition regime" is allowing private companies, who put profits before patients, to deliver healthcare. This implies that the Conservatives are insincere about their duty to provide healthcare to all and, as a consequence, are defaulting on their commitment to equality of access. The real-world impact of defaulting on this commitment is, for the movement, understood through the lens of cuts:

Cuts to any public service have a human face. Behind every cut is a child, an individual, a family and even, perhaps, a whole community with cuts to schools, hospitals, transport and leisure services. When cuts are made, they have a disproportionate impact upon people and

communities who are already experiencing shortages of income, jobs, education and housing.

The People's Assembly website, 23 April, 2015

The People's Assembly present the cuts in a particular way, with a "human face" (as a 'child', 'individual', or family'), perhaps in an attempt to draw parallels with their supporters' life experiences and to elicit compassion. Most people live in communities and have experience of schools, hospitals and leisure centres and would not want to see these services withdrawn, especially for those who are vulnerable. But the Conservatives recognised this aspect of austerity and refer often to family in their 2015 manifesto (83 references) and claim that it is only by taking "hard decisions on public spending" (Conservative 2015: 5) that they can they protect "[y]our job, your home, the mortgage you pay, the school your children go to, your local hospital, your pension – all these things depend on a strong economy. So we will carry on working through our long-term economic plan" (Conservative 2015: 7).

This claim corresponds with the austerity frame laid out in Chapter 3, that without cutting back on how much the government spends and, therefore, reducing the deficit the economy will not recover (this is the notion that underpins the Conservative's 'Strong Economy, Strong NHS' message found in their context of action). From a Utilitarian perspective, although this may leave *some* people adversely effected, cuts to areas of public provision must be implemented otherwise *all* will be affected. However, in keeping with the value of fairness expressed by The People's Assembly – that of fairness as protection of the worst off and most vulnerable – it is explained by the movement that austerity disproportionately impacts the poorest in society. This is deemed unfair by the movement and something that the government ought to be concerned with:

When it comes down to principle on what is fair when tackling the deficit, we cannot afford to have a government that would rather protect those with greed than help those in need.

The People's Assembly website, 23 April, 2015

Alongside the normative argument that cuts unfairly disadvantage the poor, the anti-austerity frame challenges the understanding that austerity is the fairest way to share the burden of debt repayment. Austerity is assessed by the movement as economically unfair in two ways. Firstly, it has shifted the burden of the financial crisis onto citizens that did not cause the crisis, which is articulated in Blyth's bait and switch. Secondly, the cuts implemented by austerity had not caused the positive change to the financial circumstances of the UK by 2015 as predicted in 2010, and so it failed on its own terms: austerity was "far from effectual in resuscitating the UK economy" (Podcast 3, 6 April, 2015).

A concern for fairness as protection of the vulnerable is a value that the movement and Labour shared in 2015. In Labour's manifesto, this concern was expressed through the lens of common endeavour with patient care and support at its heart:

Care is at the heart of Labour's values. No-one should fear old age or be left to struggle alone caring for a loved one. But too many older people suffer insecurity, loneliness and exclusion.

Labour 2015: 32

Labour, here, is highlighting the plight of the elderly and those who look after them in the 2015 care system. The use of the emotive terms 'fear', 'insecurity', 'loneliness' and 'exclusion' conjure up an image of a frightened older person sitting alone at home with no one to talk to or access to any help. This image precedes a reference to funding for adult social care that, as noted above, had been cut by "billions of pounds" (Labour 2015: 32). It can be argued that the juxtaposition of the sentences steers the interlocutor towards a judgement that the cuts were the cause of the suffering

experienced by older people and their carers (expressed in (C) as long waits for treatment). There could also be a strategic element of appealing to older people who are traditionally Conservative voters and the use of emotive terms may help to amplify Labour's argument and persuade them to vote for the party³⁰.

A value that is only expressed by the movement is that of trust. It was expressed as trust in politicians to tell the truth about austerity and its impact on people, which is based on the view that austerity was a political choice, not an economic necessity. In Podcast 3, the host, Jordan Reyne, analyses the budget speech³¹ that George Osborne gave two weeks before the start of the 2015 election on the 18 March. She informs listeners that the budget was "an exercise in secrecy and unsound statistics" that contained "openly misleading information" (Podcast 3, 6 April, 2015) but does not offer any substantive critique of the statistics. Instead, Reyne attempts to challenge the validity of Osborne's argument for austerity by contradicting his account of the circumstances that informed his decision to continue with austerity.

The implication is that the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 2015 was employing statistics out of context in order to maintain that the austerity measures implemented in 2010 had reduced the deficit. In doing so, the movement was communicating to the electorate that austerity was not working and yet the Conservatives were prepared to massage the figures to convince the public that it was. The People's Assembly did not directly call Osborne a liar (as they do to Theresa May in 2017), instead they implied in their podcasts that the Conservatives were deliberately misleading the public about the effectiveness of their programme of cuts and privatisations:

³⁰ For the latest figures on vote by age see YouGov survey 'How Britain voted at the 2017 general election': <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2017/06/13/how-britain-voted-2017-general-election> (last accessed 29/05/2019).

³¹ For a full transcript of this budget visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-george-osbornes-budget-2015-speech> (last accessed 14/12/2018).

The stats [used by Osborne to uphold the austerity programme] not only give clear indications that the Tories' system of cuts and privatisation has been far from effectual in resuscitating the UK economy, in fact has damaged it further; they also reveal that Tory MPs are willing to use completely fictitious grounds to push their failing austerity plan forward.

The People's Assembly Podcast 3, 6 April, 2015

Here, the movement was attempting to directly challenge the pro-austerity frame dominating at the time that claimed cutting back on public services would return the government's finances to order and potentially restore growth to the economy. In so doing, the movement was highlighting an inconsistency within the logic of the government's economic argument and attempting to critique it on its own terms. This counter-argument also draws upon, albeit subtly, the Keynesian paradox of thrift when it is suggested that the system of cuts "in fact has damaged it [the economy] further". As noted in Chapter 2, the paradox claims that if everyone were to cut back all at once, which the programme of austerity advocates, growth will be driven down and economic recovery would be undeliverable.

Goals

Table 7: Matrix Coding Goals Premises General Election 2015			
	Conservative Manifesto 2015	Labour Manifesto 2015	The People's Assembly (combined) 2015
Goals (G)	390	421	445
<i>Overarching Goals</i>	45	86	99
End to Programme of Austerity / Privatisation	0	34	99
NHS Excellent Care	45	0	0
Rescue the NHS	0	52	0
<i>B Supporting-Goals</i>	345	335	346
Changing the Debate	0	0	324
Increase Staff Numbers / Work Environment	28	167	0
Patient Empowerment	179	168	0
Seven Day NHS	138	0	22

The overarching goal from the 2015 Conservative Party manifesto is simply: “We will ensure you receive the best healthcare” (Conservative 2015: 39). The manifesto stated that the party aimed to “offer you the safest and most compassionate care in the world” and to “ensure that English hospitals and GP surgeries are the safest in the world, places where you are treated with dignity and respect” (Conservative 2015: 38). To achieve such standards required the supporting-goal of the delivery of a seven-day NHS. In their opening commitment to voters, the Conservative’s claim that they would “ensure you can see a GP and receive the hospital care you need, 7 days a week by 2020” (Conservative 2015: 37). They recognised that “already millions more people can see a GP 7 days a week, from 8am-8pm, but by 2020 we want this for everyone. We will now go further, with hospitals properly staffed, so that the quality of care is the same every day of the week” (Conservative 2015: 38). This latter pledge implies a situation that currently care is of a lower standard at the weekend, a message that played a key role in many recommendations made by NHS England during the Coalition to ministers, which signalled a requested move to a seven-day NHS³². It also indicates a recognition that there were not enough staff for NHS services to successfully operate and, therefore, provide the best healthcare. This is a view that the Labour Party highlighted in their context for action and briefly as part of their goals.

The overarching goal for Labour in 2015 was to “rescue the NHS” (Labour 2015: 33) through the supporting-goal of providing “8,000 more GPs, 20,000 more nurses and 3,000 more midwives” (Labour 2015: 10). The choice of the word ‘rescue’ here implies that the NHS needed saving, presumably from the incumbent government, and that Labour was the party to achieve this. This

³² See: *Equality for All: delivering safe care seven days a week* published by NHS Improvement 01 Jan 2012: <http://www.nhs.uk/resource-search/publications/nhs-imp-seven-days.aspx> and *Every day counts* published by NHS Improving Quality 16 November 2013: <http://www.nhs.uk/resource-search/publications/every-day-counts-seven-day-services.aspx> (last accessed 14/12/2018).

invokes their historical association as the political party most competent on the issue of the NHS, which the electorate would recognise. However, the salience of this was being challenged by the Conservatives throughout the election who, as noted above, claimed that Labour had allowed “appalling standards of care” to go unchecked and that it was they who had to “put things right” (Conservative 2015: 37).

Despite this both political parties shared the supporting-goal of patient empowerment, which they claimed would achieve the best healthcare. Patients were positioned at the centre of healthcare in both manifestos: ensuring that they were given greater choice about their own healthcare (Conservative) and have their voices heard (Labour). For both Labour and the Conservatives, putting patients at the heart of the NHS was driven by patient feedback. For the Conservatives this took the form of introducing, in 2013, “the friends and family test” that enabled patients to “provide feedback on the care and treatment” that they received (Conservative 2015: 38). They promised in 2015 to “boost transparency even further, ensuring [that patients could] access full information about the safety record of [their] hospital and other NHS or independent providers, and give patients greater choice over where and how they receive care” (Conservative 2015: 38). Labour wanted people to be “able to feedback on services quickly and simply, making sure their voices [we]re heard, stimulating improvement and saving on the costs of service failure” (Labour 2015: 33).

Labour went one step further, suggesting that in order to take “control of their lives” patients would be offered access to “a personal care plan designed with them and shaped around their needs, the option of personal budgets where appropriate, and a single named person to coordinate their care” (Labour 2015: 34). Here there is an explicit claim that the quality of patient care can be measured and successfully delivered through patient choice and an implicit claim that patient-centred, feedback-focused healthcare will improve standards. Offering greater choice and flexibility is part of a wider move towards the personalisation of health and social care, which hands

more responsibility to patients for the healthcare that they receive³³. This promotes a “shift in power and decision-making” (NHS England & Local Government Association 2017: 3) from clinician to patient that sees healthcare professionals holding back to enable patients to make their own decisions (BMA 2018). For the British Medical Association (BMA), this new balance of responsibility, “whilst supportive of patients having more control over their care” does not “directly result in better clinical outcomes for patients” (BMA 2018).

The promotion of this shift in patient power and responsibility subtly inculcates a new way of interacting with healthcare that is based on financial transactions (Labour’s ‘personal budget’). Patients would be constructed as healthcare purchasers (consumers) of NHS services (products) in line with their healthcare needs. This mode of interaction primes patients to operate in a way that emphasises the consumer model of engagement with healthcare rather than the citizen model (Clarke et al. 2007; Cribbs 2008; Vidler & Clarke 2005). Such an emphasis could effectively prime patients to agree more readily to pay for treatment, which would form part of the final stages of openly privatising the NHS that The People’s Assembly consider austerity to be a cover for.

The overarching goal of the social movement in 2015 was that of ending the programme of austerity (that was leading to privatisation), which was to be achieved through the supporting-goal of changing the debate. Changing the debate included organising collectively “to feel like you’re part of a movement that is making the case on a national level, but also that you can have an impact on the debate on a local level [too]” (The People’s Assembly Podcast 3, 6 April, 2015). In making this point in Podcast 3, Matt Willgress draws upon the movement in Greece and the pressure that the strikes, community

³³ For full details of Personalised Care, see NHS England’s website: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalised-health-and-care/> (last accessed 19/09/2018).

campaigns and “inspiring ... support networks that sprang up” had on the situation of the Greek people³⁴. He claimed that without these “massive movements against austerity” the country “wouldn’t have got to the stage where there was a possibility of austerity and the cuts being reversed” (The People's Assembly Podcast 3, 6 April, 2015). Willgress goes on to offer some UK examples of people getting together in “really prominent national and local campaigns” to say “‘we’re not taking this anymore’ and fought back against it” (The People's Assembly Podcast 3, 6 April, 2015). He mentions non-specific campaigns about the Bedroom Tax and the Living Wage that, he states, Ed Miliband as leader of the Labour Party in 2015 adopted a strong stance on during the election campaign. The abolition of the Bedroom Tax is one of the pledges in the manifesto (Labour 2015: 58), as are proposed tax rebates to firms who become Living Wage employers (Labour 2015: 27).

Claims for Action

Table 8: Matrix Coding Claims for Action Premises General Election 2015			
	Conservative Manifesto 2015	Labour Manifesto 2015	The People's Assembly (combined) 2015
Claims for Action (A)	84	64	861
A Tax Rises	0	0	0
B Change of Govt	0	0	62
C Changes to Existing Govt Policy	0	41	0
<i>D Future Financial Increases</i>	84	23	179
da Investment	84	23	179
da Extra Resources	0	0	0
E Demonstrating OR Mobilising	0	0	620

³⁴ For such research see: Kanellopoulos, K., Kostopoulos, K., Papanikolopoulos, D., and Rongas, V., ‘Competing modes of coordination in the Greek anti-austerity campaign, 2010–2012’, *Social Movement Studies*, 16:1 (2017), 101-118; Sergi, V., and Vogiatzoglou, M., ‘Think globally, act locally? Symbolic memory and global repertoires in the Tunisian uprising and the Greek anti-austerity mobilizations’, in *Understanding European Movements: New social movements, global justice struggles, anti-austerity protest*, ed. by Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox (Oxford: Routledge, 2013).

The claims for action from the 2015 Conservative manifesto were to continue to increase NHS spending and an implementation of the NHS's own plan to improve healthcare even further. This is expressed as a commitment to:

... increasing NHS spending in England in real terms by a minimum of £8 billion over the next five years. Combined with the efficiencies that the NHS Forward View sets out, this will provide the funding necessary to implement this plan in full.

Conservative 2015: 38

As presented, this action would bring about the goal of patients receiving the “best healthcare” because it would enable a seven-day NHS, which features in the NHS England’s *Five Year Forward View*. This action connects with the context of action identified by the Conservatives in that, according to the party, they had protected the NHS budget and already improved patient care and satisfaction by 2015 through an increase in healthcare spending over their previous five years in government. Such a view once more signalled to voters that they were competent when it came to the NHS, which challenged Labour on its traditional electoral issue.

The Labour Party’s claim for action is similar to the Conservative’s in that they promised to increase spending on the NHS by offering “£2.5 billion a year” to invest in a Time to Care Fund (Labour 2015: 18). This extra funding would be used to “recruit 8,000 more GPs, 20,000 more nurses and 3,000 more midwives” (Labour 2015: 40), which, as noted in the circumstances above, Labour claimed were needed to “improve the health service” (Labour 2015: 18). The fund would be “paid for by a Mansion Tax on properties worth over £2 million, a levy on tobacco firms, and by tackling tax avoidance” (Labour 2015: 10). That Labour explained where the funding would come from was a result of them accepting and operating within the austerity frame.

References to Labour’s £2.5bn Time to Care Fund appears in the opening pages of the manifesto, as part of the section entitled ‘A Strong Economic Foundation’ (Labour 2015: 17-18). In this section, Labour’s action draws on an

element of the normative argument for austerity when they claim that “we will live within our means” and have “no proposals for any new spending paid for by additional borrowing” (Labour 2015: 18). The moral of austerity politics is primed here by Labour who are depicting a vision of a society that does not live beyond its means. In doing so, the Labour Party positioned themselves as subscribing to the understanding that reducing the deficit required cutting back on how much government spends.

The acceptance of the austerity frame by Labour in the 2015 election formed an element of The People’s Assembly’s claim for action: to mobilise for a demonstration that would achieve their goal of ending austerity. Throughout the 2015 general election campaign, The People’s Assembly mobilised for a big demonstration that they held on 20 June, 2015. In a website article on 11 May, six weeks before the demonstration, the group told supporters, “Now is the time to mobilise, to spread the word and to put everything we have into showing the full force of anti-austerity opinion in Britain” (The People’s Assembly website, 11 May, 2015). In each of the podcasts the host told listeners that a “major national demonstration” would be held to have “our voices heard” and to “ask whoever the new government turns out to be to End Austerity Now”.

The impetus behind the demonstration was that, at the time, “every major party remain[ed] committed to austerity” and a mass mobilisation would send a “clear message to the new government that we demand an alternative to austerity” (The People’s Assembly Podcast 4, 12 April, 2015). This understanding was confirmed in an interview with Sam Fairbairn who stated in May 2017 that “whatever government gets in [we] were going to need to continue to build a broad-based movement against austerity because even if the Labour Party won their, Miliband’s, line was austerity but austerity-lite” (Fairbairn 2017, see Appendix 3).

5.2.2 A Summary of the Arguments

What follows is a summative account of the arguments analysed above of which an overview is presented in Table 9.

The claim for action (A) from the Conservative manifesto is that of continued spending on the NHS, a projected £8bn a year, and the implementation of the *Five Year Forward View*. The latter determines that £8bn from the government along with efficiency savings of £22bn will ensure that the £30bn blackhole in the NHS budget will be circumvented. The goal (G) is to ensure that patients continue to receive the best healthcare, which will be achieved through the delivery of a seven-day NHS and patient empowerment (supporting-goals). According to the Conservative's context of action (C), this high standard of healthcare had already been achieved by them through the raising of staff numbers, lowering of waiting lists and protecting the NHS budget, which had been achieved through a strong economy. All of this improved patient care and satisfaction, which is in line with the collective principle underpinning the NHS (equality of access for all) and a concern for equality (V).

The claim for action (A) from the Labour manifesto is that of raising a £2.5bn Time to Care Fund. The goal (G) is to "rescue the NHS", through the supporting-goals of providing more GPs and nurses and increasing patient empowerment. Increased staff numbers will counteract the low staff levels and high waiting times that are impacting patient care, which the Labour manifesto identifies as the context of action (C). A concern for fairness (V) as protection of the most vulnerable is expressed in relation to the social care received by the elderly.

The claim for action (A) from the People's Assembly is that of mobilising a demonstration that calls for an end to austerity. The goal (G) is to put pressure on the newly elected 2015 government into abandoning their "programme of austerity" (that is leading to privatisation), which will be achieved by the supporting-goal of changing the debate. This programme is the context of action (C) for the movement. They claim that it is a political choice that is undermining the idea of public services, as cuts to services cause a decrease in staff numbers, increase waiting times, and could lead to privatisation-by-consent. Privatisation leads to unequal access to treatment

(a concern for equality) and austerity policy not only disadvantages those most in need (a concern for fairness as protection of the worst off), but it had also not resuscitated the UK economy as predicted. In spite of this, the government was still perceived as pursuing austerity and therefore cannot be trusted (a concern with trust) (V).

As shown by these concise summaries, the parties were asserting the same broad claims for action, that of continuing to spend on the NHS, and goals, that of patient-centered care via the supporting-goal of patient empowerment; but had different values and claims for action. The People's Assembly shared the values of equality and fairness with the Conservatives and Labour, respectively, but their goals and claims for action differed in that they were focused on the broader political landscape of austerity. They were the only actors in this data set seeking to challenge the austerity frame, indeed more so than the Official Opposition who largely remained within the terms of the dominant debate.

The comparative analysis and summary of the arguments reveals a number of points of contention between the arguments made by the political actors. The Conservative's claims to have improved patient care, increased staff numbers and slashed waiting times for scheduled treatment were challenged by Labour (staff numbers and waiting times at A&E) and The People's Assembly (GP waiting times). Both of these actors blamed cuts to adult social care as the cause for the rise in waiting times: people were presenting at A&E because they did not have access to the right social care and/or GP appointments were too hard to get. As such, the policy of cuts to adult social care was impacting on the NHS and leading to the lowering of standards in patient care, which was being exacerbated by low staff numbers.

These points of contention will be explored in the critical evaluation of the arguments in the next section, which shows the extent to which various arguments were amplified and endorsed or challenged by media coverage at the time.

Table 9: The 2015 General Election Practical Arguments			
2015	Conservative Manifesto	Labour Manifesto	The People's Assembly
<i>Circumstances (C)</i>	Staff numbers have increased, waiting lists are down and healthcare is of a high standard. A strong NHS is delivered due to a strong economy.	There are staff shortages and A&E waiting times have increased and, as such, patients are finding it hard to get care.	The “programme of austerity” is a political choice that is having a direct impact on public service provision, including increased waiting times and staff shortages, and could lead to increased privatisation-by-consent.
<i>Values / concerns (V)</i>	A concern with the value of equality – the NHS is a service that is: “... vitally important to all” (Conservative 2015: 37) and we are committed to equality of access.	A concern with the value of fairness as protection of vulnerable (older people).	A concern for equality – privatisation of the NHS leads to unequal access to services. A concern for fairness (as protection of the worst off) – austerity and privatisation are not working and unfairly disadvantage those in need. A concern with trust – the government cannot be trusted to tell the truth about the cuts and austerity.
<i>Goals (G)</i>	Our goal is to ensure patients receive the “best healthcare” (Conservative 2015: 39). We will achieve this with patient empowerment and a seven-day NHS (supporting-goals).	Our goal is to “rescue the NHS” (Labour 2015: 33). We will achieve this through patient empowerment and an increase in staff numbers (supporting-goals).	Our goal is to call on the government to abandon the programme of austerity (that is leading to privatisation) by changing the debate (supporting-goals).
<i>Claim(s) for Action (A)</i>	We should continue NHS spending (£8bn a year) and implement the NHS's own <i>Five Year Forward View</i> plan to improve healthcare even further.	We should raise a £2.5bn a year Time to Care Fund.	We should mobilise for a demonstration calling for an end to austerity.

5.3 Critical Evaluation of the 2015 Arguments

I now turn to the critical evaluation of the practical arguments and their points of contention as identified above. This is achieved by drawing on public debates on the NHS found in the mainstream media as they unfolded during the election campaign. The aim here is to build on and further explore the examination of each actors' representations of the context of action (C) and their values (V) in relation to the overarching (anti)austerity frames applied in this thesis. The context for action identified in the mainstream media and their reporting on other institutions or actors may present additional considerations, which can present counter-arguments to the effectiveness of each actors' claims for action (A) and, therefore, to achieving their stated goals (G).

5.3.1 Higher or Lower? Staffing Levels, Waiting Times and the Programme of Austerity in the Media

The 'programme of austerity' defined as the main element of context of action for The People's Assembly formed a backdrop to the 2015 election that was picked up mid-election in *The Guardian*. In a Comment is Free article, Salma Yaqoob, a psychotherapist on a panel of other commentators examining the manifesto pledges, echoed Sam Fairbairn's view that: "Having accepted the framework of austerity, Labour is now committed to fighting an election on terms set by the Tories" (Yaqoob et al. 15 April, 2015). As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Labour promised no extra borrowing to pay for the £2.5bn that they pledged to spend on the NHS. This promise was repeated in *The Guardian* (Henley April 5 2015; Smith April 13, 2015) and questioned in *The Sun* when Craig Woodhouse reported that "After the Tories said the cash would come from the growing economy, Mr Miliband refused to stand by his '£2.5 billion extra' vow when quizzed on it" (Woodhouse April 12, 2015). A few days prior to Yaqoob's assessment and Woodhouse's challenge, Osborne repeated the austerity mantra in his piece that also appeared in *The Guardian* when he claimed, "Harm the economy with higher taxes and higher debts, and not only do you put millions of jobs at risk: you undermine the NHS

and all the vital public services that a strong economy pays for” (Osborne 10 April, 2015).

The mantra of a ‘Strong Economy, Strong NHS’ is articulated here and, more subtly, so is the normative argument for austerity of a responsible government that will keep the deficit low. What is missing from Osborne’s claim, the overall Conservative argument in 2015, and *The Sun’s* reporting, is *how* the party will secure a strong economy. There is no mention of public sector cuts as the party’s preferred pathway to a strong economy, instead only “higher taxes and higher debt” are mentioned by Osborne and these are presented as discredited (harmful) alternatives. It is the avoidance of higher debt that Labour referenced in their pledge to not borrow to pay for public services, which emphasises the claim that they have accepted the framework (or programme) of austerity: a programme that, for the movement, leads to underfunded, understaffed and privatised services that cannot provide the excellent standard of healthcare that is not only a Conservative goal, but also an element of the party’s context for action.

As noted above, staffing levels were described in a contradictory fashion by the two political parties in 2015, with the Conservatives stating there had been an increase in numbers and Labour outlining staff shortages. It was reported by *mirror.co.uk* that the Royal College of Nursing made a statement maintaining that “while the government claimed the number of nursing posts has increased, the total head count fell from 317,370 in May 2010 to 315,525 in December 2014” (Gregory April 13, 2015). A report from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) comparing healthcare resources in the UK with the OECD average making similar claims was cited in *The Guardian* (Wintour 5 May) and the *MailOnline* (Anon 6 May). The report showed that the NHS, despite receiving real-terms annual funding increases under the Coalition, had in 2015 2.8 doctors per 10,000 people, compared with the OECD average of 3.2 and 8.2 nurses per 10,000 people, when the OECD average was 8.9. These figures were described in the *MailOnline* as “worrying” because of the “strong link between staff numbers and patient outcomes”, with low staff numbers

resulting in poor care (Anon May 6, 2015). This link was maintained in a 72-page study by Unison that was reported on by *mirror.co.uk*, which revealed that the NHS was so understaffed that patient care was being compromised. The article quoted Christina McAnea, head of health at the union, who warned that nurses were being forced to “make the difficult choice as to which patients receive care and which ones miss out” (Gregory April 13, 2015). These reports in the media hint at a problem with staffing levels that find more agreement in the description of the circumstances by the movement and Labour Party than the Conservatives.

The reports also challenge the Conservatives’ claim that, as one half of the Coalition Government, the party had improved both the NHS and patient care, with patients “reporting the highest levels of satisfaction for years” (Conservative 2015: 37). It is not clear from the Conservative manifesto whether the party are referring to overall levels of patient satisfaction or discrete areas, but a report in *mirror.co.uk* of the publication of NHS England’s annual GP-Patient survey of 900,000 patients revealed, in 2015, a growing discontent amongst patients (Gregory April 1, 2015). The figures, also reported in *MailOnline*, showed that 10.9% of patients surveyed said that they were unable to get a GP appointment last time they tried with 14.4% of people waiting more than a week to obtain one (Stevens April 20, 2015). This was seized upon by Labour during the short campaign, who were reported in the same *mirror.co.uk* and *MailOnline* articles as using the official figures to remind voters that the NHS was in ‘crisis’ as patients were starting to turn to overstretched A&E departments because of a lack of GP appointments.

As a way of highlighting the lack of GP appointments, Labour reworked an old Conservative Party political poster designed by Saatchi and Saatchi in 1979 that claimed “Labour isn’t Working”. In their twist, Labour’s poster (see Image 2 below) depicted a huge queue outside a waiting room with the title “The doctor can’t see you now” and a claim that it was the “Tories” that had “made it harder to see a GP”. Labour’s claim, underpinned by official NHS reports, provides evidence that challenges the Conservative’s truth claim that

“patients [were] reporting the highest levels of satisfaction for years”
(Conservative 2015: 37).

Image 2: A Labour Party poster during the 2015 general election parodying the one designed by Saatchi & Saatchi for the Conservative Party in 1979



A reason given for increased GP waiting times is proffered as an element of the context for action by The People’s Assembly, when, as noted above, Dr Walker claimed that it was due to massive cuts in social care – a view that is borne out by an assessment of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review that saw local government revenue set to be reduced by £5.6 billion over the 4-year period of the review (Hastings et. al. 2015: 601). According to articles in *The Guardian*, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the National Audit Office (NAO) reported that local councils had experienced a real-terms reduction in government funding of 40% that had a significant negative impact on spending on services, including a 9% reduction to adult social care (Rutter 30 March, 2015; Smith 13 April, 2015; see also LGA 2013: 2; NAO 2014: 26). The result of reductions to council budgets and, therefore,

spending on adult social care was that people were attending A&E for treatment and then remaining in hospitals despite being ready to be discharged³⁵. Pressure was then placed on hospitals and the NHS budget, which is noted by Dr Walker in the podcast and echoed in a letter from leading doctors that appeared in *The Guardian* who stated that “Queues in A&E, delays in discharge, the lack of community services and joined-up care are due to the savage cuts in social care” (Campbell May 6, 2015).

References to GP and A&E waiting times challenge the Conservative’s proposition that they had improved waiting times in the NHS. Despite only featuring twice in Labour’s argument and not at all in the Conservatives or The People’s Assembly arguments, conditions in A&E are reported on by all of the mainstream media newspapers analysed in this thesis. Across the mainstream media were reports of “A&Es in meltdown” (Blanchard May 5, 2015) with waiting time targets having not been met for a year, “making it the service’s worst performance in a decade” (Ramesh April 7, 2015). According to NHS England figures reported in *MailOnline* and *mirror.co.uk*, over 400,000 people waited longer than four hours in hospital emergency wards before being either admitted, transferred or discharged, in the first three months of 2015 (McTague April 7, 2015; Gregory April 7, 2015). The number of patients who waited longer than four hours in A&E had increased in 2015 by 302% since 2009/10 from 353,617 to 1,421,191 (Gregory April 7, 2015 and April 27, 2015).

All of these reports upheld the empirical fact presented in Labour’s context for action that A&E waiting times had been increased and, in doing so, contradict the opposite claim by the Conservatives. As noted above, it is possible that the focus of the different parties – Labour on A&E and the Conservatives on scheduled surgery – could explain the contradiction. Yet, reports in late April 2015 in *The Guardian* and *mirror.co.uk* stated that “[t]he

³⁵ A report by The King’s Fund on this issue is available online: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/verdict/how-serious-are-pressures-social-care> (last accessed 29/01/2019).

waiting list for elective treatment broke through the 3m barrier last year [2014] and has kept on growing ... the number of cancelled operations has risen and risen” (Campbell April 20, 2015) and “two-month cancer treatment target[s] ha[d] been missed for an entire year” (Beattie April 25, 2015).

It was articles, again from the left-leaning press, that drew the link between rising waiting times and privatisation. As part of the HSCA, the Private Patient Income (PPI) Cap limited the amount of private work that NHS Trusts could take on from 2% to 49% (Clause 162, HSCA 2012). In a report published at the time, the BMA opposed the abolition of the cap and warned that it had “the potential to act as an incentive for foundation trusts to undertake more non-NHS activity at the expense of NHS patients’ ability to access services” (BMA 2013). By 2015, this had ceased to be a warning as some underfunded trusts were reported in *mirror.co.uk* as taking on more private work to maximise their income, even though “their own waiting lists soar[ed]” (Beattie April 25, 2015) and, in *The Guardian*, patients were reported as having “to endure longer waits for treatment” (Campbell April 25, 2015). The result, according to Andy Burnham, Labour’s Shadow Health Secretary in 2015, was the potential for the NHS to “end up as ‘a two-tier service’, with those paying privately being prioritised over other patients” (Campbell April 25, 2015).

This is a view that finds agreement with The People’s Assembly’s implicit concern for equality that privatisation leads to unequal access and that austerity was simply a way of enabling more private companies to deliver healthcare (austerity-as-covert-privatisation). For example, the use of PPI by NHS Trusts enabled them to accept payment from private individuals, rather than solely from collected tax revenue. As such, the lifting of the PPI cap advantages those citizens that can afford to pay for treatment and, conversely, disadvantages those who can’t by making them wait longer for treatment. This finds agreement with the concern for fairness as expressed by the movement in 2015 and undermines the value of equality (as equality of access) in the Conservative’s values premise. If one group of patients are not receiving quality care because another group is being privileged, then access

to healthcare is not equal for all. Nor are they receiving the “best healthcare” because waiting times are causing treatment delays, which demonstrates, again, how elements of the movement’s context for action and their values, alongside the mainstream media’s portrayal of the circumstances, are challenging the achievability of the Conservative goal.

These reports also emphasise the movement’s argument for austerity-as-covert-privatisation because they revealed that private patients were becoming a source of income for NHS Trusts. As the article in the *mirror.co.uk* (Beattie April 25, 2015) claimed, “... stats show the average income which NHS Trusts are bringing in from private patients has soared by a staggering 58% since 2010”. This income was providing much needed money to fill the growing budget deficits that NHS Trusts were reporting, which is an element that is missing from all of the practical arguments put forward above. However, in an attempt to make the NHS the dominant issue of the final days of the campaign, the Labour Party drew on facts and figures from a study by NHS Providers (a membership organisation for all NHS Trusts) that highlighted the scale of the deficits faced by NHS Trusts. The study revealed that 54% of Trusts in 2014/15 were in deficit by a combined figure of £759 million and described the situation as a financial crisis in the NHS³⁶. All of the newspapers, with the exception of *The Sun*, reported on the findings (Wintour May 5, 2015; Anon May 5, 2015; Blanchard May 4, 2015).

Reasons given for the financial position of the Trusts were not offered by the media, but did feature in a report by The King’s Fund on the performance of the Coalition Government, published in March 2015. It stated that the financial situation was a response to “increasing difficulties in realising cost savings” and a need to assure quality standards through increasing nurse staffing (Appleby et al. 2015: 49). In addition to these, the real-terms funding

³⁶ For an overview of the figures see: <https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/a-new-financial-year-but-not-a-new-beginning> (last accessed 01/02/2019).

increase was too small at between only 0.6% and 0.9%, much less than the 3 to 4% required to meet increases in demand for healthcare (Appleby et al. 2015: 5). This led Denis Campbell, writing for *The Guardian*, to declare, “A major cash injection is needed because of the NHS's growing deficit”, and go on to note that “none of the parties have even mentioned that” (Campbell April 16, 2015).

The “cash injection” estimated in 2015 was the £8bn identified in the *Five Year Forward View*. But the author of this report, Simon Stevens, was quoted in the *Daily Mail* as warning that this £8bn a year funding was only just enough to “make ends meet” (Anon April 11, 2015), which was a view also expressed by Professor Chris Ham, Chief executive of The King's Fund, and Nigel Edwards, Chief executive of the Nuffield Trust, in a letter to *The Guardian*:

... the often quoted £8bn a year needed by the NHS in 2020 is the bare minimum to maintain standards of care. The pledges made so far will not pay for expensive promises to deliver, for example, seven-day working or large increases in staffing.

Ham April 28, 2015

They add that this amount was only just enough *if* the NHS was also able to find the £22bn in efficiency savings by 2020, which the institution was finding it hard to do (Appleby et al. 2015: 49). In another letter to *The Guardian* on the eve of the vote, Sir David Nicholson, NHS England Chief Executive until 2014, underlined this view when he claimed that the NHS was in serious trouble if more money was not found for the service (Nicholson May 6, 2015). He stated that if Labour and the Conservatives did not commit to more than the £8bn or so that they were promising to invest then, the future of the NHS was under threat.

The effect of this on the Conservative's practical argument is that the proposition that healthcare spending had increased under the Coalition is rendered a rhetorical device designed to situate the party as a proven investor

in the NHS, which in turn leads the interlocutor towards a positive evaluation of them as able to provide the funding that the institution needed. This view was endorsed in *The Sun* where it was claimed that “Treasury figures ... revealed [that] the Coalition had increased NHS spending by £7.3billion a year since 2010-2011” and that the promised £8bn extra a year will “plug the huge black hole in Health Service books” (Hawkes April 11, 2015). However, the £8bn a year was highlighted in the *MailOnline* as only just enough to meet patient needs and maintain the current standards of care (Groves April 17, 2015), which were outlined by The People’s Assembly and Labour as falling standards that were failing patients. The consequence of this is that the Conservative’s goal of providing the “best healthcare” is, once again, invalidated.

Labour’s claim for action of investing in the NHS was also challenged by the broader context of action described above and delimited by their own goal of not incurring any extra borrowing. As noted in the analysis of Labour’s practical argument above, the party constrained their NHS funding pledge by subscribing to austerity through their promise to balance the books and cut the deficit. This inability to manoeuvre outside of the framework of austerity underpinned the goal of calling on the government to abandon austerity by The People’s Assembly. The £2.5bn was evidently not adequate as an NHS budget and was described as not providing enough to keep the service going by Sir David Nicholson in the *MailOnline* (Groves April 17, 2015a).

As already noted, the £2.5bn Time to Care Fund was presented as a budget solely for recruiting additional staff. This claim for action would address the lack of staff that was identified as a feature of the context of action, but the Fund would not have addressed the budget gap of £8bn identified in the *Five Year Forward View*. Without the additional (minimum) financial increase of £8bn a year the NHS would not be able to continue to operate at the standards required. In effect, the Labour Party would have been expecting the NHS to do even more with even less, rendering the goal of “rescuing the NHS” unachievable. A similar argument of more for less can be levelled at the

Conservative's goal of a seven-day service. How much a seven-day service would cost or how it would be funded did not form part of the Conservative argument, either in the manifesto or the media. Indeed, on a number of occasions the Conservative's pledge of £8bn a year was critiqued by Labour and other commentators as uncoded. Andy Burnham, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary in 2015, was reported in *mirror.co.uk* as repeatedly accusing the Conservatives of "'trying to bribe' their way back to power after an uncoded pledge to put an extra £8billion a year into the NHS" (Gregory April 15, 2015). Dr Mark Porter, chair of the British Medical Association, was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying that "Without a detailed, fully coded plan to provide the staff and resources needed to deliver more seven-day services, this is at best an empty pledge and at worst shameless political game-playing with the NHS ahead of the election" (Anon March 30, 2015). It was Sir David Nicholson who was reported in *The Sun* as offering a warning to both of the parties in 2015 that they "were ignoring 'substantial financial problems' in the NHS while [still] pledging to expand services after the election" (McDermott April 17, 2015).

5.3.2 The Arguments and the Electorate

This section evaluates the rational acceptability, validity and soundness of the arguments in relation to the broader context of action identified in the last section. It also examines the potential impact of the arguments on the electorate based on the strength of the (anti)austerity frames circulating at the time.

The Conservatives' claim for action was to continue to spend on the NHS and provide it with the £8bn a year deemed essential for the service to offer the "best healthcare" (their goal) to all patients. They utilised the austerity frame in their circumstances premise by promising to "deliver a strong NHS through a strong economy" (Conservative 2015: 38), a focus that was reflected in the overall reporting of the 2015 general election. The party presented a context for action in which they were part of a government responsible for protecting the NHS budget whilst also securing a strong economy. By focusing on the

economy during the election they attempted to shore up the framing that a responsible government does not over-spend on public services, but does protect them. This serves to steer the electorate towards the conclusion that they will continue to increase NHS spending as they did in the past. However, the Conservative's depiction of the situation often conflicted with other commentators' assessments and some documented facts. That healthcare spending was said to increase under the Coalition Government was directly challenged by reports circulating in the media that detailed the real-terms growth of the NHS budget as failing to meet the rising demands placed on the service. Indeed, the £8.5bn spending pledge was considered to not be enough to run the NHS properly, particularly if the Conservatives wanted to forge ahead with their seven-day NHS plan, but it was more than Labour were offering. As a result of an insufficient budget, cuts to other care services had to be made and they had a direct impact on the ability of the NHS to deliver quality healthcare, and the HSCA had opened the way for more private patients being treated, which left NHS users waiting longer times for treatment.

The Conservative's argument is rendered unsound because the 'facts' – detailed in their context of action – were revealed as mistaken by the broader context. In addition, the negative consequences (e.g. waiting longer times for treatment and unequal access) highlighted by these reports in the media and by The People's Assembly affects the legitimate concern with equality held by the Conservatives as part of their practical argument. So, although the Conservative's claim for action does not invalidate their goal (£8bn may indeed have led to patients receiving the best healthcare), the context of action represented by other actors in the 2015 election campaign highlights that the Conservative's representation of the circumstances was rhetorically motivated. It was motivated by an implicit argument for austerity in a similar way to that of Labour.

Unlike the Conservatives, Labour's context for action found empirical support in the broader political landscape. For example, their proposition that there

were staff shortages and longer waiting times was demonstrated in reports published in the media from NHS England, The King's Fund and the Royal College of Nursing. Their claim for action of raising a £2.5bn a year Time to Care Fund to alleviate this problem is in keeping with their context of action, but the amount would not have achieved the overarching goal of "rescuing the NHS". The Time to Care Fund would have achieved the goal of increasing staffing numbers, which *may* have the desired effect of increasing patient care, but the Labour Party's proposed action would not have provided enough funds to address the budget gap of £8bn and so rescue the NHS, rendering their goal unobtainable. In doing so, the practical argument from the Labour Party is considered invalid.

It can be argued that this failure in Labour's argument would have been apparent to voters in 2015. Communicating to the electorate that the party had "no proposals for any new spending paid for by additional borrowing" (Labour 2015: 18) entrenched the Labour Party within the Conservative's narrative about the state of the economy and the overarching austerity frame. Despite being careful to avoid apologising for the size of the deficit and level of debt when leaving office in 2010 (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016: 73), the message from Labour's 2015 manifesto was that the deficit still required cutting and that this task was intrinsically linked with how much the government spends. This would have resonated with voters' support, at the time, for cuts to public spending and persistent negative views of Labour as a government that had spent recklessly (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016). As already noted in Chapter 2, Labour are historically associated with the issue of the NHS (Beckett 2016; Cowley & Kavanagh 2018, 2016) and are traditionally perceived as the party that will take care of the nation's healthcare needs. In 2015, though, the obvious shortfall in funding for the NHS would have communicated to voters that they were *not* the party in that election to handle the problems faced by patients and staff. Instead it would have appeared that the Conservatives were the ones providing the money that the NHS needed and, despite the vagueness of the Conservative's funding plans,

this resonated with voters due to the dominance of the austerity frame that claimed a strong economy would deliver a strong NHS. In addition, that the incumbents were offering more money would be welcomed by the electorate and undermined the movement's call to end austerity, because, as voters were experiencing, the NHS was still being funded and free at the point of use.

The People's Assembly were the only political actors to fully articulate the anti-austerity frame in their overall argument during the 2015 election. In the circumstances and values premises they depicted austerity as a political programme that was having a direct impact on the NHS and other healthcare services and unfairly and unequally disadvantaging the most vulnerable in society. As noted above, the programme (or framework) of austerity and its impact was widely reported on in the media that drew on numerous reports from institutional actors, such as the Local Government Association (LGA) and the National Audit Office (NAO). However, the issue of privatisation, which formed a fundamental feature of the movement's argument, didn't chime with the electorate (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016: 172-3) and was missing an element highlighted by the mainstream media: NHS Trusts were taking on more private patients to maximise their income and pay down rising budget deficits.

As noted in Chapter 2, communicating with the public to gain support for issues is a key element in an actor's political messaging during election time. In 2015, The People's Assembly communicative tactics aimed at communicating broadly, but their use of one-to-many platforms (website and podcast) would have been unlikely to have gained a wide audience beyond their supporters. In order to mediate their concerns to a wider audience, the movement's claim for action was to mobilise a demonstration to call on the 2015 government to abandon austerity (their goal). However, whether mobilising *after* an election has concluded is the most impactful way to change the debate and the minds of a newly elected (pro-austerity) government is open for debate and directly challenges whether the

supporting-goal (of changing the debate) would have helped achieve the goal. Indeed, the austerity frame was so entrenched in the political landscape of 2015 that both main parties constructed their arguments around it to a stronger (Conservatives) or lesser (Labour) degree. This meant that the broader political discourse that mediated people's understanding of the world around them stood in opposition to the movement's employment of the anti-austerity frame. It is possible, therefore, that, by using a different frame to the one held by the public, the movement were unable to bridge the gap between themselves and the already existing cognitive structures of the electorate. In contrast, the Labour Party's adherence to the austerity frame situated their argument in the existing cognitive structures but this had a negative impact on their election campaign message.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the structure of practical arguments from three political actors active during the 2015 general election and given a critical evaluation of these by situating them in the broader political landscape of the mainstream media. The analysis has shown that each of the political actor's arguments were either invalid or unsound, but that the impact of the argument resided in the resonance of the frames circulating at the time. In 2015, the austerity frame was still dominant and, as such, it was the message that spoke most convincingly to that frame that was communicated most effectively.

The analysis also demonstrates that the movement in 2015 attempted to offer the electorate a view of austerity that was counter to the dominant one offered by the incumbent government. Unlike Labour, The People's Assembly did not accept the view that austerity was the only solution to the problem of the deficit and set about trying to emphasise how it was impacting on public services and why that mattered. As shown above, the movement made a case for understanding austerity as a way of changing the nature of the public's engagement with the NHS and vice-versa. Their critique of austerity-as-covert-privatisation was alluded to in the media in the form of PPI, the

inclusion of which would have benefited their overall practical argument. The movement did, however, proffer counter-arguments that were endorsed in the media (GP waiting times), although not put forth by the Official Opposition, but their communicative tactics had a modest reach.

Chapter 6: The 2017 General Election Campaign

This chapter follows the structure of the last in that it reconstructs and analyses the practical arguments made by the Conservative and Labour parties and The People's Assembly, but focuses on the 2017 general election. It starts with a brief overview of the short campaigning period and identifies the importance of the NHS as an issue in electoral politics at the time. The chapter then outlines the reconstructed practical arguments followed by a comparative analysis of them in a dialectical framework. It then turns to a critical evaluation of the validity of the arguments through their relationship to the broader landscape. This is conducted through a qualitative content analysis of the media coverage at the time, which shows the extent to which various arguments were amplified and endorsed or challenged.

6.1 The Short Campaign and the Issue of the NHS in 2017

The 2017 general election provided a dramatically different outcome to what most commentators and the Prime Minister at the time, Theresa May, thought would deliver the Conservatives a landslide majority (Thorsen, Jackson & Lilleker 2017; Wring, Mortimore & Atkinson 2019). Unlike the 2015 election, this was a snap election called by the new Conservative leader in an attempt to gain a decisive vote of confidence from the public that would shore up her mandate to deliver Brexit following the referendum result a year before (Lynch 2017; O'Brien 2017). Going into the 2017 election the Conservatives and media commentators sought to frame it as being the 'Brexit election' and that was the second most prominent issue (10.9%) behind the electoral process (32.9%) in news coverage (Deacon et al. 2019: 35). However, neither manifesto gave much space to the issue and both parties remained vague on the details, leaving politicians little in the way of substance to say on the matter (Lynch 2017; O'Brien 2017). The People's Assembly did not focus on Brexit either, choosing instead to focus, through attacks on May's character, on the threat to the NHS that they considered the Conservatives to pose.

The Conservative manifesto was launched during week two of the campaign (12-18 May, 2017) and immediately began to attract negative coverage over their social care policy. Quickly dubbed the 'dementia tax', the policy was attacked for its potentially negative impact on elderly people and Theresa May was seen to U-turn on the policy almost immediately (Deacon et al. 2019: 33). Labour's manifesto was leaked to the press ahead of its official launch so that, by the time the final draft was published, the publicity generated meant that the election debate around the manifesto was "decidedly policy rich" (Deacon et al. 2019: 33). This focus on the substance of policy was a marked shift from the 2015 news reporting on the election campaign, when a good deal of time was spent on the 'process' (Deacon et al. 2019: 33). In 2017, the weight given to the process was down by 12.5% from 2015 and there was also a slip downwards by 5.9% in the amount of coverage that the issue of the economy received (Deacon et al. 2019: 35). The NHS, by contrast, was the fourth most prominent issue in news coverage (Deacon et al. 2019: 35) with the debate on healthcare provision peaking midway through the election following the controversy over the dementia tax (Deacon et al. 2019: 36; Harmer & Southern 2019: 104; Wring & Deacon 2018: 376).

Turning to the campaigns themselves, according to Jay Blumler, the Conservatives' was political-consultancy-led, consisting of a repetition of sound-bites, and was relatively policy-light (Blumler 2019: 55; Blumler 2017). The 'strong and stable' slogan was a main feature of the Conservative's campaign strategy to build a brand to sell a product, in this case Theresa May (Ridge-Newman 2019: 138). Building a brand requires brand credibility, which has a close relationship to trustworthiness (Seiler & Kucza 2017), and trust in May's premiership was being questioned early on over her unwillingness to take part in televised debates. Questions surrounding her credibility peaked following the U-turn on the 'dementia tax' (Ridge-Newman 2019: 138) and this was seized upon by The People's Assembly. Even the editorial of ConservativeHome commented that the campaign had been "forced off-track" by the "social care fiasco", which had brought the "core offer of 'strong

and stable government' [into] disrepute"³⁷. The repetition of the slogan began to prove counterproductive for May too as she was lampooned as "robotic" in online media coverage (Harmer & Southern 2019: 108) and satirised in a poster by the artist Jeremy Deller that circulated on the internet (see below).

In contrast, the Labour Party adopted a model that was social movement-led, which "favoured elaborations of larger social and political visions [and] was policy-heavy" (Blumler 2019: 55). Labour's 2017 manifesto was viewed as marking a "break with the prevailing pro-austerity consensus" (Wring, Mortimore & Atkinson 2019: 11). Despite being described as '*The NEW longest suicide note*' in a headline by the *MailOnline* (Tapsfield May 11, 2017), the Labour manifesto was well received (Cook 2019: 152; Deacon et al. 2019: 33). In relation to the NHS, the analysis below reveals that the Conservatives highlighted the disconnect between the government and the institution with their continued support for NHS England and its *Five Year Forward View*. The movement and the Labour Party, by contrast, are positioned as the anti-austerity actors, both wanting more governmental responsibility for the NHS, the reinstatement of the powers of the Secretary of State for Health, and an end to privatisation in the service.

6.2 The Reconstructed Arguments and Analysis

This section foregrounds the argument from the incumbent Conservative government and presents the challenges made by the Labour Party and The People's Assembly. A detailed comparative analysis is presented below and a concise overview of each actor's argument follows and is visually represented in Table 14.

³⁷ See Tory Diary 2017: <https://www.conservativehome.com/thetorydiary/2017/06/in-these-last-few-election-day-may-must-spell-out-what-the-choice-means-for-your-wallet-purse-and-savings.html> (last accessed 01/03/2019).

6.2.1 Comparative Analysis

Beginning with the incumbent Conservative Party, this section presents a comparative analysis of the arguments from all three political actors. In the same manner as the last chapter, this section follows the structure of Faircloughian PDA outlined in Chapter 4 and unpacks the summarised arguments above. At the start of each section is a table of the data from which the analysis is drawn.

Circumstances

Table 10: Matrix Coding Circumstances Premises General Election 2017			
	Conservative Manifesto 2017	Labour Manifesto 2017	The People's Assembly (combined) 2017
Circumstances (C)	179	176	810
A Privatisation	0	27	155
B Underfunding OR Cuts	0	37	449
C Patient Suffering or Care	161	75	100
D Staff	0	0	21
E IT	0	0	85
F Waiting Times	18	17	0
G Hospital Closures	0	20	0
H Ideology	0	0	0

Unlike 2015, where the Conservatives focused on how they had improved NHS care through increased staff numbers and reduced waiting times, the context for action in 2017 focused on who was responsible for delivering the service. For the party it was NHS England who were responsible for organising and delivering patient care: “NHS England [...] determines how best to organise and deliver care in England” (Conservative 2017: 67). This, it was claimed, was in keeping with the plans laid out in the *Five Year Forward View*, and these plans were supported by the Conservatives in both 2015 and 2017. So, rather than being the party that “put things right”, as stated in 2015, they positioned themselves in 2017 as the ones responsible for “hold[ing] NHS England’s leaders to account for delivering their plan to improve patient care” (Conservative 2017: 67). In effect, this positioned a future Conservative government as the regulator of NHS England rather than as the provider of State healthcare in England. This draws the reader’s attention to the subtle repositioning of the government’s role – as funder-*regulator* of the NHS – that

was undertaken via the implementation of the Health and Social Care Act in 2012 (HSCA). As noted in Chapter 3, the Act devolved responsibility for the running of the institution to NHS England and gave Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) control of the NHS budget. NHS England allocates funding to CCGs and oversees the day-to-day operating of commissioning, although it is CCGs who are responsible for the commissioning of local services. This restructuring effectively made the Health Secretary redundant and assigned responsibility for healthcare to NHS England. As such, the Conservative's context of action is an accurate description of the circumstances within the NHS at the time. However, despite this not being actively misleading, the incremental changes made by the HSCA have never been explicitly made clear to the public by any Conservative government.

The impact of these changes, however, are highlighted by the Labour Party's context of action. Labour identified a number of problems faced by NHS patients in 2017, including millions of people on waiting lists, the "routine breach of safe levels of bed occupancy" and "the scandal of slowing ambulance-response times" (Labour 2017: 66). In addition to this was "the growing problem of rationing of services and medicines across England" by CCGs that resulted in patient care being subject to "postcode lotteries" (Labour 2017: 66). The notion of a postcode lottery, or postcode variations, in healthcare arises from the differences in access to NHS treatment experienced by patients throughout the country. Since the implementation of the £20bn efficiency savings recommended in NHS England's *Five Year Forward View*, CCGs have had to make decisions about which treatments to restrict in their Trusts in order to balance their budgets (Crump et al. 2015). In referring to the "postcode lottery", Labour were implicitly referring to this situation in the NHS and acknowledging unequal access to care that, for the movement (in both 2015 and 2017), is considered to be the result of cuts to public services enshrined in the programme of austerity.

The context of action, according to The People’s Assembly, was one of crisis. It was one in which “our NHS [wa]s in crisis” after years of cuts and underfunding that was putting financial pressure on the service and people:

After years of a Tory Government our public services are on their knees, our NHS is in crisis, our schools are underfunded, thousands rely on food banks to feed their families, people are on poverty wages while prices soar, the most vulnerable have been hit again and again.

The People's Assembly website, April 19, 2017

As in 2015, the movement was largely disseminating their message about the effects of austerity and its cause (the ‘Tories’) via its website. But unlike the last election the message on privatisation was not foregrounded by The People’s Assembly’s; instead one of the main political parties was articulating it. In a web post the movement simply stated that “The NHS [wa]s chronically underfunded and ... being privatised” (The People's Assembly website, May 30, 2017). This view was communicated more robustly by Labour who asserted that “Care services have been slowly but relentlessly privatised” and that “privatisation of our NHS” must be reversed and the service returned to “expert public control” (Labour 2017: 71). The argument against privatisation (that it has the potential to reduce equality of access) remained the same in 2017 as it was in 2015 and so will not be revisited here. However, the notion of equal access formed a fundamental aspect of the values premise for both of the political parties, which is discussed in the next section.

Values premise

Table 11: Matrix Coding Values Premises General Election 2017			
	Conservative Manifesto 2017	Labour Manifesto 2017	The People's Assembly (combined) 2017
Values (V)	246	164	1557
A Trust	0	0	1441
B Equality	196	121	116
C Fairness	36	43	0

The two values expressed as concerns by both the Conservatives and Labour in 2017 are those of equality (of access) and fairness. Both actors’ focus on equality is directly linked to Bevan’s collective principle of access for all, which

only the Conservatives explicitly referred to in 2015. The concern for fairness is expressed by the Conservatives through the concept of intergenerational fairness and by Labour as protection of the vulnerable (as it was in 2015). Unlike in 2015, The People's Assembly in 2017 focused closely on a concern with trust, specifically distrust in the incumbent government.

Equality

The concept of equality that formed a concern for both political parties in 2017 was enshrined in equal access to healthcare provision:

The Conservative Party believes in the founding principles of the NHS. First, that the service should meet the needs of everyone, no matter who they are or where they live. Second, that care should be based on clinical need, not the ability to pay. Third, that care should be free at the point of use.

Conservative 2017: 66

In the aftermath of war and national bankruptcy, it was a Labour government that found resources to create a National Health Service – our proudest achievement, providing universal healthcare for all on the basis of need, free at the point of use.

Labour 2017: 66

What is clear from these statements is that both party's claim healthcare is a universal service that is based on need alone. It can be argued that such a model of the NHS is achievable whether it is delivered directly by NHS England (as the Conservatives advocate) or by the Department of Health (Labour and the movement), which means that the value of equality is compatible with the differing supporting-goals of each party in 2017 (discussed below). What is interesting here is the language used in each statement. As in 2015, the Conservatives link themselves with the founding principles and values of the NHS rather than the delivery of the service itself. As such, NHS England's delivery of the service (and whomever CCGs choose to procure services from) would be consistent with the Conservative's claim that it wishes to provide

universal access: the Conservatives can present themselves as ascribing to the founding principles of the NHS by funding the service, but are, in reality, divorced from the responsibility for upholding those principles. Labour in 2017, however, take ownership of the NHS by stating that they are the party (when in government) directly linked to providing the service (“it was a Labour government ... providing universal healthcare for all”). The distinction between who is directly responsible for the provision of healthcare is an important one: although provision by either the Department for Health or NHS England would still be funded by the taxpayer, outsourcing the budget to a third party provides any government with the option of laying the blame elsewhere should anything ‘go wrong’ in the NHS. This is politically expedient in that any public anger could be directed away from the government and toward NHS England.

Fairness

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, 2017 was styled as the ‘Brexit election’ but the issue was not given much direct attention in either manifesto. However, aspects of the debates conducted during the 2016 Referendum on the European Union (EU) were alluded to by the Conservatives in references to intergenerational fairness. The title of Chapter 4 of the Conservative manifesto, in which the ‘Our National Health Service’ subsection sits, is ‘A restored contract between the generations’. It speaks to an existing schism between young and old, that was brought into sharp focus by the financial crisis of 2008 (Harper 2014) and heightened during and after the Referendum (Becker, Fetzner, & Novy 2017; Clarke, Goodwin & Whiteley 2017; Liberini et al. 2017). The dichotomy between the generations is spelt out in the narrative that governments faced a challenge to “sustain public spending on pensions and healthcare” in the face of a growing and aging population (Harper 2014: 587; see also Harper 2010) whilst also having to manage budget deficits for younger, future generations. Indeed, the 2017 Conservative manifesto directly refers to this dichotomy: “We must admit that the solidarity that binds generations is under strain in our country” (Conservative 2017: 63). The declarative structure of this sentence conveys

the information as though it is an empirical fact that there is a strained relationship between old and young, rather than a constructed narrative.

The 'contract' in the title of the manifesto chapter speaks to the traditional contract held between the generations (Arber & Attias-Donfut, 2000). This "system of intergenerational reciprocity" (Harper 2010: 188) is maintained in society at the familial level (parents provide for children, children provide for elderly parents) and a societal level (working adults providing, via taxes, for both older and younger dependents). In the Conservative Party manifesto such a contract is prescribed in the fourth paragraph of the introduction to this section:

At times, solidarity will require great generosity from one group to another – of younger working people to pay for the dignified old age of retired people, and of older people balancing what they receive with the needs of the younger generation.

Conservative 2017: 63

The requirement for the older generation to "balance what they receive" hints at an adapted intergenerational contract, similar to that put forth above, and the conception of meritocratic 'desert' highlighted in relation in austerity in Chapter 3. An adapted contract would require the older generation to continue to bear the costs of their longer lives through increased contributions in order to reduce the "financial burden for the smaller working-age cohorts" (Harper 2010: 188). In their 2017 manifesto, the Conservatives are hinting at the adapted contract upon which they consider intergenerational fairness to be based. The older generation *should* pay back into the system what they have received because if they take too much there may be nothing left for the younger generation³⁸. What they should not take

³⁸ What is missing here is an acknowledgement that the older generation have, in the main, worked hard to secure (and pay for) their own "dignified" old age!

too much of is referred to in the introduction to the manifesto's Chapter 4, when it is stated that the "contract includes our National Health Service", which is described as a "system of solidarity to which we all contribute" (Conservative 2017: 63). It can be inferred from this that to achieve a truly fair intergenerational balance, the older generation must only take what it needs from the NHS (just enough to ensure a "dignified old age") and should leave enough behind for their younger counterparts. An interesting feature of intergenerational fairness here is linked to the notion of 'solidarity' used above, and refers to the ties in a society ("a system of solidarity") that bind people together as one. The noun 'solidarity' invokes the use of inclusive first person deixis – 'Our' NHS – used by the movement in 2015 that evokes a sense of camaraderie. The Conservatives usually talk about community with implications of communitarianism (Gibson 2015), but were, in 2017, employing a term that is usually associated with the Left and social movements in general. This could be considered strategic in that the party would have known that some Labour voters' sympathy lay with the movement-esque politics of Jeremy Corbyn.

The Labour Party's conception of fairness considered the need to share the burden, as the Conservatives did, but focused on protecting vulnerable and poor communities who, according to anti-austerity advocates, are unfairly disadvantaged by austerity:

... we will halt pharmacy cuts and review provision to ensure all patients have access to pharmacy services, particularly in deprived or remote communities.

Labour 2017: 66

We will fight health inequalities to break the scandalous link between child ill-health and poverty.

Labour 2017: 67

In line with patient care and equality of access being about need rather than the ability to pay, the manifesto committed Labour to funding “free parking in England – for patients, staff and visitors – by increasing the tax on private medical insurance premiums” (Labour 2017: 67). In a visit to Worcester during the 2017 election campaign (May 8), Jeremy Corbyn gave voice to this notion of fairness when he stated that: “Labour will end hospital parking charges, which place an unfair and unnecessary burden on families, patients and NHS staff. Hospital parking charges are a tax on serious illnesses”³⁹. It was deemed unfair to financially penalise people experiencing illnesses and the staff who drive to work to help them. Offering free car parking was seen as fair because it would protect the vulnerable and, as a political issue, also highlighted ‘fairness as wealth redistribution’ through taxation, which is linked to the lowering of inequalities in society (Wilkinson & Pickett 2009). This view is in keeping with the unfairness of inequality proliferated by the ‘postcode lottery’ mentioned above.

Trust

The overarching concern for The People’s Assembly in 2017 was that of trust, specifically the inability to trust politicians. This concern was communicated through various tactics – Twitter commentary, a billboard, a protest song, and their website – and each focused on distrusting the Conservative government or Theresa May. For example, on Twitter references to trust were made directly:

Yep. Obvious to everyone no longer strong and stable faffing about with uncOSTED #ManifestoOfMisery asking us to **trust** her? Really?

Twitter, May 22, 2017

Tories promise a consultation on #dementiatax after the election is over, it’s another Tory con, they cannot be **trusted** on social care!??

³⁹ See the Labour Party archive for the full announcement: <https://labour.org.uk/press/labour-to-end-nhs-car-park-charges/> (last accessed 01/10/2018).

Twitter, May 22, 2017

The use of the 'not' (they *cannot* be trusted) in the tweets modifies 'trust' to negate the predicated reliability of another's actions, as does the use of sarcasm ('asking us to trust her? *Really?*'). This sought to negatively evaluate the "Tories" and Theresa May in an attempt to challenge the legitimacy of the government. One salient example of an attempt at delegitimisation is the classification of Theresa May as a 'threat' that first appeared during the 2017 election campaign on a billboard crowdfunded by The People's Assembly (see Image 3 below).

Image 3: The billboard commissioned by The People's Assembly in the 2017 general election



The billboards aped traditional political party advertising yet did not endorse any one party; instead, they opposed the Conservative Party only. They presented Theresa May, and by extension her Conservative government, as a threat and addressed viewers in the second person to emphasize the impact austerity policies had on "your local hospital, your child's education, your standard of living, your job security, your pension, your peace and security". The use of the emotive term 'threat' generates fear and leads the viewer to draw a value judgement of Theresa May (and the Conservative government that she leads). The judgment does not simply express a viewpoint, but negatively evaluates Theresa May and ascribes that evaluation to her using the personal first-person pronoun 'I'.

Presenting an individual as a ‘threat’ is a common rhetorical tactic and arguably one used as a tool of propaganda (van Dijk, 1987; Wood & Finlay 2008). Analysis conducted after the July 2005 bombings in London revealed a frequent portrayal of Islam, Muslims and multi-culturalism more generally as posing a threat to the white-British population by right-wing groups such as the British National Party (BNP) and English Defence League (EDL) (Kassimeris & Jackson 2015; Wood & Finlay 2008). More contemporaneously to the 2017 election was the narrative surrounding the European Union in the lead up to the Referendum vote. The EU was represented (mostly by Eurosceptics) in the debate over membership as anti-democratic and a threat to national sovereignty (Todd 2015). John Todd’s analysis of discourse on Europe from 2013⁴⁰ reveals that in political speeches and newspaper articles the EU was denoted as an authoritarian system of legislation, taxation and government that was threatening the sovereignty of the UK (2015: 82-87). A vote to leave the EU was conveyed as a way to ‘protect’ the UK from such a threat. The use of the term ‘threat’ in The People’s Assembly billboard is used in a similar way, to stir up a strong emotional response to a person and a (political) group and to delegitimise them.

Another offline tactic used by The People’s Assembly to call into question the legitimacy of the sitting government was the protest song, *Liar Liar GE2017*, which was performed by the band Captain SKA. As with the billboards, the song steered those that heard it toward a negative moral evaluation of the government as bad and untrustworthy. On The People’s Assembly’s website, band member and songwriter Jake Painter gave the rationale for the release. He said:

We’ve re-mastered our *Liar, Liar* song for this General Election
because we want to do all we can to expose the horrific effects Tory

⁴⁰ This was the year in which David Cameron announced his intention to offer the UK a referendum its membership with the European Union.

policy has had on ordinary people. Theresa May lies her way through interview after interview without addressing the real issues.

The People's Assembly website, May 28, 2017

The song itself focused on Theresa May, featuring three clips taken from speeches and news interviews with her. For example, following the chorus transcribed below there is a clip of her on *The Andrew Marr Show* from the 4 September, 2016 stating: "I will be very clear that I think we need that period of time, that stability, to be able to deal with the issues that the country is facing. I'm not going to be calling a snap election". This is presented as standing in contrast with the fact that seven months later she called the snap general election for which the song was released. These clips are followed by a chorus of "She's a liar, liar... you can't trust her, no no no no" and interspersed with lyrics that highlight concrete issues facing NHS staff:

"We all know politicians like telling lies
Big ones, little ones, porky pies
Saying they're strong and stable, won't disguise
We're still being taken for a ride
Nurses going hungry, schools in decline
I don't recognize this broken country of mine
They're having a laugh, let's show them the door then
Cut the rich, not the poor"

The song lyrics resonate with long-term trends in public perceptions of the chronic verbal dishonesty ("We all know politicians like telling lies; Big ones, little ones, porky pies") among the political class (Allen & Birch 2015). There is a widely-held view that politicians use spin, avoid giving straight answers to questions, and make campaign promises that they are perceived as knowingly unable to keep (Curtice & Jowell 1997; Pattie & Johnston 2001; Zmerli & van der Meer 2017). All of this coalesces into a general distrust in the ability of

politicians to tell the truth. The song also builds on a longstanding tradition of mistrusting the Conservatives, particularly with public services (Cowley & Kavanagh 2016: 42) and branding the party liars. The People's Assembly may have drawn on this and, through their communicative tactics, strategically appealed to voters to use a heuristic of trust.

Goals

Table 12: Matrix Coding Goals Premises General Election 2017			
	Conservative Manifesto 2017	Labour Manifesto 2017	The People's Assembly (combined) 2017
Goals (G)	189	129	54
<i>A Overarching Goals</i>	74	63	54
NHS Excellent Care	74	44	0
Publicly funded healthcare	0	19	54
<i>B Supporting-Goals</i>	115	66	0
Clinical outcomes	115	0	0
Reverse HSCA	0	66	0

The party manifestos shared the same overarching goal of ensuring quality of care but they differed in the supporting-goals to achieve this. For the Conservatives the goal was “to help the NHS provide exceptional care in all parts of England” and to do this (supporting-goal) the Conservatives stated that they would “make clinical outcomes more transparent” (Conservative 2017: 68). From Labour the goal was to “ensure that NHS patients get the world-class quality of care they need” (Labour 2017: 66) through a reversal of the Health and Social Care Act (supporting-goal).

From an analysis of the section ‘Exceptional standards of care, wherever, whenever’ in the Conservative manifesto it can be argued that “clinical outcomes” refers to patient treatment or care. One example from the manifesto is:

Outcomes in the NHS for most major conditions are considerably better than three, five or ten years ago. However, the founding intention for the NHS was to provide good levels of care to everyone, wherever they live. This has not yet been achieved: there remain

significant variations in outcomes and quality across services and across the country.

Conservative 2017: 68

The implicit claim from the Conservative manifesto is that “good levels of care” can be measured via the outcome of “most major conditions” and by measuring outcomes it is possible to see the results of NHS treatments and effectively spot “variations in outcomes and quality across services” (Conservative 2017: 68). The quality of the care received is thus measured in outcomes and is conceived of as *achieving* those outcomes, which is then the overriding objective in relation to patient care. Care becomes outcomes-focused, a view that is in keeping with neoliberal ideology, wherein human well-being is measured and public services are expected to operate within the market place, which is also measured. A consequence of this is that the process of caring for and treating a patient is rendered nothing more than a box that needs to be ticked.

For Labour, ensuring that “NHS patients get the world-class quality of care they need” (Labour 2017: 66) was not equated with patient outcomes; instead it was to be given precedence over economic efficiency. In the subsection entitled ‘NHS funding’ in the 2017 manifesto there was a repeated focus on “patient need rather than available finances” and ensuring that “excess private profits are not made out of the NHS at the expense of patient care” (Labour 2017: 69). According to Labour, in 2017 there was a focus on “available finances” rather than “patient need” that was reflected in “... the Health and Social Care Act that puts profits before patients” (Labour 2017: 69). In this statement the Labour Party are alluding to concerns regarding the increasing use of non-publicly owned, especially for-profit, firms to provide services, which may lead to an erosion in patient care. If Labour were to achieve their overarching goal of “world-class quality of care” for NHS patients then the Act must be repealed first (supporting-goal). The party goes further still in stating that it will “make the NHS the preferred provider [and] reinstate the powers of the Secretary of State for Health to have overall responsibility

for the NHS” (Labour 2017: 69), effectively returning the service to its original role as funder-provider.

Labour’s terminology here is reflective of the goal of The People’s Assembly who want to obtain a government that will offer an NHS that is funded by the taxpayer and provided by the government (publicly-owned). In their manifesto, Labour’s use of the phrase “profits before patients” invokes the description by the movement in 2015 of patients being treated as ‘numbered assets’ rather than people in need, which serves to prioritise *how* healthcare is delivered over *why* it is. In 2017, the movement focused on challenging how healthcare is provided and by whom with several tweets around health insurance:

Time to sort out your health insurance if you are thinking of voting for
#ManifestoOfMisery or vote to #SaveOurNHS #GE2017
#LabourManifesto

Have you been busy sorting out your medical insurance?
#ManifestoOfMisery Let’s make June the end of May #JC4PM

Twitter, May 20, 2017

We need a government who will fund #OurNHS not Kaiser
Permanente⁴¹! #GE2017 #VoteNHS #ManifestoOfMisery

Twitter, May 19, 2017

The content of the latter tweet draws on the movement’s concern with trust in its suggestion that the government, at the time, was prepared to fund a private healthcare provider over the NHS. Once again, The People’s Assembly were attempting to reveal the true intentions of a Conservative government who were said to be using austerity as a way of implementing privatisation

⁴¹ Kaiser Permanente is a US based non-profit healthcare organisation that provides health coverage through insurance plans. For full details: <https://about.kaiserpermanente.org/who-we-are> (last accessed 31/05/2019).

(austerity-as-covert-privatisation) and derelict in their stated commitment to the founding principles of the NHS. For example, if patients were to require health insurance from a private company to obtain medical treatment then the Conservative manifesto pledge that care “should be based on clinical need, not the ability to pay” would be exposed as mere political rhetoric to gain votes. However, as in 2015, access to the NHS was still free at the point of use in 2017 and medical insurance unnecessary, rendering the movement’s message nothing more than an unevidenced strategic move to imply that the Conservatives could not be trusted with the NHS.

Claim for Action

Table 13: Matrix Coding Claims for Action Premises General Election 2017			
	Conservative Manifesto 2017	Labour Manifesto 2017	The People's Assembly (combined) 2017
Claims for Action (A)	260	121	227
A Tax Rises	0	48	30
B Change of Govt (ToriesOut)	0	0	182
C Changes to Existing Govt Policy	118	21	0
D Future Financial Increases	142	52	15
da Investment	100	20	15
db Extra Resources	42	32	0
E Demonstrating OR Mobilising	0	0	0

The claim for action from both the Conservatives and Labour was to offer the NHS more money:

... increase NHS spending by a minimum of £8bn in real terms over the next five years.

Conservative 2017: 66

... commit to over £30 billion in extra funding over the next Parliament.

Labour 2017: 69

Although the two political parties shared the same objective, the language that each used revealed their relationship with the NHS as an institution and

situated them in the opposing frames identified in Chapter 3. Labour's commitment to "£30 billion in extra *funding*" distinguishes it from that of the Conservatives, who, throughout both of their 2015 and 2017 manifestos, referred to NHS "*spending*". In the context of the NHS, funding is understood as akin to the provision of a budget or a source of income designated for healthcare provision. If the money given to the NHS is referred to as 'funding', the government's link to the provision of healthcare – as funder-provider – is maintained more closely. Spending, however, is more closely aligned with the household budget metaphor that, within the logic of austerity, requires the government to attempt to behave like a 'household' and spend less than it earns. In this view, spending is understood as costs or as household bills that needs to be paid from the household budget, income or wages. Continuing with the household metaphor but reversing it, cuts to 'funding' would equate to cuts to income or wages. It can be argued that reference to NHS 'funding' in the Labour manifesto positions the NHS as a public good (rather than an external cost) that the party believes *should* be publicly provided through collective provision. This notion leads to the rejection of privatisation in healthcare, as it is a model that could lead to privately-funded and unequal care that renders health provision nothing more than an individual right (a view that is compatible with the movement's goal).

As shown above, the goal for The People's Assembly was to have a government that would ensure the continuation of a fully funded, publicly-owned NHS. The movement's claim to action focuses on trust in the incumbent government's ability to deliver this and calls for the public *not* to vote for a (Conservative) government that is a threat to the NHS. It can be said that, given the nature of electioneering, such a claim for action would be welcomed by the Official Opposition, but in 2017 the Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn, offered a more positive message of itself to the electorate (Beckett 2017: 42; Flinders 2017: 19). Despite negative campaigning against Labour by the incumbent Conservative Party (Beckett 2017: 42; Shephard

2017: 98), it was The People's Assembly who were the political actors that attempted to attack the presumed failings of their opponent.

6.2.2 A Summary of the Arguments

What follows is a summative account of the arguments analysed above of which an overview is presented in Table 14.

The claim for action (A) from the Conservative manifesto is that of spending a minimum of £8bn a year on healthcare. Their goal is to enable the NHS to deliver "exceptional care" (G), which will be assisted by making clinical outcomes more transparent (supporting-goal). The delivery of the NHS is the responsibility of NHS England, whose *Five Year Forward View* the party supports (C). This is underpinned by a commitment to the founding intention of the NHS and regulated by a concern for intergenerational fairness (i.e. an equality of redistribution or burden-sharing between the old and young) (V).

The claim for action (A) from the Labour manifesto is that of providing the NHS with extra resources (£30bn over the five year parliament). This will ensure that patients get the "world-class" quality of care that they need (G) and will be achieved, in the first instance, by reversing the Health and Social Care Act (HSCA) (supporting-goal). This goal is in response to the current situation in the NHS that patient care is being affected by unsafe levels of bed occupancy, slow ambulance response rates, a "postcode lottery" in the provision of healthcare, and privatisation (C). As with the Conservatives, Labour are committed to the founding principles of the NHS that ensures equality of access for all patients, and access to healthcare is understood through a concern for fairness, particularly the protection of the vulnerable in society (V).

The claim for action (A) from The People's Assembly is that the right thing to do in 2017 is *not* vote for a Conservative government that cannot be trusted and that is a threat to the NHS. Their goal is to obtain a government that will provide a fully funded, publicly-owned NHS that is accessible for all (G). The context of action for the movement is that the NHS is in crisis due to years of

underfunding and is being privatised (C). This situation demonstrates that a Conservative government cannot be trusted with the NHS (V).

As in 2015, both parties asserted the same broad claim for action of spending on the NHS, but in 2017 they offered similar amounts in funding. The goals of all the political actors were the same in that they share the implicit goal of the continuation of the NHS, but they differ on means (i.e. how best to deliver the service, with or without State intervention). The two political parties share the values of equality and fairness, with the Conservative's signaling intergenerational fairness as their priority and Labour highlighting protection of the vulnerable. The value of equality was expressed by each as a commitment to the founding principles of the NHS, which emphasised that the ethos of the service was still valued across the political divide (even if there was disagreement on who should deliver it). Unlike 2015, The People's Assembly did not explicitly share the values of equality and fairness with either of the parties, instead choosing to focus closely on trust in 2017. As noted above, it could be argued that the movement's focus on trust was partly due to the political landscape at the time, wherein trust in May was being questioned in the media, and partly because of both Labour's and a societal shift toward anti-austerity. So, instead of opposing the austerity frame (as in 2015), The People's Assembly could actively engage in challenging the incumbent government instead.

The comparative analysis and summary of the arguments reveals that unlike in 2015, there are no marked points of contention between the actors' assessment of the context of action, instead, in 2017 there appears to be a shared implicit goal of the continuation of NHS. The comparative analysis reveals that all of the political actors agreed that the NHS should receive public money, but disagreed on who should be responsible for the delivery the service. Both Labour and The People's Assembly advocated for a funder-provider model (i.e. a tax-payer funded service that the government is responsible for delivering) whilst the Conservatives considered NHS England to be the body responsible for running the service with oversight from the government (a funder-regulator model). The only point of divergence in the 2017

arguments reconstructed here was that of The People's Assembly's charge that the Conservatives could not be trusted with the NHS.

The critical evaluation of the arguments in the next section reflects this overview by showing the extent to which the funding offered upheld the shared goals and provides an assessment of how prevalent the heuristic of trust was in 2017. It does so by examining in what ways these were amplified and endorsed or challenged by media coverage at the time.

Table 14: The 2017 General Election Practical Arguments			
2017	Conservative Manifesto	Labour Manifesto	The People's Assembly
<i>Circumstances (C)</i>	NHS England delivers and organises healthcare in England; we support their <i>Five Year Forward View</i> .	There are a number of issues affecting patient care including unsafe levels of bed occupancy, slow ambulance response times and a rationing of services that is leading to "postcode lotteries" (Labour 2017: 66); the NHS is being privatised and profits are being put before patients.	The NHS is in crisis due to years of underfunding and is being privatised.
<i>Values / concerns (V)</i>	A concern for equality – a commitment to and belief in the "founding intention" and "founding principles" of the NHS (Conservative 2017: 68). A concern for intergenerational fairness.	A concern for equality of access – the equal treatment of all people preserved by the founding principles of the NHS. A concern for fairness as protection of the vulnerable – understood through the lens of fairness as protecting vulnerable and poor communities.	An explicit concern with trust – the government cannot be trusted.
<i>Goals</i>	Our main goal is "to help the NHS [NHS England] provide exceptional care in all parts of England" (Conservative 2017: 68), which will be achieved by making clinical outcomes more transparent (supporting-goal).	Our main goal is to "ensure that NHS patients get the world-class quality of care that they need" (Labour 2017: 66), which will partly be achieved through the reversal of the HSCA (supporting-goal).	Our goal is to gain a government that will provide a fully funded, publicly-owned, NHS.
<i>Claim(s) for Action</i>	We should spend a minimum of £8bn a year on the NHS.	We should provide extra resources (£30bn).	The right thing to do is to <i>not</i> vote for a (Conservative) government that cannot be trusted and is a threat to the NHS.

6.3 Critical Evaluation of the 2017 Arguments

As in Chapter 5, I now turn to the critical evaluation of the practical arguments identified above, by drawing on public debates on the NHS found in the mainstream media as they unfolded during the election campaign. It begins with a content analysis of the media's reporting on the money offered to the NHS by each party, an assessment of the relationship between the pledges and the (anti)austerity frames circulating at the time, and an evaluation of whether the claims for action can achieve the goals. The section then moves to the movement's concern with trust and how that concern was endorsed or challenged in the media landscape at the time, and then evaluates the effectiveness of this on their overall argument.

6.3.1 More Money for the NHS: Is it Enough?

In 2017 all of the political actors agreed that more funding was needed to sustain the NHS. As noted in the analysis above, the Conservatives pledged to spend a minimum of £8bn a year and Labour £30bn across the life of the Parliament, but only the latter stated how the money would be raised. In keeping with their 2015 position, the Conservatives did not tell the electorate where the money to fund the NHS was going to come from, perhaps still operating within the terms laid out in the 2010 election and reinforced in 2015 that only they could be trusted on the economy. By contrast, Labour claimed that their manifesto was 'fully costed', and this was the only marker of engagement with the austerity frame in Labour's argument. In some of Jeremy Corbyn's speeches across the country he repeated this claim, and when asked about the £30bn increase to NHS funding, he was reported in *The Guardian* as telling the Royal College of Nurses Conference that Labour's health proposals were "fully costed and fully funded" and that the money would be raised either by "moving existing budgets or changing taxation levels for corporates and the very top end of our society" (Pidd May 15, 2017). This claim was consistent with the manifesto pledge that the party would fund the NHS "through increasing income tax for the highest 5 per cent of earners and by increasing tax on private medical insurance" (Labour 2017: 69). The *MailOnline* reported on these tax increases through the lens of austerity that

offered a critical, but also polemic, evaluation of Labour's claims for action and goals. Six days after the manifesto launch, the paper's policy editor, Daniel Martin, ran with the headline "Exposed, Labour's lies over tax: Think tank warns of 'dishonest' plans for the highest burden since World War Two" (May 26, 2017). Using phrases such as "swingeing tax increases", "tax burden" and "ordinary families will take a hit", the article discussed an analysis ("damning assessment") of the two main party manifestos conducted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)⁴².

The IFS analysis was stated in the *MailOnline* as claiming that "Mr Corbyn's policy plans would lead to the longest period of sustained public spending for 30 years, and the highest level of tax receipts compared to GDP since 1949" (Martin May 26, 2017). The think-tank's reported assessment of these proposed tax receipts was that they were overestimated by at "least £9bn" and that the corporate tax increases proposed would "make a broad group of people worse off" (Martin May 26, 2017). Tax rises were positioned by in the piece "economically damaging" due to the impact that they are proposed to have on private investment (Martin May 26, 2017). Martin's piece also alluded to the normative argument for austerity that low taxes *and* reduced public spending are the only way to stimulate the economy. To raise taxes, as suggested by Labour, was, therefore, to damage the economy and such an economic landscape would be detrimental to the NHS. As one anonymous Tory spokesman was reported in the *Daily Mail* as summing up: "Jeremy Corbyn can't deliver any of this because his nonsensical economic policies would damage our economy and mean less money for the NHS, not more" (Martin May 15, 2017). As noted in Chapter 2, a large element of the economic argument for austerity was that too much money had been spent on public services and it was *that profligacy* which was responsible for the

⁴² A press briefing of the analysis is available online: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/events/1481> (last accessed 28/02/2019).

financial chaos the UK experienced in 2007/08; in 2017 the political landscape reflected that view.

Taking both the economic and normative elements of austerity raised by the *MailOnline*, an evaluation of the effectiveness of Labour's claim for action in achieving their goal can be made. As detailed above, the overarching goal from Labour was to "ensure that NHS patients get the world-class quality of care they need" (Labour 2017: 66). The claim for action was to provide "£30 billion in extra funding over the next Parliament through increasing income tax for the highest 5 per cent of earners" (Labour 2017: 69). Applying the austerity frame and the IFS analysis to this practical argument, it can be challenged thus: It was possible that the proposed £30bn raised through tax receipts had been miscalculated by £9bn. If the initial measures were likely to fall short by such an amount, it was likely that a Labour government would need to increase taxes even further. Tax increases would impact private investment and corporations, leading to a lowering of wages for a broad section of society. This would harm growth and stagnate the economy. Thus, an increase in taxes to invest in public services would damage the economy and, by extension, the NHS. In a turbulent economic environment, the government would not be able to offer patients the "world-class quality of care" that they need, which in effect undermines Labour's overarching goal.

An anti-austerity challenge to this evaluation would claim that reduced public spending on the NHS had been detrimental to the functioning of the service and its staff – a view that was elaborated by Labour in their context of action (slow ambulance response rates and unsafe bed occupancy) and implied in the song *Liar Liar GE2017*, which claimed that nurses needed to use food banks. Alongside these was the claim that the funding promised to the NHS (by both parties) was, still, the bare minimum required to maintain standards of care, as elucidated by The King's Fund and Nuffield Trust in 2015 (referenced in Chapter 5). This issue continued in 2017, with Andrew Gregory, writing two days before the general election in *the Daily Mirror* that the NHS was facing a "£12.4bn black hole by 2020 under Tories" (Gregory June 6,

2017). According to the article, an assessment of the manifestos by the think-tank the Health Foundation noted that “£140.8billion is needed in 2020/21 and even with the extra cash the Prime Minister is promising, there will be just £128.4billion” (Gregory June 6, 2017). The group’s analysis of NHS pledges revealed the funding gap of £12.4bn mentioned by Gregory in his headline, but also a £7bn gap under Labour’s plans. Professor Anita Charlesworth, Health Foundation director of research and economics, was quoted in the article as saying, “Whoever wins the election, promised spending for the NHS will still mean this is the decade – 2009/10 to 2020/21 – with the lowest rate of funding growth in the service’s history” (Gregory June 6, 2017).

Richard Vize also reported on this analysis in a *Guardian* article that concluded, “not even Labour is offering a solution to the funding problems” (Vize May 19, 2017). A few days later, the paper’s health policy editor, Denis Campbell, focused on a report by the Nuffield Trust, whose chief economist, Professor John Appleby, was quoted as saying that the manifesto pledges were “smaller than those recommended by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the Lords select committee on long-term NHS and social care sustainability as well as NHS organisations such as those representing hospital trusts” (Campbell May 22, 2017). In keeping with its strong Conservative partisanship, the *Daily Mail* reported on findings from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) that found “that annual spending on the NHS has reached £2,160 per person – up from just £500 in 1970” (Groves May 31, 2017). But despite this, the report’s author, Peter Dolton, was quoted as warning that the NHS’s “true need may be even higher, with Britain’s ageing population driving up demand inexorably” (Groves May 31, 2017).

These articles and reports from think-tanks revealed that whichever party made it into government in 2017, their NHS funding pledges would not have been enough to ensure that the service had enough funds for patients to receive world-class or exceptional care. The effect of this on the practical

arguments of all the actors in 2017 is that the goals of excellent healthcare (Labour and Conservative) and obtaining a government that will ensure a fully funded NHS (The People's Assembly's) are undermined. As such, The People's Assembly's claim for action – not voting for a Conservative government – would have been a necessary condition for that party to not obtain office, but it would not have been a sufficient condition in ensuring an incoming government would fully fund the NHS. It cannot be argued with any certainty as to whether the movement was aware of this shortfall in their argument, but it can be surmised that, on the basis of their campaigning history, an anti-austerity Labour government that did not fully-fund the NHS would be preferable to an austerity-based Conservative one that also fell short on funding. As such, the movement used negative campaigning to delegitimise the incumbent austerity government.

6.3.2 Trustworthiness: Lies or U-turns? The People's Assembly and the Media
As noted in the analysis above, The People's Assembly attempted to present the Conservatives as untrustworthy by questioning the personal conduct and character of Theresa May. One aspect of the personal attack centred around her U-turn on the calling of a snap general election, which may have subsequently resonated with voters as the Prime Minister flip-flopped on the dementia tax. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the Conservative manifesto was launched during week two of the campaign (12-18 May, 2017) and immediately began to attract negative coverage. Under the heading 'A long-term plan for elderly care', the party laid out their plans to fix the "system of care for the elderly" that they claimed was not working for hundreds of thousands of older people and was an unsustainable cost for "today's younger people" (Conservative Party 2017: 64-65). Their proposal was to align the means-test for domiciliary and residential care⁴³ so that

⁴³ At the time, domiciliary care was not means tested. This is still the case following the U-turn on this pledge.

whether a person received care at home or in a residential or nursing home they would pay for their care and “the family home will be taken into account along with other assets” to the threshold of £100,000 (Conservative Party 2017: 65). Four days after the launch of the manifesto, Theresa May made an unprecedented U-turn on this policy, which coincided with negative coverage of the Conservatives in the press in week three (Deacon et al. 2019: 38; Phillips 2019: 91). The U-turn struck a chord with the protest song and also functioned as way of challenging her campaign slogan.

During the 2017 election the Conservative’s central campaigning message was ‘strong and stable’ leadership with Theresa May, which appeared on billboards and other materials throughout the election. It was repeated incessantly as part of the Conservative’s campaign strategy, a move that proved to be significantly miscalculated as its overuse was hijacked by political opponents and lampooned by commentators (Ridge-Newman 2019). With every U-turn the strength and stability of May’s leadership was called into question, leading the Shadow Education Secretary, Angela Rayner, to refer to her in a tweet⁴⁴ as “weak and wobbly”. This challenge to May’s credibility was amplified across the media in several outlets. For example, *The Guardian* editorial claimed that “deep and lasting damage” to the “strong and stable” message had occurred because May had “added another U-turn to [the party’s] already remarkable list of U-turns, which include abandoned budget changes to national insurance for the self-employed, and the repeated denials of election plans” (Editorial May 22, 2017).

It was the *mirror.co.uk* that referred to her ‘weak and wobbly’ status the most, with many headlines incorporating the phrase and relating it to her “election” or “social care” climbdowns that featured in articles throughout the

⁴⁴ Angela Rayner used #WeakAndWobbly on 3 May, 2017. See: <https://twitter.com/AngelaRayner/status/859785437463949313> (last accessed 27/08/2019).

campaign. The content matched these headlines, as many commentators sought to target the turning point of the election:

Theresa May did not look strong or stable as she attempted a humiliating climb-down from her own plans for the dementia tax ...
She says strong and stable, she acts weak and wobbly.

Bloom May 22, 2017

‘strong and stable’ became weak and wobbly as the PM was forced to row back on the hated ‘dementia tax’.

Bartlett June 1, 2017

... for seven weeks now Theresa May has trotted out her ‘strong and stable’ mantra like a broken record in a bid to con voters into believing she is the one to lead Britain.

But the PM has exposed herself as weak and wobbly almost every time she opens her mouth.

Blanchard June 7, 2017

Image 4: Jeremy Deller's poster photographed in London



Even the Conservative-leaning *Daily Mail* commented on Theresa May's lacklustre performance stating that "she appeared uncomfortable when repeatedly questioned by journalists on the apparent U-turn and whether it showed her to be weak and wobbly, rather than her election slogan strong and stable" (Groves & Stevens May 23, 2017).

Away for the newspapers the slogan was also parodied by the artist Jeremy Deller in posters simply saying 'Strong and stable my arse' (see Image 4) that appeared across London in late May 2017. He was reported in *The Guardian* as

saying that, “he hoped the posters were self-explanatory, particularly after ‘this U-turn this morning’ from Theresa May on Conservative party social care policies” (Brown May 22, 2017). All of this served to create a narrative that Theresa May lacked consistency in her political messaging: a political backdrop that the lyrics of the protest song would have resonated with.

The People’s Assembly seized upon the weakness of May’s character to advance their goal of obtaining a trustworthy government by trying to convince enough of the electorate to negatively evaluate Theresa May and her party and, therefore, not vote for the Conservatives. They did this by appealing to trust as an heuristic and using negative campaigning techniques to get their message across. As noted in Chapter 2, negative political campaigning tactics notoriously use *ad hominem* arguments (Walton 2006: 122) and negative messaging to attack opponents’ traits, character, values and issues (Nai & Walter 2015; Freedman & Goldstein 1999). Appeals to emotion are commonplace in successful political advertising and, as Walton (2008: 106) claims, it is plausible to suggest that many “political debates and controversies are decided as much on the basis of emotional appeals and loyalties as on purely dispassionate reasoning”. Such personal attacks are common and can be relevant when questions about personal conduct are required, but portraying May as a ‘liar’ or a ‘threat’ was not relevant to the context of anti-austerity politics or to policy being made by the politicians. The use of personal attacks against May did not demonstrate that the Conservative government’s austerity measures were detrimental to the citizens of the UK or public services. To fully persuade an audience to not vote for the party would have required the explication of more propositions and premises to fill in the gaps, which could be met by information found in articles published or demonstrations organised by The People’s Assembly outside of the 2017 election considered here. As such, The People’s Assembly close focus on negative campaigning in 2017 meant that they lost the force of their 2015 anti-austerity argument. It could be that the movement considered that making the anti-austerity argument was redundant in this

election because one of the main parties was making it for them, but also that the public mood had shifted.

By the 2017 election the political landscape had begun to change and it seemed that the British public were getting weary and increasingly detaching their consent for austerity. The 34th edition of the British Attitudes Survey (BAS), conducted in 2016 and published in 2017, found that the public was turning against spending less: "... after 7 years of government austerity, public opinion show[ed] signs of moving back in favour of wanting more tax and spend" (Clery, et al., 2017: 2). The public wanted more spending on public services with around 8 in 10 people surveyed by BAS thinking that the "government should spend more or much more on health (83%); 7 in 10 on education (71%), and 6 in 10 on the police (57%)" (Clery, et al., 2017: 3). BSA data released in 2018 showed that there was a dominant view that the NHS was facing a funding crisis: "86% of people believe the NHS faces a "major" or "severe" funding problem, up 14 points since 2014" (Evans 2018). This view was articulated by Sam Fairbairn when he said: "The whole word 'austerity' is a dirty word now. I mean, Philip Hammond [the Chancellor of the Exchequer in May 2017] didn't mention it once in the budget last year [2016] and he tried to rebrand it as 'fiscal discipline' ... we created the movement, the demonstrations have already created a dirty word around the word austerity and people know it is bad even if they don't know exactly what it is or what it means for them. There is a sense that that is a bad thing" (Appendix 3).

Building on this extra knowledge it could be argued that instead of explicating the notion of austerity, the movement chose instead to focus on undermining the incumbent and compete in the negative campaigning space left by Labour.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the structure of practical arguments from three political actors active during the 2017 general election and given a critical evaluation of these by situating them in the broader political landscape of the mainstream media and other institutions. The critical evaluation has shown that none of the political actor's goals would have been achieved by

their claims for action and that a shift in the austerity debate may have impacted on the strength of the movement's counter-arguments. In the next chapter, an overall examination of the arguments from both elections will be given and conclusions reached.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter will discuss and contextualise the findings from this study. In particular, it will evaluate the communicative practices used by The People's Assembly in relation to the political landscape in each general election campaign. It will argue that the prevalence of the austerity frame in the 2015 manifestos and the anti-austerity frame in the 2017 Labour manifesto impacted on the repertoire utilised by the movements to communicate with the electorate. The chapter draws together and discusses the findings from Chapters 5 and 6 into a cohesive summary and outlines the original contribution made by this study. Finally, the chapter will suggest directions for future research.

7.1 Social Movements and Electoral Messaging

Social movements are consistently conceptualised as distinct from the normal institutionalised politics that occurs through voting and political parties, yet movements have long been engaged in political communication as part of their activity (Downing 2008; Goldstone 2003; Flesher Fominaya 2014). Movement action and communication can have a refining and reinforcing effect on conventional elections through the highlighting of specific issues that shape party behaviour, which, in turn, can impact public decision-making on who to vote for during election time (Goldstone 2003: 8-9). However, as shown in Chapter 2 in the field of political communication the literature has traditionally focused on the ways in which institutional political actors – political parties and politicians – have communicated, often via the media, with the electorate. Conversely, the social movement literature has tended to focus on extra-parliamentary politics that occur outside of election time and, as such, neglects this aspect of the political process. This thesis demonstrates that a UK-based social movement, The People's Assembly Against Austerity, engaged in electoral politics and positioned themselves as political actors in campaigns.

This thesis has shown that a social movement in the UK operating in the field of electoral campaigning put forth critical arguments to partisan political ones

that, in the case of 2017, may have been adopted by institutional actors (albeit a party sympathetic to movement-style politics). The analysis revealed that The People's Assembly tailored their communicative practices during the elections to focus on delivering a message to voters. In 2015, their argument focused on challenging the notion of austerity present in both political parties' manifestos by highlighting that it was a political choice, not an economic necessity, and that such a choice was damaging public services and eroding equality of access. This message was conveyed through the movement's website and podcasts, which, despite the tactic's limited reach, were designed to inform the voting public. The communicative tactics used by the movement sought to challenge the concept of austerity and inform the electorate of that challenge, but did not seek to influence the electorate's voting intention as they did in 2017. It can be argued that this was due to the movement's understanding that, in 2015, both major parties remained committed to implementing the programme of austerity through the cutting of the deficit. This understanding was confirmed by the National Secretary of The People's Assembly (as detailed in Chapter 5) and finds agreement with the analysis conducted in this thesis of the arguments made in the 2015 Labour and Conservative manifestos. The conclusion to Chapter 5 highlighted the dominance of the austerity frame in both Labour and Conservative manifestos, which resonated with the electorate in 2015, the strength of which even The People's Assembly's claim for action – mobilising a post-election demonstration to call for an end to austerity – implicitly acknowledged.

In 2017, their argument against austerity was backgrounded in favour of engaging in negative campaigning. As noted at the end of the last chapter, not only was the public's consent for austerity waning in 2017 but there was also a Labour Party that "favoured elaborations of larger social and political visions" and had adopted a model of politics that was more movement-led (Blumler 2019: 55). The election and subsequent re-election of the veteran left-winger Jeremy Corbyn as the leader of the Labour Party in 2015 and 2016

cleaved open an opportunity for the political mainstreaming of the anti-austerity argument (Cammaerts 2018: 182). In the first of hundreds of campaign rallies for the Labour leadership in 2015, his life-long campaigning activities and movement-based approach to politics emerged as he recalled The People's Assembly's demonstration (the movement's 2015 claim for action), stating that the "250,000 people [who] came on the anti-austerity march ... are involved in politics in a different way ... I think we need to build a social movement" (Corbyn 2016: 16; see also Seymour 2016: 7). It is recognised that the emergence of political figures such as Jeremy Corbyn cannot be understood without factoring in the influence of social movements. Although it may not be possible to fully assess the impact of movements on the parliamentary political landscape, as Flesher Fominaya identifies, movement messages could "galvanize popular support for leaders with an anti-austerity agenda" (2017: 14). It can be argued that a political landscape containing such a high-profile anti-austerity political actor may have impacted on The People's Assembly's communicative tactics. Due to there being a viable anti-austerity political alternative, the movement concentrated less on putting forward an argument *against* austerity and, instead, focused more on trying to convince enough of the electorate *not* to vote for the Conservatives. As noted in Section 6.3.2, The People's Assembly may have seized upon the weakness of Theresa May's character and drawn on negative campaigning techniques to exploit this, but the movement's case in 2017 may have been more robust if it interrogated or drew attention to the weaknesses in their opponents' *arguments* (as it attempted in 2015), instead of personalities, or the strengths of its own. For example, the concern with trust could have focused more closely on the use of collective provision (taxes) to pay for treatment offered by private, for-profit providers, an aspect of privatisation that the Conservatives may have found it hard to defend against. A look toward the value of unfairness used by campaigners for tax justice may offer a solution to this. However, it must be noted that with the election of 2017 being called so unexpectedly, the tactics that were employed were possibly

more effective as an intervention in electoral campaigning than those used in 2015.

From this summary it can be argued that there was a shift in the weight of the competing pro- and anti-austerity frames in the elections considered here. This view helps to answer the overarching research question of what arguments the movement presented and to what extent they challenged (or complemented) electoral messaging. In 2015, the language of austerity was being employed by both of the main political parties and the movement was trying to challenge that language, but its communicative tactics did not engage the broader electorate. By 2017, the public's appetite for the 'make-do-and-mend' spirit was waning and there were institutional actors that were more inclined to talk about the negative consequences of austerity policies and to suggest alternatives that The People's Assembly and other anti-austerity movements had long been campaigning for. Whether this represents a paradigm shift in UK politics is yet to be revealed, but it is noted here that within only two years the anti-austerity frame had gained more prominence in the electoral campaigning of the political actors analysed. It is difficult to say what role The People's Assembly played in such a shift, but they were a point of concentrated engagement with the arguments against austerity in this research. In a broader sense, it could be argued that social movements' focused campaigning can provide a site of exploration by academics in order to understand potential future shifts in the political debate.

What this analysis shows is that a social movement was actively engaging in the parliamentary political process in an attempt to present counter-arguments to the electorate. The communication of these counter-arguments by the movement constituted a 'body of knowledge' through which to understand the political landscape and to make decisions about what to do or what (alternative) policies to choose. The use of Faircloughian Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) as a method enabled the reconstruction of these distinct arguments and allowed for comparisons between political actors to

be drawn and counter-arguments to be revealed. What this insight does is embed social movements in the bigger picture of large-scale power relations and situates them as one of the processes of social change.

In summary, a social movement can challenge 'official' or dominant meanings through the spreading of ideas between individuals and groups, which in turn informs the political landscape. They can bring about social change through the use of a wide variety of strategies and tactics that influence public opinion, popular discourse and public policy (Staggenborg 2015: 1), and the mediation practices of social movements assist the dissemination of societal critiques that is essential for a functioning democracy (Cammaerts 2018: 5). Within a democracy there should be space to hold the State or government accountable for its actions and provide some level of participation in parliamentary decision-making and transparency on how those decisions are made. Social movements occupy this space and communicate political alternatives and, therefore, their arguments and messages should be examined in the field of political communication. The inclusion of extra-institutional actors adds value to the field because it draws in counter-arguments that broaden the political debate, especially at election time, and draws out what they are saying and how they challenge or endorse dominant frames.

7.2 Further Research

The effects of these arguments on the voting public, whether they have changed political attitudes or behaviours as a result of the premises put forth, has not been explored in this thesis. The focus has been on the internal structure of the arguments themselves and on positioning social movements as political actors during election campaigns. This is because the thesis has concentrated on electoral campaigns, a period that is considered too short for the generation of "decisive shifts in political attitudes" (Franklin 2004: 221). If the researcher had more time, the project could have extended the time-frames to include the beginning of each year, which would have allowed for a more robust discussion on the impact of arguments on the voting public.

Long-term cumulative effects of the impact of the political actors' arguments could have been drawn out or foregrounded. However, a full overview of the campaigns would only have been viable for the 2015 election as this was scheduled to occur, allowing time for the parties to hold their long-campaign and for the movement to organise demonstrations and other communicative tactics.

Future research could also be broadened out to create an overview of other movements, including populist and right-wing movements, and their impact on voting intention. Such research could analyse the language used in tactics (such as protest events, lobbying and the use of social media to disseminate information) employed by these movements when contesting governments and policymaking, and ask questions about the challenge that they pose for democratic participation. One example is the rise in young people's participation in movements, such as the recent Climate Strike marches, the analysis of which would make possible a contemporaneous analysis of the relationship between movement politics and electoral politics to provide an assessment of the impact of this on the future of democracy. This research would contribute to the central question of how, whether and why British democracy can be considered representative, responsive and/or legitimate. These are clearly questions of very high importance in the current context in which democracies (including British democracy) are experiencing significant issues in each of these areas.

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Appendix 1

NVivo Codebook: Nodes

Name	Description
Circumstances (C)	The particular circumstances – institutional, social and empirical facts – within which political actors are acting
A Privatisation	Any reference to the term privatisation either as a nominalisation (e.g. “The Conservatives favour an all-out privatisation that is, following the Health and Social Care Act, forcing CCGs to tender out services as much as possible”) or as a process (e.g. “people are fed up with Theresa May's lies and a Government who's cut, privatised and attacked the poorest and most vulnerable”). This is placed in (C) as an empirical fact (there are NHS services that are provided by private healthcare companies) and an institutional fact (the government has a <i>duty</i> to provide free, universal healthcare (collective provision) and this duty is something that the government <i>ought</i> to be concerned with).
B Underfunding OR Cuts	Any use of the terms ‘cuts’ or ‘underfunding’ either to a specific NHS service or in general. Underfunding could be described as ‘cuts to spending’ (e.g. “Since 2010, billions of pounds have been cut from budgets that pay for adult social care”) or ‘cuts to services or provision’ (e.g. “Even in the last four years, during this radical period of austerity, we have seen a 10% cut in mental health beds”) or used as a noun (e.g. “the People's Assembly Against Austerity have all been campaigning against NHS cuts for many years now”).
C Patient Suffering or Care	Patient care (noun phrase) is identified as reference to the medical care that a patient receives from a healthcare professional or as the care (verb) that a person is seeking or is receiving when unwell (i.e. being looked after). Patient suffering is identified in the texts as the reverse of this, for example reports of patients receiving poor treatment in hospitals (e.g. “increasing numbers of patients being treated in corridors or car parks”) or patient's being at risk due to care being denied (e.g. “Patient safety is already at risk. If the [cyber]attack is not dealt with quickly, it is no exaggeration to say that lives could be at risk”). This is placed in (C) as an empirical fact (i.e. operations being cancelled and direct reports of poor patient treatment) and an institutional fact (i.e. the government has a <i>duty</i> to provide “good levels of care to everyone”).
D Staff	Any reference to the levels of staff (doctors or nurses) within the NHS: either an increase or a decrease in numbers.
E IT	Any reference to the cyberattack on the NHS and its effects. This is placed in (C) as an empirical fact and is only found in the 2017 data.
F Waiting Times	Any reference to GP, hospital or A&E waiting times (i.e. the time waited by a patient before being seen or treated by a healthcare

Name	Description
	professional). This is placed in (C) as an empirical fact.
G Ideology	Any reference to neoliberal ideology as the basis for the context of action. This is placed in (C) as an institutional fact because of the claim that neoliberalism, through cultivating an individualised society, is implicitly eroding the government's <i>duty</i> to provide collective provision for its citizens and this duty is something with which the government <i>ought</i> to be concerned (e.g. "in certain areas such as Barnet where the council has been very ideologically tied to austerity in particular so many public services and local services have been cut ... and it is only going to get worse if the government continues to commit to this austerity agenda").
Values (V)	What the values that the author/agent is concerned with or ought to be concerned with e.g. personal responsibility, equality, fairness etc.
A Trust	The value of trust: coded as any reference to 1) the relationship between the political establishment and citizens who may entrust their government to perform certain functions in society (e.g. maintaining public services, military defences, etc.) or to have confidence in them to keep their electoral promises and/or tell the truth, which reflects a belief in the benevolent motivation of another party (see Levi & Stoker 2000; Norris 2011); 2) whether an individual judges that they trust or distrust another party that could be expressed as 'trusting x to do y' or 'not trusting x to do y', which reflects the performance capacity of another person (or group or institution) (Norris 2011).
B Equality	The value of equality (underpinned by the notion of moral equality i.e. treating people with equal concern and respect): coded as any reference to equality of access to healthcare.
C Fairness	The value of fairness: coded as any reference to 1) protection of the worst off or vulnerable, understood as protecting the vulnerable, poor communities, and those in need; 2) intergenerational fairness, understood in this thesis as a relationship of economic reciprocity between the old and the young that prescribes an equality of wealth redistribution or financial burden-sharing between the generations; 3) workers' rights, understood as protecting the working conditions of employees.
Goals (G)	Any proposed solutions to the issues face by the NHS and patients that would bring about a possible future state of affairs in accordance with the 'Values' of the political actor.
A Overarching Goals	
End to Programme of Austerity	Coded to this node were any commitment (often marked by the modal verb 'will') to the end of austerity and/or the removal or reversal of private company involvement in the NHS, the imposition

Name	Description
and/or Privatisation (2015)	of caps on the profits made by private healthcare providers, or a return to public ownership. For example, "Where private companies are involved in providing clinical services, we will impose a cap on any profits they can make from the NHS" (Labour 2015: 34).
Publicly funded healthcare (2017)	Any reference to publicly owned, funded or run healthcare service was coded to this node. For example, Labour's claim that it would "make the NHS the preferred provider" (Labour 2017: 69) or the movement's references to health insurance.
NHS Excellent Care (2015 & 1027)	Coded to this node were any reference to a "commitment" or "ambition" to "ensuring" that the NHS is "providing" / "delivering" care to patients that is "exceptional" / "best quality" / "world-class quality".
Rescue the NHS (2015)	Any reference to rescuing or saving the NHS was coded to this node. For example, Labour's claim that they would "rescue the NHS" (Labour Manifesto 2015: 33).
B Supporting-Goals	
Changing the Debate (2015)	Coded to this node were any commitment or call to changing or challenging the austerity frame. For example, "what we need to do is use th[e] movement to crack open the whole debate and start talking".
Clinical Outcomes (2017)	Coded to this node were references made to the 'outcomes' or treatment for patients within the NHS. For example, a commitment to "make clinical outcomes more transparent" (Conservative 2017: 68).
Increase Staff Numbers or Work Environment (2015)	Coded to this node were references to any intention or commitment (often marked by the modal verb 'will') to increase or maintain the number of doctors, nurses and other NHS staff. For example, "Labour will invest in 20,000 more nurses, 8,000 more GPs, and 3,000 more midwives" (Labour 2015: 10).
Patient Empowerment (2015)	Coded to this node were any intention or commitment (often marked by the modal verb 'will') to proposed empowerment of patients through the provision of information (e.g. safety records of hospitals, electronic health records, access to personal healthcare budgets) that will help them to make 'informed choices' about their own healthcare.
Seven Day NHS (2015)	Coded to this node were any references to creating or implementing a seven-day NHS, often marked by the modal verb 'will'. For example, "We will ensure you can see a GP and receive the hospital care you need, 7 days a week" (Conservative 2015: 37).

Name	Description
Reversal of Health and Social Care Act (2017)	Any references to a commitment to reverse or remove the Health and Social Care Act. For example, Labour's commitment to "repeal the Health and Social Care Act" (Labour 2017: 69).
05 Claims for Action (A)	Reference to what the political actor (presumably) ought to do (ought to do A) or A is presumably the right thing to do in order to achieve their goal(s).
A Tax Rises	Coded to this node was any reference to a commitment to raising taxes as a way of increasing NHS funding.
B Change of Govt	Coded to this node was any reference to calls to remove the Conservative government (a call to action). For example, "Everyone who values the NHS, or who wants to ensure their own and their loved ones' health, everyone who wants a decent society should have none of it. The Tory cuts have put us all at risk. Kick the Tories out one June 8!" (The People's Assembly website, May 15, 2017).
C Changes to Existing Govt Policy	Coded to this node were any commitment (often marked by the modal verb 'will') to changing <i>current</i> legislation, frameworks or regulators that will change the way the NHS operates and/or achieve certain goals.
D Future Financial Increases / Extra Resources	Coded to this node were any commitment (often marked by the modal verb 'will') to increase 'funding' or 'spending' on or in the NHS. For example, "we will increase NHS spending by a minimum of £8 billion" (Conservative 2017: 66). Or commitment to extra resources such as ambulances, beds, equipment etc.
E Demonstrating OR Mobilising	Coded to this node were any references to mobilising people to demonstrate to call for an End to Austerity. For example, "The People's Assembly Against Austerity is calling for a national demonstration and festival straight after the election to send a clear message to the new government that we demand an alternative to austerity" (The People's Assembly Podcast 4, 12 April, 2015).

Appendix 2

Matrix Coding_General Election 2015 data sets

	Conservative_Manifesto2015_Health	Labour_Manifesto_2015_Health	The People's Assembly (combined)_2015
Circumstances (C)	203	121	2647
A Privatisation	0	0	711
B Underfunding OR Cuts	0	45	703
C Patient Suffering or Care	123	30	289
D Staff	28	25	108
E IT	0	0	0
F Waiting Times	52	21	93
G Hospital Closures	0	0	0
H Ideology	0	0	743
Values (V)	99	127	965
A Trust	0	0	335
B Equality	99	0	257
C Fairness	0	127	373
Goals (G)	390	421	445
<i>Overarching Goals</i>	45	86	99
End to Programme of Austerity / Privatisation	0	34	99
NHS Excellent Care	45	0	0
Rescue the NHS	0	52	0
<i>B Supporting-Goals</i>	345	335	346
Changing the Debate	0	0	324
Increase Staff Numbers / Work Environment	28	167	0
Patient Empowerment	179	168	0
Seven Day NHS	138	0	22
Claims for Action (A)	84	64	861
A Tax Rises	0	0	0
B Change of Govt	0	0	62
C Changes to Existing Govt Policy	0	41	0
<i>D Future Financial Increases</i>	84	23	179
da Investment	84	23	179
da Extra Resources	0	0	0
E Demonstrating OR Mobilising	0	0	620

Matrix Coding_General Election 2017 data sets

	Conservative_Manifesto2017_Health	Labour_Manifesto_2017_Health	The People's Assembly (combined)_2017
Circumstances (C)	179	176	810
A Privatisation	0	27	155
B Underfunding OR Cuts	0	37	449
C Patient Suffering or Care	161	75	100
D Staff	0	0	21
E IT	0	0	85
F Waiting Times	18	17	0
G Hospital Closures	0	20	0
H Ideology	0	0	0
Values (V)	246	164	1557
A Trust	0	0	1441
B Equality	196	121	116
C Fairness	36	43	0
Goals (G)	189	129	54
A Overarching Goals	74	63	54
NHS Excellent Care	74	44	0
Publicly funded healthcare	0	19	54
B Supporting-Goals	115	66	0
Clinical outcomes	115	0	0
Reverse HSCA	0	66	0
Claims for Action (A)	260	121	227
A Tax Rises	0	48	30
B Change of Govt (ToriesOut)	0	0	182
C Changes to Existing Govt Policy	118	21	0
D Future Financial Increases	142	52	15
da Investment	100	20	15
db Extra Resources	42	32	0
E Demonstrating OR Mobilising	0	0	0

Appendix 3

Interview with Sam Fairbairn the national organiser of The People's Assembly

Monday 8 May, 2017 at 2pm, 52 Beachy Road, London

An introduction to my research was given before the recording was started. Sam read through and signed the ethics forms. I left him with a copy of the ethics form and an information sheet.

The recording was performed using two mini-microphones attached to my iPhone 5s and captured also on my iPad 2 that was placed in the middle of the table and recorded sound as we spoke. All place markers have been removed for clarity.

AR = Abi Rhodes, interviewer

SF = Sam Fairbairn, interviewee

Recording entitled = 'People's Assembly'

AR: So, as I have said, I recently attended the NHS demonstration and a good demonstration it was. I just wonder if you can briefly describe what your reasons were for organising the event itself?

SF: Yeah, I mean, well, obviously over the winter it was clear that the NHS was a major issue in British politics. It was clear that the government, well it was clear to us that the government was doing virtually nothing to address a deepening crisis in the NHS. It also became clear that it was the worst crisis the NHS had ever faced and it was something that I think people across the country felt very, very concerned about and actually if you think about it nobody else was, you know, no one was really doing anything about it, apart from you have the Red Cross saying there's a humanitarian crisis in the NHS [1:01] and then intervening to help ease the crisis, which is historic. You know this is an historic situation that you have, where ultimately the government hides; is doing nothing. You'd think that any serious government would inject,

at that minute, it doesn't matter about the consequences in terms of debt or the economy, but when you have got a huge crisis in the health service they would just chuck in a load of money to solve it, but no they don't do that whatsoever. And obviously there was a huge, huge amount of public outrage about it, and quite rightly, and also NHS workers felt very, very strongly and angry about the situation including their conditions were deteriorating even further over that period. Now we recognised that there was going to be a crisis in the NHS, every winter there has been one for as long as we can remember, so we started organising the demonstration; actually before the winter we had the idea that we needed something around it, but we had no idea how deep the crisis would actually get over this winter, last winter particularly. So, it became clear very, very quickly that the demonstration was going to be a big demonstration and that it was more and more necessary and virtually every single day you had a new front page saying whatever it was that there was a new crisis in one aspect or another of the NHS.

So, I suppose why we organised it was [2:36] we could see that there was a crisis coming. We could see that, although it was being reported in a big way; you know obviously people were very concerned about it but there was nothing that they could do about it. You know what I mean? So, I suppose, and you could feel that people wanted to do something about it. So, obviously we wanted to demonstrate mass opposition to the way that the government was handling the situation in a very public way – number one – and try and put pressure on the government to do something about it and, at the same time, give people a direction where they feel that they can express their anger in a constructive way. Now, we never think that one demonstration is going to change anything or that everything is going to be great after one demonstration, but I think part of it is you can't just see one demonstration as [3:35] one demonstration. I think a demonstration is a process of firstly the process of building into that demonstration and building up to that demonstration. To get one of that kind of size, which was what, 250,000, actually you don't just put the call out and people turn up because if we could

do it like that we would have one every week! But it's not like that, it is actually a very big process involving thousands and thousands of people to get something like that together: that includes, individuals from as simple as sharing the information on Facebook, reading up about it, learning about the issue that are to do with it, to people going to their mates saying "let's go down to this" and then that starts a discussion and a debate, I suppose, with their networks around them, their workmates going to them, and then there is obviously more official structures like trade union branches where the issues are raised. So the process of building a demonstration starts a debate in [4:43] society amongst, potentially if it is a big demonstration like that or bigger then you are talking about, I think, potentially millions of people actually, in terms of how that reaches people, you know the kind of ripple effect of just someone saying to someone "do you want to come on this demonstration" and someone says "oh, why", "because look at the NHS, this is happening". [5:05] It just starts that debate. Now, actually that has a huge impact in society beyond just the demonstration itself. Then you think about the demonstration itself and how many people wanted to come on the demo but couldn't come on the demo ...

AR: Exactly, yep.

SF: ... or would have done but couldn't and how many people were thinking about it and then regretted it when they didn't, when they saw the size of it, or whatever; or how many people was it the first demonstration they'd ever been on and were inspired by it, learnt stuff, took stuff back from the speeches or discussing with people around them, or the people that brought them, or whatever it is, and then go back to their workmates and their friends and say [5:39] look at this demonstration I was on and show them the pictures and the videos or whatever it is. So actually, the ripple effect out of that, the after effect is very, very big as well and that is without counting the press impact that we managed to have at the same time, which would have reached more people that didn't even hear about it before and didn't have those discussions previously.

So, actually the process of building a big demonstration like that is much more than just people turning up and it having impact, it is about people organising amongst themselves and taking it upon themselves; that here is a way that we can start to impact society, it empowers people, it gives people confidence to take action in all sorts of other different ways; and I think that after the demos, the big demos, which is what we have always said, actually what I'd quite like to see is mass strike action taking place against the government, direct action, more of these kinds of things that in lots of way have a much more confrontational and, I suppose, actually impact the way that society running [6:49] in one way or another; strike action anyway, but how do we get to a point where people are confident to take that kind of action? You have always got to think that the big demonstrations all help people to feel like there is [7:00] a movement, or there is a large group of people that will support you if you take that action; and it also kind of builds up toward that as well. I think that that is why we organise demonstrations in those ways. And I think it is very, very easy to kind of dismiss them. I think demonstrations are dismissed far too quickly and far too easily; and the other thing I think, that you need to recognise, is that I do think that they put pressure on the government; in that those events do put pressure on the government and I think we have also got to think, is the government ever going to turn around to us and say "oh, you know, because of your demonstration or this strike action or whatever that we did or didn't do this", they will always try and spin it in a way to make us feel like we are powerless.

AR: Yeah.

SF: Because if they start to give the impression that we have the ability to change the direction of policy or government policy then they are lost, they are out of here [8:04] [laughs]. That is the biggest hurdle for us, convincing people that if they fight back, if we do take action, then we have an impact. You know what I mean?

AR: Oh yes, absolutely. Yeah I do [laughs]. Building on that a bit you mention 'the process' I'd kind of like to explore the considerations that is given to the

call for action. You mentioned disseminating things on social media and stuff like that. What I am specifically interested in, and you mention giving people direction, what kind of consideration is given to the language that is used within the copy itself, you know the wording on the placards or the slogans or on the website itself? I noticed a cross over between the call for action for the NHS demo on The People's Assembly website and on the Unite website and they were exactly the same wording. Do you think that it draws on or amplifies how people are already feeling? Are you using certain language to get people to go "actually that makes me really angry" because there was a bit about a 'threat' [9:18], you know that the NHS is under threat.

SF: Yeah, well we do think about the language really carefully and I suppose; although I think you'd be surprised because I think we give off the impression that, with the kind of scale of the events that we have that we have got a huge, huge team working on them and that we have got hundreds of employees and, to be honest, any normal work place or organisation that would pull off this similar kind of scale events would have a whole team just about messaging and marketing. A whole team on press. A whole team on social media. A whole team on organising the logistics of the event. A whole team on speeches. You know what I mean?

AR: Yeah.

SF: And there would be different sections [10:00] but we have got two full time staff seconded to us and a part time staff and that's it. We have obviously got to pull in lots of volunteers, anyway that's not the point, but I suppose my point with that is, we think very, very carefully about the messaging and about the wording and how to put across a message; but a lot of the time I wish we had a bit more people who know what they are doing with it. Do you know what I mean?

AR: OK. Yeah.

SF: I mean, we kind of do and we have got experience with it, but it is not like we have a dedicated team just thinking about what is going to connect with

people here like lots of other organisations would do. Nonetheless, we always think carefully about the messaging we put out and I suppose for us it is about how do you [...] for example, with the NHS demonstration I think that a lot of people understand that there is a problem and a crisis in the NHS, but they don't really understand what the government is actually doing. There is all sorts of jargon, like what's an STP and how do people know this [11:08] and PFI and god knows, and actually there is a whole number of complications and whatever, which I think is intentional from the government's side; is to try and put all this complicated language out to try and confuse people about what is happening so that they don't get to grips with it. However, how do you coalesce all of that [11:26] down into slogans which everyone can connect with, that's the real ...

AR: Yes.

SF: ... the real challenge with it and I think actually for the first time that demonstration managed to do that in quite a serious way, because even before then the NHS stuff was, it was kind of [...] people were doing stuff about the NHS and campaigning on it but even then it didn't quite have a clear and focused message. So we broke that down into 'ourNHS' and 'No cuts, closures, or privatisations', very simple, very easy to digest and you can always build on those different things. So, yeah, I think that it is very, very important that there is a succinct message that is very targeted and I guess at any one point, whatever it is about, I suppose what we're thinking is what is the big issue, where is the government weakest on at any one point? What's their weak link in the chain I suppose, and what is the thing [12:28] that most people are angry about that you can mobilise on. So it happened to be after the crisis, after the winter that was around the NHS. If you look at it now I think we are talking about, well obviously everything is about the election now, but the schools thing is absolutely huge – school's funding cuts – so we are kind of shifting; not shifting attention away from anything, because it is all to do with a crisis of the government, the government, it is all to do with austerity [13:01]; but what is the key thing that we can expose the

government on at any one point and mobilise the broadest numbers of people that can have the biggest impact and sometimes that is a very general message. Just after the election [2015] we did a very, very big demonstration 'End Austerity Now', which was a very simple thing and we actually organised that demonstration way before the general election took place and we thought whatever government gets in – because it was Miliband versus Cameron – whatever government gets in were going to need to continue to build a broad-based movement against austerity because even if the Labour Party won their, Miliband's, line was austerity but austerity-lite, do you know what I mean? [13:44]

AR: Yes. Yes it was.

SF: So we thought, right we still need to have a demonstration: 'End Austerity Now' because it summed up the moment and actually when Cameron got in I actually thought, "oh God, no one is going to turn up, everyone is going to be really depressed afterwards and they are going to feel deflated" but actually it was the opposite; it really [14:00] sparked people's anger. Do you know what I mean? [laughs]

AR: Yes [laughs].

SF: Sometimes you just can't predict, but it was so good that we had that demonstration. We were absolutely right to think there needs to be something big after the election, 'cos that just captured it and it took off around there and a similar thing happened around it. So, the messaging is absolutely key and I just sometimes wish, I feel sometimes that it is a bit by mistake that we get it right [laughs]

AR: [laughs] A bit of luck maybe?!

SF: Yeah [laughs] but it does involve a layer of, you do have to have a political analysis of the situation as it develops and how that is impacting people in order to think what is the thing that is going to be effecting people most and that you can really mobilise stuff around. Because you know sometimes you

see people that are very, very bad at it – you see essays on placards [laughs] and things like that.

AR: [laughs] [14:55] It needs to needs to be obvious doesn't it?

SF: Absolutely, and actually if you look back to the anti-war movement, the early days of the anti-war movement, I think that they got it spot on with a whole number of their messaging; but I don't know if you remember the February 15th, the big, big demonstrations, just the big 'NO' that's all it was on the placard. 'NO'. Now, if you can get everything down into one word that's good. That's brilliant. It captured the moment. What more do you need to say?

AR: And so you think that that was because [15:29] everyone kind of understood what they were saying no to? There was a broad consensus in society at that particular moment ...

SF: Yeah.

AR: ... against what the government were trying to do?

SF: Yeah, it was THE big issue of the time and then you have the blood spot alongside it, which was David Gentleman's design, and it was just brilliant.

AR: Yes.

SF: Absolutely genius.

AR: Yeah. I miss the lay out in Parliament Square which was a pity because it looked absolutely fantastic from the photos I saw.

So, you have mentioned putting pressure on the government, is that via raising public awareness do you think? Or is it a direct impact, you know, look we're here were outside Parliament or is it both? [16:11].

SF: I think it is both. Yeah, I think it is both things. You can't get that "we're here" without raising the awareness and the social thing. I think part of it is always thinking, for me, how are we going to change society. It can't just be about relying on the politicians to do it for us otherwise we would be lobbyists

basically or we wouldn't bother with a lot of what we are doing. And there is a different strategy amongst [16:37] lots of different organisations. Some organisations are very focused on lobbying or meeting with MPs and stuff and sitting down with them, or whatever it is, and trying to push forward or write up bills, or all that kind of stuff. Now all of that is good work, and you can get some progress, I am not saying that it is not worth doing anything like that, but, for me, I think how are we actually going to address the real issues here and where has most of the gains that we have made as a movement; or I suppose as a class, really that is what I am saying, where have most of the gains for ordinary people come from? It is from people organising and mobilising in a mass way [17:23] and having a mass impact on society. Not that comes about from, if you think about, well there are all sorts of examples, you know like the suffragette movement, you think about the civil rights movement in America, you think about the anti-apartheid movement. You know, all of these things that really made big, big gains they come about from people actually organising and mobilising and being involved with the moment themselves [17:50], rather than it being a top down thing where you have got a few people scurrying about the halls of parliament chatting to MPs or whatever it is. All of that is great, get on with it, but surely we should be backed up with a big movement. So I am interested, in terms of mobilising people and how do we mobilise people on a very mass scale and that is a big question really; and that is what I am more focused on and what we're more focused on.

So, it is about creating an impact [18:24] in society in a big way and that comes about from, you can't just have things in London you have to have things across the country; even the things where you feel like you are just talking to people who agree with you, I don't actually think that that is right and even if you are then, so what, give the people that agree with you a boost and tell them to go out and talk to other people. So, it is about putting across that thing; so the public meetings, even activist meetings are important in the localities: little stunts or street stalls even, and all of that stuff that you feel

like is making no difference at all, actually does have an impact in terms of broad [...] I don't think that we should, that any activity [19:08] is worthless or pointless, it is all about giving people the confidence to go out and feel like they are making an impact and doing something and enjoying and part of a much broader and wider movement. So, I think all of that has a big impact on the government really.

AR: Yeah?

SF: And, as I say, it can be quite frustrating because there is no kind of measure of that. Do you see what I mean?

AR: Yes.

SF: There is nothing that you can say, right because we did this, this, this, then this happened. It is all [...] well sometimes there is, like the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign, for example, obviously had a [19:49] very, very big victory and managed to keep the hospital open after a very big campaign, a community campaign down there; but that is rare that you can point to something like that, so decisive, which can be frustrating. But, they are there.

AR: Yeah. Absolutely. And that brings me on, you were mentioning protests and demonstrations not being in isolation, you mentioned it a couple of times and I think that you did mention it at the speeches in Parliament Square, which sparked a few thoughts for me. Is there any sort of particular action outside of protesting and demonstration that you feel has had – whether it is a communal or an impact on the community itself or an impact on something else that is slightly bigger, like the Lewisham thing – is there anything specific that you, organising for The People's Assembly, so is there any particular activity that's worked? [20:49]

SF: Well, I think the main, the most exciting form of action that anyone can take is strike action, I think. I mean, if you look at the junior doctors strike, OK eventually they signed a fairly crappy contract, I think, but the impact that that had was absolutely enormous [21:04] and the same is true of any kind of strike action. That is the most effective form of protest, or whatever, that we

can take. Our ability to withdraw our labour. I think that is very, very exciting. It is something that we can't organise directly, obviously we're not a trade union, but it is something we can think about: mobilising community support and solidarity for workers out on strike. So, during the junior doctors strike we organised a whole number of community rallies for junior doctors we brought people down to the picket lines, all of those kind of things. Even held public meetings with junior doctors and other trade unions, which concretely demonstrated that they were supported by a wide number of people. We would get in touch with, or if we knew any high profile celebrity types to come down or even do a video message, which would then reach layers of people. I suppose it is about that sense of working together, even though it is about their own pay, their own contract, the conditions that they are fighting over, actually if they win that then that is beneficial for everybody, no matter what you are doing. Do you know what I mean? [22:20]

AR: Yeah.

SF: It is about getting that message across. I mean, look at the tube strikers when they go on strike they get absolutely hounded in the press – “Oh these people are earning forty five grand a year” – but there is a reason that they are earning forty five grand a year because they are well organised. They work together and actually they have managed to win a whole bunch of battles which is why they get a better pay. Now, it is better that they do that, because that sets a standard and an example. If they are getting that then everyone should be getting that. It's not that everybody is getting lower so they should get lower; we should be thinking about it the other way around. All of that, that is quite inspirational when you really see communities mobilising in support of striking workers and that kind of thing. That's very, very good. [23:10]. In terms of other actions, you know if you look at the DPAC, the Disabled People Against the Cuts, who have, I mean there is a small group of them but a small group who are willing to take quite militant action if you like, like blocking roads and doing all those kinds of things and it is very, very powerful when you see people in wheelchairs and some of the most

vulnerable people actually taking that form of action. I think that had been quite inspirational.

AR: Yeah.

SF: You know, and I suppose that kind of thing is very useful to get across a message very quickly in the media and in the press and that kind of stuff to much wider layers of people. So, that's that kind of action. I genuinely just feel that it is very exciting when people get [...] when you look at what individuals do for the movement in their areas, people literally, and even if they're only involved for a short amount of time or whatever, but they do, a lot of people [24:04] give up a huge amount of time; they have got a day job, they have got their nine to five and they have got a family, or whatever else, but they will come along to the meetings, they'll do a street stall on a Saturday afternoon in the pissing rain [laughs] ...

AR: [laughs] Yeah.

SF: ... like, all of that is quite an inspirational ...

AR: Yeah.

SF: ... process I think, and it shows, the only thing they are getting from it, they are not getting anything out of it for themselves in that moment; it is about genuinely believing that we have the ability to change society and they want to do that and contribute to that and it think that that is very, very inspiring really.

AR: Yeah, and at a more grassroots level as well, I guess, 'cos you mentioned a bit of distinction between lobbyists and social movements and how social movements possibly, in your understanding, would be a group that is a lot more focused on society and societal changes rather than trying to tramp up and down the halls of Westminster to knock on individual MPs [25:06] ...

SF: Yeah.

AR: ... doors to sit down and have a coffee and say this is what needs to change. So, it would be more of a societal pressure, well no, a societal change that could then make that eventual change.

SF: Yeah and force them to give us these, to make concessions to us, but ultimately it is; I suppose there is all sorts of different views. It's, can you change the system [25:33] as? It is, can it be reformed and we get good, well, it is a difficult one.

AR: It is yeah.

SF: Because this is slightly going outside of the remit of The People's Assembly, but it comes down to can parliament be reformed and that the current systems exists, but in the interests of the majority. Well, I'd say, this system is based on competition so [26:00] it is virtually impossible that it benefits people, in that it is driven towards people benefitting people, based on competition, it is impossible. Or can we, do we need a whole new system, a whole new way of thinking that puts cooperation over competition. I think that it is our instinct to cooperate with one each other, but we are told, we are so alienated, we are told that we can't change society and that we have even got to compete against each other in the work place for promotion, or whatever it is. So that whole idea of greed comes in, which I think is rubbish. That's a much wider discussion really, but yeah I think people organising together is also the way that people change their ideas and change their minds [26:52]. So, even if people may start out with sexist ideas, or homophobic ideas, or maybe slightly racist ideas, or whatever it may be, if you are organising and fighting and struggling with all of these people together then those kind of ideas break down very, very quickly. Do you know what I means?

AR: Yeah, I do.

SF: And you can start to see, oh actually the real enemy is above – the people who are fucking us over or not paying us right, or whatever it is – that's the

people that are really creating problems in society. Not my neighbour who is black, or an immigrant, or whatever it is.

AR: Yeah, yep.

SF: So it is that process, that people's ideas and minds change as well and that includes going on a demonstration, that includes taking strike action [27:44], going to a public meeting or whatever it is. I remember my first demonstration, my mind was just blown with how many people were there. You know? [laughs]

AR: Yeah [laughs].

SF: My mind was just like whoa!

AR: Yeah. My recollection. I think it was probably that one [points to the End Austerity placard behind Sam], was that in about June time?

SF: Yeah.

AR: Yeah. It was just immense. It was pretty much the same route I think actually as the NHS demonstration, almost?

SF: That one [End Austerity demo] started at Bank.

AR: Oh, OK, yes it was. It did didn't it, in that crossroads?

SF: Yeah.

AR: Yeah.

SF: But we ended in Parliament Square as well.

AR: Yeah. Because I remember coming passed Number 10 and the level of "boos" ...

SF: [laughs]

AR: ... that went up was just [28:22] absolutely immense! I was kind of hoping for that this time around, there was a few boos but nothing, because it was

just constant roar of “boos” as we went passed. Yeah. It was like yeah!
[laughs].

SF: I think we underestimated the numbers on that one.

AR: Oh right. OK, yeah.

SF: Yeah.

AR: Yeah, it is when you nip in to get a coffee or a quick pit stop and then you're coming out and there are still people going passed, that's a sign that this is a good demonstration [laughs]. So, there is that sort of festival vibe as well, which a number of people did kind of touch on, and I think you have mentioned it here, about feeling supported and having your voice heard and feeling like there are other people that, not just agree with you, but have a similar sort of mind set and it is showing that solidarity. Is that something that you guys would consider whilst you are creating any information that you are disseminating, whether that be a leaflet or another event down the road or press releases. Do you do press releases to the mainstream media?

SF: Mm.

AR: Yeah, so that sort of working together, that sort of solidarity raising?

SF: Yeah, definitely. I think, I suppose part of it is just convincing people, well, it is one connecting with them on the issue, that's number one and once we have got them on the issue then how do you convince them to do something about it? Those are the two things [29:47] and then give them that thing to do. You know?

AR: Yeah.

SF: And so, I suppose, for lots of people it's got to be varied, it has got to be; some people won't be able to come on a demo, some people will only be able to do stuff online, or whatever, and I suppose that is a slightly difficult thing for us because we do want to mobilise and involve everybody in what we do, but because we have got such a small team of people we can't have a team of

people who are just mobilising for one online social media thing that gets loads of people and while we get on with the demo over here. It is like all or nothing, everyone is focused on this [laughs].

AR: Yeah, fair enough.

SF: And sometimes I wish we could be a bit more inclusive with other forms of action or protest or whatever it is, but it is just resource issue really [30:39].

AR: Yes, yes absolutely.

SF: Everything is a resource issue.

AR: Yeah, and I suppose then that's quite nice to have the little pockets of local People's Assembly set up all across ...

SF: Yeah, yeah, and some of the stuff they do has been great.

AR: I am hoping, well, I am not hoping to I will be asking Stuart [Halfordy of Nottingham People's Assembly] for an interview as well, similar sort of thing, just to see what local action he has also taken pre-me joining and helping out with all sorts of stuff.

SF: Yeah, yeah, for sure. You should come along, we have got a meeting on the 17th June. Is that too late for you?

AR: No.

SF: ... which will be in London and it will have representatives from groups across the country come together and that is where we are going to be talking about what we are going to do next. It is basically after the election as well, so.

AR: Yeah, because was there one before and that was cancelled and moved

SF: Yeah.

AR: Yeah, 'cos I had asked Stuart about coming to that and he said yes [31:30] please do go and so yes, yes, I would like to. Because also part of this [referring to PhD] I will be doing some sort of Participant Observation

research, so sitting in the meeting taking notes, similar to this but without asking. So, yes, I mean that would absolutely fantastic to get more and more information as possible.

I have to say that, actually almost with your first question, first answer and certainly in your second answer you have pretty much answered all the questions that I had [laughs].

SF: Oh really! [laughs]

AR: Yes [laughs] or all the things that I was hoping that you would draw out. Yeah, definitely and it does cross over quite a lot with what the participants were saying about how they felt about the event and what they were hoping to achieve with the event and stuff. So, government's kind of there but not really the main impetus.

SF: I think it has to be. It is a difficult one because you want people to come on the thing, because you want them to think that they will have an impact on the government, which is true because they are, so that has to be aim number one, but at the same time we shouldn't over estimate what one demonstration will achieve in terms of that initially policy. I think [32:52] government, demonstrations over the period, you know if you look at any social movement that has had an impact, they are over the period of many years and it does take a while to do that. If you look at the anti-war movement of example, some people, it gets very criticised, that big demo, that even when I went on it I was like "this is it they can't do it, there is no way they can go to war", you know what I mean? You just believe it, and then they do. Now obviously people use that as an example, saying it is pointless demonstrating, look at this, which I just think is absolute bollocks. It is a big shame that that didn't stop the war, obviously, but you could've had, I think it could've done if, well, it's all sorts of different things. Number one we had an incredibly strong Labour government at that stage, it was, what was the majority? It was huge. Absolutely huge. It was not like they were feeling insecure in their position in parliament.

AR: Agreed.

SF: Now, if you had a similar demonstration right now with Teresa May, for example, [33:58] they would collapse immediately, I think. With a tiny, tiny majority, it is unsustainable, even she has admitted it is unsustainable, by calling an election. Do you know what I mean?

AR: Yes, exactly.

SF: After saying “oh no we're not going to do this” well whatever, she has just suddenly realised that “oh shit I am going to need a bit more authority here to do what I want to do” [34:16]. So, I think, if you had a big demonstration like that then they would just crumble very, very quickly, on that kind of scale. But even then, back in 2003, with a strong government – strong and stable ...
[laughs]

AR: [laughs]

SF: ... you could. I think the problem was you didn't have more strike action around it. Now, a war is a very difficult, in fact it is probably impossible for a number of unions to take strike action around it because it is a political issue. However, if we had had a bit more walk-outs from work places. If you'd had [...] I think we were on the cusp of it but it just didn't, we didn't quite manage to get a level of action that was strong enough. I think that it was very, very close to breaking the government at that time and then actually, if you look later on, the sustained impact of the anti-war movement over many years was the thing that got rid of Tony Blair in 2006. Was it 2006? Yeah.

AR: Yeah.

SF: That made him resign, the Lebanon stuff, the Gaza stuff, whatever it was. That was something that Tony Blair didn't want to do and that came after a string of resignations from the cabinet, following a whole series of big demonstrations, emergency demonstrations, that took place around the war. So, actually that was something, you know the whole of the country now, virtually, it has been accepted what a disaster the Iraq War was. You know,

you saw the interview with Teresa May the other day, did you?, on Andrew Marr, where he said “Jeremy Corbyn got it right around Iraq, you got it wrong, will you accept it?” And she just wouldn’t accept it, but it is obvious [36:01]. Without those big demonstrations that wouldn’t be an accepted thing. The Chilcot thing wouldn’t have happened, that kind of stuff. So, actually these movements do change the kind of the course of history in that way. I think we have got to have a long term view of it really.

The whole word austerity is a dirty word now. I mean, Philip Hammond didn’t mention it once in the budget last year and he tries to rebrand it as ‘fiscal discipline’, which is bollocks ...

AR: [laughs]

SF: ... but actually we created the movement, the demonstrations have already created a dirty word around the word austerity and people know it is bad even if they don’t know exactly what it is or what it means for them. There is a sense that that is a bad thing. So, I think that we are getting somewhere, it is just frustrating that it is not a lot quicker some of the time, but [36:54] you know.

AR: As long as you get somewhere at some time. Talking about austerity, it is going to be an overarching theme in terms of the discourse of austerity, the Keep Calm and Carry on narrative, we’ll all be alright, we’re all in this together, belt tightening and all that, except, obviously, we are not. Would you be able to give me your understanding or conception of what austerity means when you use it?

SF: Yeah. [37: 24] I suppose there are different levels, because they put it out saying that obviously we need to reduce the deficit, there is a problem with the amount that Britain is spending at the moment and, therefore, we need to cut public services. So, if you look at it on their terms, or on the terms that they are attempting to sell it to us on, I think they are wrong. So you have to attack it that way in one sense, but then you have also got to look at the reality of the situation [37:57], which I think is a different situation, something

going on behind the scenes. First of all I think that they are wrong on their own terms, in terms of what they are selling to us because there are other ways of raising money other than cutting public services. And what a contradiction it is when corporation tax is being cut to the lowest levels; probably globally, apart from tax havens. What is it, America is like 45% or something and here, what is it now? It is like seventeen or something, whatever it is [38:30], I mean it is tiny. So you know what a joke really, but anyway there are obviously other ways you can raise money if you're obsessed with cutting the deficit down to zero or to having a surplus, other than cutting public services; and it is so obviously skewed in the wrong direction towards ordinary people and the kinds of things that we rely on, but I think that the reality of the situation is that it is an ideological attack from a Conservative government, which, looking back historically, doesn't take much to realise that they have never liked public services.

AR: [laughs] Yeah.

SF: Never liked the idea that the State should provide basic services to the population, they have never liked any of those things and they were set up, very openly, as a party to protect the rich and big business. Their ideology, which they would never say, but is about, it is genuinely about corporations and everything being run by the private sector and that's all they care about. So, it takes it out of the hands of us and ultimately what that means is some people are making lots of profit while everyone else is making it for them.

AR: Yep, absolutely. [40:00]

SF: And that's what they like. That's the situation that they like and they want to create more, I suppose more of an environment where that kind of thing can flourish and happen. They would want to get rid of the NHS entirely and replaced by privately run thing. All of those things it is just outrageous.

AR: It is, yeah.

SF: That's what we talk about when we talk about austerity. The main drive I think, and the most important thing really, is privatisation because that is the

big threat and cuts are a way of, you know you cut a service back so much that you spend zero on it and a private company has got to come in and take it up.

AR: Like Chomsky mentioned [laughs].

SF: Yeah.

AR: Would you agree that the ideological position that they come from is very much rooted in neoliberalism?

SF: Oh, of course.

AR: The reduction and retreat of the State and the eventual corporatocracy really, that's the way it is going to be heading.

SF: Yeah, absolutely. And everything they do is, you know Teresa May's husband is going to be benefitting from his hedge funds and from Brexit and everything; and the NHS was sold off to, I can't remember what this thing was but there was a whole bunch of MPs that have links to the companies the NHS is being sold off to.

AR: Yep.

SF: It is so blatant.

AR: It is, isn't it?

SF: They don't even try and hide it really [laughs].

AR: [laughs] This is it, and it is kind of getting that message out really and that's probably one of the reasons maybe for these kind of demonstrations?

SF: Definitely.

AR: To highlight that to more people, who either don't have the time to find that out because although it is obvious it is not being shouted from the ...

SF: No.

AR: ... Daily Mail's roof top, obviously [laughs].

SF: Of course.

AR: Right, well, yep I think that is absolutely fantastic. That is pretty much all of my questions. Is there anything that feel that I have not asked that you would want to add to this?

SF: No, not particularly.

AR: No? Excellent, that's great. Well, thank you very much for that, that's fantastic.

SF: Please do get in touch if you want to follow up anything.

AR: Thank you, yeah that would be great.

END: 42:20