

2016/09: Should Britain leave the European Union?

What they said...

'It's being British. It's knowing that other people can't understand our way of life as well as you can living in your own country'

Robert Baron, 67, participant in a vox pop conducted in South Benfleet

'To people my age it's pretty obvious. We stay... my generation has the most at stake...'

Gus Sharpe, 19, Margate resident interviewed by The Times

The issue at a glance

On June 23, 2016, Great Britain voted in a referendum on whether or not to remain within the European Union (EU). This referendum was arranged by the British Parliament through the European Union Referendum Act, 2015.

The result was 51.9% in support of an exit (17,410,742 votes) and 48.1% (16,141,241 votes) to remain, with a turnout of 72.2%.

The referendum outcome has led to significant consternation within Great Britain. Within hours of the result's announcement, a petition, calling for a second referendum, was gaining support. By 10.40 pm on June 28 it had attracted 4,000,003 signatures, over forty times the number needed for any petition to be considered for debate in Parliament. While the First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, was warning that Scotland may refuse legislative consent to dropping EU law in Scotland.

Within Britain, prominent supporters of the exit vote have advised that Britain make a slow, carefully negotiated withdrawal from the EU, while key EU leaders have demanded that Britain finalise its withdrawal as quickly as possible in the name of causing the least disruption to the EU.

Background

(The information found below was abbreviated from the Wikipedia entry titled 'United Kingdom withdrawal from the European Union')

The full text can be accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_withdrawal_from_the_European_Union)

United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union

British withdrawal from the European Union is a political goal that has been pursued by various individuals, advocacy groups, and political parties from across the political spectrum since the United Kingdom joined the precursor of the European Union (EU) in 1973. Withdrawal from the European Union has been a right of EU member states since 2007 under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. It is often referred to as Brexit, or, in early usage, Brixit, both words derived by analogy from Grexit.

In 1973, the UK joined the European Economic Community (EEC). In 1975, a referendum was held on the country's continued membership of the EEC, which was approved by 67% of voters. The EEC later transformed into the EU.

In 2016, a referendum was held on Great Britain's membership of the EU. This referendum was arranged by the British Parliament when it passed the European Union Referendum Act 2015. The result of the referendum was 52% in favour of leaving and 48% in favour of remaining, with a turnout of 72% of the electorate.

The process for the UK's withdrawal is uncertain under EU law, although it is generally expected to take at least two years. Article 50, which governs the withdrawal, has never been used before. The timing for leaving under the article is a strict two years, although extensions are possible once Britain gives an official notice, but no official notice seems likely to be given until after a new British Prime Minister is selected later in 2016.

The assumption is that during the two year window new agreements may be negotiated, but there is no requirement that there be new agreements. The current British Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced he will resign by October, while the First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon has said that Scotland might refuse consent for legislation required to leave the EU.

The history of Great Britain's involvement with the European Union

The United Kingdom was not a signatory to the Treaty of Rome which created the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957. The country subsequently applied to join the organization in 1963 and again in 1967, but both applications were vetoed by the then President of France, Charles de Gaulle.

Once de Gaulle had relinquished the French presidency, the United Kingdom made a third application for membership, which was successful. Under the Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath the European Communities Act 1972 was enacted. On 1 January 1973 the United Kingdom joined the EEC, or 'Common Market'. The opposition Labour Party, led by Harold Wilson, contested the October 1974 general election with a commitment to renegotiate Britain's terms of membership of the EEC and then hold a referendum on whether to remain in the EEC on the new terms.

1975 referendum

In 1975, the United Kingdom held a referendum on whether to remain in the EEC. All of the major political parties and mainstream press supported continuing membership of the EEC. However, there were significant splits within the ruling

Labour party, the membership of which had voted 2:1 in favour of withdrawal at a one-day party conference on 26 April 1975. Since the cabinet was split between strongly pro-European and strongly anti-European ministers, Harold Wilson suspended the constitutional convention of Cabinet collective responsibility and allowed ministers to publicly campaign on either side. Seven of the twenty-three members of the cabinet opposed EEC membership.

On 5 June 1975, the electorate were asked to vote yes or no on the question: 'Do you think the UK should stay in the European Community (Common Market)?' Every administrative county in the United Kingdom had a majority of 'Yes', except the Shetland Islands and the Outer Hebrides. In line with the outcome of the vote, the United Kingdom remained a member of the EEC.

Between referendums

The opposition Labour Party campaigned in the 1983 general election on a commitment to withdraw from the EEC. It was heavily defeated as the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher was re-elected. The Labour Party subsequently changed its policy.

As a result of the Maastricht Treaty, the EEC became the European Union (EU) on 1 November 1993. The organization had evolved from an economic union into a political union. The name change reflected this.

The Referendum Party was formed in 1994 by Sir James Goldsmith to contest the 1997 general election on a platform of providing a referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the EU. It fielded candidates in 547 constituencies at that election and won 810,860 votes, 2.6% of total votes cast. It failed to win a single parliamentary seat as its vote was spread out, losing its deposit in 505 constituencies.

The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), a Eurosceptic political party, was formed in 1993. It achieved third place in the United Kingdom during the 2004 European elections, second place in the 2009 European elections and first place in the 2014 European elections, with 27.5% of the total vote. This was the first time since the 1910 general election that any party other than the Labour or Conservative parties had taken the largest share of the vote in a nationwide election.

In 2014, UKIP won two by-elections, triggered when the sitting Conservative MPs defected to UKIP and then resigned. These were their first elected MPs. In 2015, the 2015 general election UKIP took 12.6% of the total vote and held one of the two seats won in 2014.

2016 referendum

In 2012, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, rejected calls for a referendum on the United Kingdom's EU membership, but suggested the possibility of a future referendum to gauge public support. According to the BBC, 'The prime minister acknowledged the need to ensure the UK's position within the European Union had "the full-hearted support of the British people" but they needed to show "tactical and strategic patience".'

Under pressure from many of his MPs and from the rise of UKIP, in January 2013, Cameron announced that a Conservative government would hold an in-out referendum on EU membership before the end of 2017, on a renegotiated package, if elected in 2015.

The Conservative Party won the 2015 general election with a majority. Soon afterwards the European Union Referendum Act 2015 was introduced into Parliament to enable the referendum. Despite being in favour of remaining in a reformed European Union himself, Cameron announced that Conservative Ministers and MPs were free to campaign in favour of remaining in the EU or leaving it, according to their conscience. This decision came after mounting pressure for a free vote for ministers. In an exception to the usual rule of cabinet collective responsibility, Cameron allowed individual cabinet ministers to publicly campaign for EU withdrawal.

Internet information

On July 2, 2016, The Irish Times published a report titled 'Thousands gather in London to protest against Brexit' The report examines a London-based protest march against the Brexit vote and includes comments from a number of those who took part.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/uk/thousands-gather-in-london-to-protest-against-brexit-1.2708590>

On July 2, 2016, The Telegraph published an analysis by Christopher Williams titled 'What does Brexit mean for the key parts of the UK economy?'

Although the analysis looks at the advantages and the disadvantages that might be experienced by the British economy as a consequence of Brexit, on balance it suggests that most effects will be negative.

The full analysis can be accessed at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/07/02/what-does-brexit-mean-for-the-key-parts-of-the-uk-economy/>

On July 1, 2016, Time Magazine published a comment and analysis titled 'These 5 Facts Explain Why Brexit Could Lead to a U.K. Breakup'

The article considers some of those factors which might lead Scotland or Northern Ireland to secede from the United Kingdom.

The full text can be accessed at <http://time.com/4389858/brexit-referendum-united-kingdom-breakup/>

On June 28, 2016, CNBC published a report by Edward Chancellor titled 'Brexit will make the UK economy stronger'

The comment explains the advantageous effects that the Brexit decision may have on the British economy. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/28/brexit-will-make-the-uk-economy-stronger-commentary.html>

On June 27, 2016, The Conversation published a comment by Simona Guerra, Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of Leicester, titled 'Brexit: what Europe must do to avoid losing more member states' The comment examines some of the misconceptions among the British electorate which led to it voting to exit the EU and suggests what the Union might do to prevent the withdrawal of further member states. The full text of this article can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/brexit-what-europe-must-do-to-avoid-losing-more-member-states-61484>

On June 27, 2016, The Guardian published a comment and analysis titled 'Frexit, Nexit or Oexit? Who will be next to leave the EU?' The article examines the attitude of other members of the EU toward having their own referendums on remaining within the Union. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/27/frexit-nexit-or-oexit-who-will-be-next-to-leave-the-eu>

On June 27, 2016, The Telegraph published an analysis titled 'EU referendum: How the results compare to the UK's educated, old and immigrant populations' The report looks at voting patterns determined according to demographics. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/eu-referendum-how-the-results-compare-to-the-uks-educated-old-an/>

On June 27, 2016, The Week published an analysis titled 'EU referendum: What are the pros and cons of Brexit?' The report considered the advantages and the disadvantages of Britain leaving the UE. The full text of this analysis can be accessed at <http://www.theweek.co.uk/brexit-0>

On June 24, 2016, The Guardian published a comment by Giles Fraser titled 'Brexit brought democracy back - now we need to start listening to each other' Giles argues that the Brexit vote indicates the disconnection between a majority of Britons and the political parties which claim to represent their interests. The full text of the comment can be accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/24/brexit-democracy-i-voted-leave-divisions-campaigns>

On June 25, 2016, Vox Business and Finance published a report titled 'Brexit: the 7 most important arguments for Britain to leave the EU' The report outlines economic, social and political arguments offered in support of Great Britain leaving the EU. The full report can be accessed at <http://www.vox.com/2016/6/22/11992106/brexit-arguments>

On June 24, 2016, Fusion published a comment and analysis by Felix Salmon titled 'With a single vote, England just screwed us all' Salmon examines the differences in the voting demographics across the United Kingdom and suggests that the referendum result will disadvantage many groups. The full text can be accessed at <http://fusion.net/story/318538/england-brexit-screwed-us-all/>

On June 21, 2016, The Mises Institute published a satirical piece by Louis Rouanet titled 'Just another Day in Regulated Europe' The piece uses exaggeration to ridicule the extent of regulation in the European Union. The full text can be accessed at <https://mises.org/blog/just-another-day-regulated-europe>

On June 20, 2016, The Telegraph published a report by its economic correspondent Peter Spence titled 'Would Britain face break-up after Brexit?' The article considers some of those factors that might lead either Scotland or Northern Ireland to secede in the event of a positive Brexit vote. The full text of this article can be accessed at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/03/25/would-britain-face-break-up-after-brexit/>

On June 18, 2016, The Spectator ran an editorial titled 'Out - and into the world: why The Spectator is for Leave' The Spectator argues that the European Union has pursued policies at odds with the interests of its member countries. The full text of this opinion piece can be accessed at <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/06/out-and-into-the-world-why-the-spectator-is-for-leave/>

On May 9, 2016, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, issued a speech titled 'Prime Minister David Cameron set out what the UK's European Union membership means for British strength and security in the world'

The speech is subtitled 'PM speech on the UK's strength and security in the EU: 9 May 2016'

The speech argues that Britain gains a great deal economically and strategically, in terms of its national security, by remaining within the EU.

The full text of this speech can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-the-uks-strength-and-security-in-the-eu-9-may-2016>

On April 22, 2016, The Financial Times published a comment by Linda Colley, professor of history at Princeton University. The comment is titled 'Brexiters are nostalgics in search of a lost empire'

The comment argues that those supporting a leave vote are seeking a realignment of Britain's strategic alliances more in line with their memories of the former British Empire.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/63de3610-07b0-11e6-9b51-0fb5e65703ce.html#axzz4DXcMN4e0>

On October 2, 2015, Business Insider Australia published a comment by Lianna Brinded titled 'I'm starting to think a 'Brexit' is a good idea and I never thought I'd ever say that'

The piece looks at a range of factors which support Britain leaving the EU.

The full text can be accessed <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/reasons-why-uk-leaving-the-eu-brexit-is-a-good-idea-2015-10?r=UK&IR=T>

On September 8, 2015, Business Insider Australia published a comment by Lianna Brinded titled 'How the refugee crisis could spark a Brexit'

The comment considers the current and predicted influx of migrants and refugees into the EU and the effect this is having on support for union within Great Britain.

The full text can be accessed at http://www.businessinsider.com.au/the-refugee-crisis-is-going-to-blow-britain-out-of-the-european-union-2015-9?_ga=1.166361273.627500920.1465713685?r=UK&IR=T

On August 12, 2015, Naked Politics published a comment by Ben Harris titled '10 Reasons Why the UK Should Leave the EU'

Harris supplies a range of reasons, social and economic, as to why Great Britain should leave the EU.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.nakedpolitics.co.uk/home/10-reasons-why-the-uk-should-leave-the-eu>

On January 15, 2015, Investopedia published a comment by Andrew Beattie titled 'What Could Happen If the Eurozone Breaks Up?'

The comment examines the possible economic consequences of the break-up of the Eurozone. These are predicted to be negative.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/013015/what-could-happen-if-eurozone-breaks.asp>

Arguments supporting Britain leaving the European Union

1. Britain will gain greater economic autonomy and boost its economy

It has been claimed that leaving the EU will immediately improve Britain's financial situation as Great Britain will no longer have to contribute to the EU budget. The EU does not have the power to collect taxes directly; however, it requires member states to make an annual contribution to the central EU budget. In 2015, Britain paid in \$13bn, but received only \$4.5bn worth of EU funding toward services in Britain in return; thus the United Kingdom's net contribution was \$8.5bn.

Some of the subsidy arrangements within the EU have been claimed to be particularly disadvantageous to Great Britain. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is cited as a key example. This policy is essentially an EU subsidy for the agriculture industry and takes up around 40% of the entire EU budget. Because the United Kingdom has a relatively small agriculture sector (approximately 0.6% of the economy compared to 3.6% in France for example) this means that CAP costs the United Kingdom rather than benefits it.

Britain would also be free to establish its own trade agreements rather than be bound by those which apply to the EU. Supporters of Brexit have claimed that this could allow Britain to trade on more favourable terms.

Recent economic developments within the EU have led some British economists to suggest that Britain would do better on its own. In a Vox Business and Finance report published on June 25, 2016, it was noted, 'The global recession that began in 2008 was bad around the world, but it was much worse in countries that had adopted Europe's common currency, the euro. The unemployment rate shot up above 20 percent in countries like Greece and Spain, triggering a massive debt crisis. Seven years after the recession began, Spain and Greece are still suffering from unemployment rates above 20 percent, and many economists believe the euro was the primary culprit.'

Britain decided not to adopt the euro and has not suffered the same adverse effects. Some commentators have seen this as a demonstration that Britain's economy would fare better if Britain were able to manage its own economic affairs.

As part of the aftermath of Britons voting to leave the EU the value of the pound has dropped. It has been suggested that this will increase the competitiveness of British exports and act as a spur to the development of export industries. It has also been suggested that foreign investors will become increasingly unwilling to put their money into Britain, making local investment more likely and boosting national savings. It has also been suggested that this investment is more likely to go

into export industries rather than housing construction feed by artificially inflated real estate process. These prices might then fall, making housing more affordable.

These developments were summarised in a report written by Edward Chancellor and published by CNBC on June 28, 2016. Chancellor states, 'As sterling falls and currency volatility rises, foreigners will become reluctant to fund the current-account deficit. As a result, savings will have to rise. A cheaper currency means that exports are more competitive. In theory, this means resources will be diverted away from construction towards the traded-goods sector. A higher cost of capital should improve the allocation of capital. In time, this should allow interest rates to normalize.' It has also been suggested that a reduction in the value of the pound will act a boost to the British tourism industry. In an analysis published in The Telegraph on July 2, 2016, it was stated, 'On the positive side, the pound's weakness should encourage tourists from abroad to visit the UK, providing support for airlines. A rise in inbound tourism and staycations could benefit the likes of Merlin Entertainments, the owner of Madame Tussauds and Legoland, and the rest of the UK's hospitality industry.'

2. Britain will gain greater control of its borders

EU law guarantees that citizens of one EU country have the right to travel, live, and take jobs in other EU countries. British people have increasingly felt the impact of this rule since the 2008 financial crisis. The eurozone has struggled economically, and workers from eurozone countries such as Ireland, Italy, and Lithuania (as well as EU countries like Poland and Romania that have not yet joined the common currency) have gone in large numbers to the United Kingdom in search of work.

Douglas Murray, a British journalist and Brexit supporter, has stated, 'In recent years, hundreds of thousands of Eastern Europeans have come to Britain to do a job. Brexit supporters argue that this influx of foreign workers has created damaging competition for jobs. Murray has claimed that this competition has 'undercut the native working population'.

The United Kingdom absorbed 333,000 new people, on net, in 2015.

Immigration has become a highly politicized issue in Britain, as it has in the United States and many other places over the past few years. Anti-immigration campaigners such as Nigel Farage, the leader of the far-right UK Independence Party, have argued that the flood of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe has depressed the wages of native-born British workers.

EU rules require the United Kingdom to admit all EU citizens who want to move to Britain, whether or not they have good job prospects or English skills. Critics of this policy argue that it puts an unsustainable strain on the British welfare system and that Britain should have a rational system for admitting migrants which factor in their language and job skills. Critics have noted that membership of the EU has placed Great Britain in a situation where it has had to turn away skilled migrants.

Ben Harris, writing for Naked Politics on August 12, 2015, argued, 'Because of the EU's free movement of people policy, member states are unable to place any meaningful controls on EU migrants, meaning that member states may only set a limit on the number of non-EU migrants that are able to enter the country. As a result, the UK has had to turn away skilled immigrants to the UK this year at the same time as being powerless to turn away non-skilled EU migrants.'

It has also been claimed that the influx of migrants from the EU was putting a strain on British schools and health services. There is concern that this influx into Britain will become greater as the EU accepts more member states. Michael Gove, the United Kingdom's justice secretary, and a supporter of the Leave case, has stated, 'Because we cannot control our borders public services such as the NHS will face an unquantifiable strain as millions more become EU citizens and have the right to move to the U.K.'

The probability of having to accept larger numbers of refugees if Great Britain remains part of the EU is also a significant incentive for those arguing to leave. On October 1, 2015, the United Nations predicted that some 700,000 migrants and refugees would have reached Europe via the Mediterranean sea by the end of the year and the same amount would arrive again in 2016.

Opponents see the UE's handling of the refugee crisis as irresponsible. The Spectator's editorial of June 18, 2016, states, 'In theory, the EU is supposed to protect its member states by insisting that refugees claim asylum in the first country they enter. In practice, this law - the so-called Dublin Convention - was torn up by Angela Merkel when she recklessly said that all Syrians could settle in Germany if they somehow managed to get there.'

It has also been suggested that improperly regulated borders leave Great Britain at greater risk of a terrorist incursion. Colonel Richard Kemp has stated, 'By leaving, we will again be able to determine who does and does not enter the UK. Failure to do so significantly increases the terrorist threat here, endangers our people and is a betrayal of this country.'

3. British national pride and cultural autonomy will be boosted

Many supporters of the Leave case have argued that Britain is losing its distinct national identity as a member of the EU. In an analysis printed in Sit & Stand on June 16, 2016, Steven Erlanger stated, 'Pollsters and analysts say that while Scotland and Northern Ireland are expected to vote overwhelmingly to stay in the bloc, England, far more populous, is likely to go the other way, reflecting a broad and often bluntly expressed view that English identity and values are being washed away by subordination to the bureaucrats of Brussels.'

Erlanger went on to suggest, 'England makes up about 85 percent of Britain's population, and so dominates. But the English identity, while subsumed into the British one, is not entirely the same, drawing as it does on its own rich history and deeply embedded political and cultural traditions. In particular, the English are considerably less willing than their fellow Britons in Scotland and Northern Ireland to see themselves as a subset of Europe - there is more nativism and more "Little England" nationalism, which can veer into xenophobia.'

As part of a vox pop conducted in South Benfleet, Robert Baron, 67, stated, 'It's being British. It's knowing that other people can't understand our way of life as well as you can living in your own country.'

British actress and Brexit supporter Liz Hurley has similarly stated, 'I yearn for the days when my (gorgeous navy blue) passport got stamped when I went anywhere in Europe.' United Kingdom passports are now burgundy and conform to an EU format.

Some commentators have suggested that many supporting the Brexit movement are nostalgic for the British Empire. Others have suggested that they are looking to consolidate a new set of alliances with English-speaking countries with which Britain has closer cultural ties.

In an opinion piece published in *The Financial Times* on April 22, 2016, Linda Colley, professor of history at Princeton University, stated, '[M]any in the Conservative party, which is overwhelmingly English, are drawn to the idea of a revived Anglosphere, a union of sorts between the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, which might provide a congenial substitute for the EU.'

4. Britain will be freed of over-regulation

Critics of the EU claim it is a centralised, overly bureaucratized system which imposes burdensome, needless regulations on member countries.

Philip Booth, professor of finance, public policy and ethics at St Mary's University has stated, 'In the centralised EU system, it is relatively easy for countries that want more regulation to combine together and vote for it to be imposed on governments that want light regulation. And the nature of the EU bureaucracy is such that, once given power, it tends to regulate without restraint.'

By way of example of an unnecessary and inefficient regulation imposed by the EU, Professor Booth has noted, 'One indication of the extent of regulation is its length. The 1870 Insurance Companies Act which, in effect, lasted 100 years before we adopted EU insurance regulation in the early 1970s, was shorter than the list of typographical errors alone in one tiny part of the EU's Solvency II regulations entitled "the technical specifications for the preparatory phase" of Solvency II. Another indicator is its cost: preparing for Solvency II cost UK insurers an incredible \$3bn.'

One of the leaders of the Brexit movement, former London mayor, Boris Johnson, has similarly stated, 'Sometimes these EU rules sound simply ludicrous, like the rule that you can't recycle a teabag, or that children under eight cannot blow up balloons, or the limits on the power of vacuum cleaners. Sometimes they can be truly infuriating - like the time I discovered, in 2013, that there was nothing we could do to bring in better-designed cab windows for trucks, to stop cyclists being crushed. It had to be done at a European level, and the French were opposed.'

On June 21, 2016, the Austrian Mises Institute published a satirical piece by Louis Rouanet ridiculing the extent of over-regulation for which the EU is responsible. Rouanet writes, 'Martin woke up on his EU regulated bed and looked through his EU regulated window. This night, Martin had slept like a baby thanks to the 109 EU regulations concerning pillows, the 5 EU regulations concerning pillow cases, and the 50 EU laws regulating duvets and sheets. Martin went to brush his teeth with his toothbrush regulated by 31 EU laws.'

After that, our EU-regulated man went to his EU regulated kitchen to grab a Class 1 EU regulated apple. For the benefit of society, the EU had defined what a "class 1" fruit actually is: to class a "Red Variety" apple as "class 1" then 50% of its surface must be red.'

Relatedly it has been claimed that the EU's over-regulation is often expensive. Ben Harris, writing for *Naked Politics*, claimed, 'The EU is wasteful - Vast sums of money have been spent on unnecessary and inappropriate projects such as \$760,000 for a "gender equal" cultural centre which was never built, over \$350,000 for a project to get European children to draw each other and \$155,000 for a Portuguese golf resort.'

5. British democracy will be restored and re-invigorated

There are those who maintain that the vote for Britain quitting the European Union represents a triumph of democracy. This claim is made in part because the majority exit vote was taken despite the opposition of all major parties. It is thus seen by some as a genuine and spontaneous expression of the popular will and a protest against political parties that have not addressed the concerns of much of the electorate.

In an opinion piece published in *The Australian* on June 11, 2016, (one week before the referendum) Greg Sheridan stated, 'If the British vote to leave, they will have defied bipartisan opposition. Not only Cameron, but Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn as well as the Scottish Nationalist Party, the third largest party in Westminster, and the Greens are all campaigning for remain.'

Sheridan concludes, 'If Britain does leave the EU, it will be a deliberate decision by the electorate to take responsibility for its own destiny, economically and in security terms... Brexit represents a popular assertion of good government against the dishonesty, equivocations and failures of a paralysed governing class.' He described the leave movement as 'one of the few seismic moments in history generated entirely by a democratic movement and an exercise of the ballot box.'

Many commentators have suggested that the willingness of a majority of Britons to vote against the directions of the parties for which they traditionally vote is a marker of their belief that their country's political elites have not been responsive to their needs.

On June 24, 2016, *The Guardian* published a comment by Giles Fraser. Fraser stated, 'Outside the capital things were different. As if in some parallel universe, the rest of the country saw things differently... They had... been left profoundly unattended by the political process. Taken for granted, patted on the head - by the Labour party as much as the Conservatives - and dumped upon by a financial services industry that never paid the price for its own recklessness, this

was an angry roar for attention.'

It has further been claimed that the overriding of British law by laws and regulations formulated within the European Union has undermined democracy in Great Britain.

Euroskeptics emphasize that the EU's executive branch, called the European Commission, is not directly accountable to voters in Britain or anyone else. British leaders have some influence on the selection of the European Commission's members every five years. But once the body has been chosen, none of its members are accountable to the British government or to Britons' elected representatives in the European Parliament.

On June 18, 2016, The Spectator ran an editorial arguing that EU-produced laws were damaging the democratic process in Great Britain. The editorial states, 'The EU has started to deform our government. Michael Gove revealed how, as a cabinet member, he regularly finds himself having to process edicts, rules and regulations that have been framed at European level. Laws that no one in Britain had asked for, and which no one elected to the House of Commons has the power to change. What we refer to as British government is increasingly no such thing. It involves the passing of laws written by people whom no one in Britain elected, no one can name and no one can remove.'

Ben Harris, writing for Naked Politics on August 12, 2015, summed up the situation in this manner, 'The EU undermines British democracy. Because the European Parliament makes laws on an EU-wide basis, we are in the bizarre situation of non-British representatives making laws which affect the UK and likewise British representatives are helping to make laws affecting other member states. For many people opposed to Britain's EU membership, this is a matter of principle - the UK should be governed by British representatives only and the only way to achieve this is by leaving the EU.'

Arguments opposing Britain leaving the European Union

1. The leave margin was too narrow and too few people voted

There is concern that the decision to leave the European Union is one that will have very far-reaching consequences. Critics of the referendum have therefore argued that it is one that has to be either approved or rejected by a significant percentage of voters.

A petition to have the EU referendum re-run has attracted over 4 million signatures. The prelude to the petition, on the Internet site on which it can be accessed, states, 'The margin between the results of UK voters for leaving the EU, and the UK voters to remain in the EU, is too narrow. Although a total voting turnout of 72% is high, it is still far too low for such a critical vote, and below a minimal 75% turnout.'

This petition argues that a 60% margin is the lowest level of support that would justify a decision being taken and that at least 75% of the electorate should vote. The petition states, 'We the undersigned call upon HM government to implement a rule that if the remain or leave vote is less than 60% based on a turnout less than 75%, there should be another referendum.'

The petition also calls on the European Parliament to give the people of the United Kingdom an opportunity to remain should a second referendum clearly show that the minimal 75% turnout was reached, and with the voters in favour of staying in the EU by a margin of at least 20%.

Those who argue for a large voter participation rate and a large decision margin do so because they claim that the implications of the vote are so great that the action should not be taken without the backing of a strong majority of all citizens.

It is also stressed that this petition, which was in existence before the referendum result was known, is not partisan. It has not come into existence because those who want to remain within the EU are unhappy with the referendum result. On May 16, 2016, over a month before the vote was taken, one of the leaders of the exit group, Nigel Farage, indicated that if the remain group secured a narrow majority he would call for a second referendum.

Farage stated, 'In a 52-48 referendum this would be unfinished business by a long way. If the remain campaign win two-thirds to one-third that ends it.'

Concern has been expressed; however, that if a second referendum were held the result may be no clearer cut. There are those who are worried that Great Britain could find itself with two inconclusive referendum results regarded as not binding by significant proportions of the population.

Prior to the 2016 referendum being held, Prime Minister David Cameron warned of the dangers of ongoing demands for referenda. Cameron stated, 'You cannot have neverendums. You have referendums. When people start talking about a second referendum before you have even had the first, you are demonstrating you are losing the argument.'

The underlying problem appears to be that there may be no national consensus on this issue. Where this is the case, it may not have been appropriate to attempt to solve the question via a referendum.

2. The Brexit vote operates in the interests of some voting blocs in Great Britain but not others

One of the major objections raised about the decision to leave the EU is that it was taken by a group of voters to advance what they believe to be their interests; however, it has been taken to the perceived disadvantage of other voting blocs.

The underlying reason why many want an overwhelming majority to support whatever decision is taken regarding the United Kingdom's membership of the EU is to prevent the possibility of one section of the electorate effectively imposing a decision on another.

It has been suggested, for example, that the age split in the vote is concerning as the oldest section of the electorate was significantly responsible for a decision which will have the greatest long-term impact on the younger members of the electorate who did not support it.

In a report published in The Times on June 24, 2016, it was stated that 'Polls showed that British pensioners were about

three times more likely than the youngest voters to want a permanent break with the E.U.'

A 19-year-old, interviewed by The Times after the vote to leave, stated, 'To people my age it's pretty obvious. We stay.' Referring to his EU passport the young man went on to explain, 'It ensures a lifetime of freedom to travel and work in any of the union's 28 member states, each with its own culture to explore, its own charms and opportunities. So my generation has the most at stake in losing that.'

The effect of this demographic split has also been stressed by Felix Salmon in an opinion piece published on June 24, 2016. Salmon stated, 'This vote is...the grimmest of reminders of the power still held by the older generation, not only in the UK but around the world. Young Britons-the multicultural generation which grew up in and of Europe, the people who have only ever known European passports, voted overwhelmingly to remain. They're the generation that just lost its future.'

It has also been noted that this was a regional and class-based vote with a majority of white, working- and middle-class regional England determining the decision. It was not taken by the cities (especially London), by Scotland or by Northern Ireland. Felix Salmon observed, 'Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU; Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain. England drove this result, and specifically Little England-the older, whiter areas outside the big cities.'

It has been noted that this geographic and class distribution also reflects levels of education. In an analysis published on June 27, 2016, The Telegraph noted, 'According to the polls, university graduates were the most likely people to want to remain in the EU - while those with a GCSE or equivalent as their highest qualification were more likely to back Brexit. This was a pattern that was reflected in the results - with the Brexit vote correlating with areas with high shares of people with no education.'

Real and perceived differences in life opportunities were a major factor in shaping voting behaviour in the EU referendum. Critics have noted the virtual impossibility of achieving a consensus solution that works in the interests of all.

3. The decision to leave the EU is politically destabilising for Great Britain

It has been noted that the Brexit decision has prompted political instability within Great Britain.

The first casualty is the current Prime Minister and Conservative leader, David Cameron. When the leave vote was confirmed, Cameron announced that he would step down as Conservative leader and Prime Minister in October, 2016. In his official statement outside 10 Downing Street, Cameron, who was one of the leaders of the Remain campaign, said the decision warranted a change in leadership. He stated, 'I will do everything I can as Prime Minister to steady the ship over the coming weeks and months, but I do not think it would be right for me to try to be the captain that steers our country to its next destination.'

Five candidates have nominated to succeed David Cameron as the Conservative party leader. Once two candidates have been determined, party members will vote for their leader in September. This jockeying for leadership has been condemned as destabilising within the party and the uncertainty as to who will lead has been criticised as being unsettling for the country as a whole.

British Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who was also a supporter of a Remain vote, has refused to resign in response to the referendum outcome. This however, is not promoting stability within his Party, as prominent Labour spokespeople have demanded that he leave. Labour MPs are currently considering a motion of no confidence in their leader. Dame Margaret Hodge, one of those who submitted the motion to Parliamentary Labour Party chairman, has claimed that Mr Corbyn had 'failed' a 'test of leadership'.

The United Kingdom's European Commissioner, Lord Hill, has chosen to stand down in light of the result of the referendum. This is not contributing to stability, as no decision has yet been taken as to whether Lord Hill will even be replaced. Asked whether the United Kingdom would be sending anyone to Brussels to take Lord Hill's place on the Commission, Downing Street replied, 'It will be for the next prime minister to decide, following discussions with European partners, what role the UK plays in the European Commission, given we remain a full member of the EU until we have left.'

More potentially destabilising in the long term is that as a result of the vote to leave the EU there is now the possibility that Scotland and Northern Ireland may choose to secede from the United Kingdom.

62% of those who voted in Scotland chose to remain with the EU. This means that a decision taken largely in England is now going to take Scots voters in a direction they do not want to go.

In 2015, Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish First Minister, indicated that Scotland's government could use a vote to leave the EU as a catalyst to hold a second referendum on Scottish independence. Sturgeon stated, 'If Scotland had voted to stay in and the UK as a whole votes to come out... it's highly likely that will trigger an overwhelming demand for a second referendum on independence...The democratic outrage of being taken out of Europe against our will, I think it would be almost inevitable.'

It is only two years since Scotland held a referendum to determine whether they would remain part of the United Kingdom. Then, some 45% voted to leave Great Britain, with a clear majority indicating they wished to remain. In a snap poll commissioned by The Sunday Times immediately after the Brexit referendum result, 52 percent of Scots claimed they would vote to leave the United Kingdom if a new referendum were held.

Even without a Scottish independence referendum, the Brexit vote could trigger a constitutional crisis. The legislation governing the Scottish Parliament says it cannot pass laws incompatible with EU law. A clean break with the EU would require these laws to be amended, which would normally require the consent of the Scottish Parliament. If the Scottish Parliament were to refuse and Westminster tried to impose this change a crisis in law, administration and politics would result.

There is also concern that Northern Ireland might also decide to leave the United Kingdom rather than leave the European Union. Northern Ireland depends on the EU for significant subsidies-nearly 90 percent of its farmers' incomes come from EU funding. 55.8% of Northern Ireland voters decided to remain with the EU, presumably at least in part because of their recognition of their economic reliance on the EU. Being a member of the EU has also helped to ease historical tension between Eire and Northern Ireland. When both were members of the EU there was easy movement across their shared border. Once Northern Ireland ceases to be a member of the EU, this easy access will end. The re-establishment of a formal border could destabilise good relations.

4. The action may undermine the European Union causing increased political, social and economic dislocation
There are those who are concerned that the Brexit result in the United Kingdom may lead other UE states to hold referenda that see them decide to leave the Union also.

On Friday June 24, 2016, Geert Wilders , the leader of the Dutch anti-immigrant PVV party, argued that The Netherlands should hold its own referendum on whether to leave the European Union following Britain's vote in favour of exiting the bloc.

Wilders stated, 'I congratulate the British people for beating the political elite in both London and Brussels and I think we can do the same. The Dutch would like to be in charge again of their own budget, their national borders and their immigration policy. We should have a referendum about a "Nexit" as soon as possible.'

In Italy the largest threat to remaining within the EU seems to come from the anti-establishment Five Star Movement, which recently had candidates elected as mayors of Rome and Turin and wants a referendum on leaving the eurozone. In France, Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National, has suggested that the French could follow Britain in leaving the EU, hailing the Brexit vote as the beginning of 'a movement that can't be stopped'.

Le Pen has stated that if she wins the French presidential election next April, she will hold an in/out referendum on the country's membership of the EU within six months. Other political leaders within France do not support this position; however, that only 41% of France is in favour of remaining within the EU, the extent of popular opposition to the Union may be sufficient to give Le Pen victory in the French presidential elections.

The recent Ipsos Mori survey found that 55% of France appeared to want to go to a referendum on whether their country should remain in the EU and that currently 41% claim they would vote to leave. The figures are higher in Italy where 58% would like a referendum and 48% would like to leave.

The same survey felt that many Europeans felt that Britain's vote to leave the EU would encourage other European states to do likewise. Only 18 per cent of EU respondents disagreed with the statement that if Britain left the union, other countries would follow while 48 per cent said they agreed.

It has been argued that if a couple of additional members states were to leave the EU a flow-on effect would be created, with the Union becoming a less viable economic, administrative and political entity and other states choosing to leave both because they were influenced by the example of others and because a reduced EU had less to offer them.

There have been warnings that should the EU collapse or be substantially reduced this would have dire political, economic and social effects, with negative repercussions for Europe and the rest of the world.

Prior to the Brexit vote, British Prime Minister, David Cameron, suggested that the United Kingdom's exit could lead to the breakdown of the entire EU and create the sort of nationalistically fuelled instability that had been the precursor to two world wars.

In a speech delivered on May 9, 2016, Prime Minister Cameron stated, 'The European Union has helped reconcile countries which were once at each others' throats for decades. Britain has a fundamental national interest in maintaining common purpose in Europe to avoid future conflict between European countries.' Cameron is clearly indicating that the EU has created common purpose between nation states that have had a history of belligerent interaction. The implication is that to undermine the EU is to increase the likelihood of war between these nation states.

It has further been suggested that the collapse of the EU would make the question of dealing with the influx of migrants and refugees into Europe even more difficult, increasing social and political instability within Europe and within those regions these people are fleeing.

It has also been suggested that the demise of the EU would have a devastating impact on the world economy. An unwinding of the EU would have huge repercussions for economies all over the world. The world's largest economy, the United States, has investments and trade ties with the EU that would be negatively impacted by a breakup of the EU.

A comment written by Andrew Beattie and published on Investopedia on January 30, 2016, states, 'This shrinking of the global trade and financial uncertainty could cause a worse global recession than that of the 2007-08 global financial crisis. The high growth economies that sell to the EU and US would slow down along with the rest of the world. Even China, which has diversified its trading partners, would see a decline as the western economies suffer losses on a national level along with every level of investor from institutional to retail to pension fund.'

5. Leaving the EU would have adverse economic consequences for Great Britain

There have been many predictions that leaving the EU would be economically harmful to the United Kingdom. Apart from the negative impact of the uncertainty that would inevitably be created, the negative impacts on other economies would have a flow-back effect on Britain. In a global economy, anything that harms the world economy is likely to harm individual members of it.

In addition to this, by leaving the EU Britain would surrender a large number of economic advantages to which its membership of the Union currently entitles it. Prime Minister Cameron outlined a number of these in his speech of May 9. Cameron stated, 'We are part of a single market of 500 million people which Britain helped to create. Our goods and,

crucially, our services - which account for almost 80% of our economy - can trade freely by right. We help decide the rules. The advantages of this far outweigh any disadvantages.

Our membership of the single market is one of the reasons why our economy is doing so well, why we have created almost 2.4 million jobs over the last 6 years, and why so many companies from overseas - from China or India, the United States, Australia and other Commonwealth countries invest so much in the UK.'

Cameron concluded, 'The overwhelming weight of independent opinion - from the International Monetary Fund to the OECD, from the London School of Economics to the Institute for Fiscal Studies - also supports the fact that Britain will suffer an immediate economic shock, and then be permanently poorer for the long-term.'

Further implications

Currently all that can be said with certainty is that the impact of Brexit on Britain, Europe and the rest of the world is uncertain. In his speech of May 9, 2016, Prime Minister David Cameron stated with regard to Britain, 'If we leave, the only certainty we will have is uncertainty.'


In the short- to medium-term the consequences for Britain and the EU are likely to be disadvantageous economically and politically. All that is currently being disputed is the extent of the disadvantage in magnitude and duration.


A small majority of Britains appears to have invested its hope in an independent future, tinged with recollections of a past the very oldest of them are unlikely to have known firsthand. The vote appears to have been one against globalisation by a section of British society without the skills that would allow them to find a place in the world market. It seems to have been a vote against the supposed hegemony of a Europe that older Britains tend to see as an intermittently hostile neighbour rather than as an entity to which they belong.

The EU appears to be the imperfect embodiment of an admirable ideal. It is a union that grew out of perceived economic advantage through close collaboration and mutual support. It has begun to become a political unit wrestling to come to terms with the profound social and moral conundrums that the world's immigrant and refugee problems have created and with the dilemma of responding to global warming. Not all of those living within this Union appear to have understood nor necessarily shared its ideal of common action and the spirit in which it has been undertaken.


On one level the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU seems simply to bow to geography and history. Britain has long seen itself as close to Europe but removed from it. On a broader level it appears a retrograde step which has jeopardised an ambitious, conscious attempt to move beyond some of the limitations of the nation state.


Newspaper items used in the compilation of this issue outline


The Australian: June 25, 2016, page 15, comment by Greg Sheridan, 'Britannia rules again as the bulldog bites'. 


The Age: June 22, 2016, page 15, comment by Roger Cohen, 'Britain must remain with the union'. 


The Age: June 22, 2016, page 15, comment by Thomas Von Der Dunk, 'English exit is just what the EU needs'. 

The Australian: June 20, 2016, page 4, comment (photos) by Matthew Parris, 'The lesson of Jo Cox's death? There isn't one'. 


The Age: June 19, 2016, page 24, background (incl aftermath of murder of MP Jo Cox) by Nick Miller, 'Divided kingdom'. 


The Australian: July 2, 2016, page 22, comment by Greg Sheridan, 'Death of the European dream'. 

The Australian: July 2, 2016, page 22, comment by Brendan O'Neill, 'The plebs give the establishment its bloodiest nose in decades - and I love it'. 


The Australian: July 2, 2016, page 22, comment by Peter Wilson, 'Who voted Leave? The old, less educated, low paid, pensioners and Christians'. 

The Age: July 2, 2016, page 20, comment / background (ref to effects on British society) by Nick Miller, 'Never mind the bollocks, it's anarchy'.


The Age: July 1, 2016, page 18, comment by Waleed Aly, 'Politics loses its might'. 

The Australian: June 30, 2016, page 14, comment by Theodore Dalrymple, 'Brits find he who lives by direct democracy dies by direct democracy'. 

Herald-Sun: June 29, 2016, page 23, comment by Peter Jennings, 'Brexit is a big hit to defence and security'. 


The Australian: June 29, 2016, page 14, comment by Gary Johns, 'Let Brexit be a warning to elite meddlers'. 

The Age: June 29, 2016, page 14, editorial, 'Brexit shock part of a bigger tale of global flux'. 

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The Age: June 28, 2016, page 21, comment by Elizabeth Knight, 'Turning back globalisation clock isn't good for anyone'. 

The Age: June 28, 2016, page 19, comment by Boris Johnson, 'Britain is part of Europe and always will be'. 

Herald-Sun: June 27, 2016, page 22, comment by Rita Panahi, 'Brexit flags big changes'. 

Herald-Sun: June 27, 2016, page 13, comment by Andrew Bolt, 'Brits lead where we might follow'. 

The Australian: June 27, 2016, page 13, letters incl, 'EU intransigence must take the blame for Brexit'. [↗](#)

The Australian: June 27, 2016, page 13, editorial, 'UK and EU require calm talks'.

The Australian: June 27, 2016, page 12, comment by Jennifer Oriel, 'People power defies Europe's self-appointed elites'. [↗](#)

The Australian: June 27, 2016, page 11, background (photos) by Shipman and Lyons, 'A very British coup'. [↗](#)

The Australian: June 27, 2016, page 9, comment by Niall Ferguson, 'Generation Led Zep kicked Britain down the stairway to hell'. [↗](#)

The Australian: June 27, 2016, page 8, comment by Dominic Lawson, 'Britain chose to bring back the parliamentary democracy it invented'. [↗](#)

The Age: June 27, 2016, page 9, background by Nick Miller, 'Wave of Bregret as reality sinks in'. [↗](#)

The Age: June 26, 2016, page 20, background items, 'How Brexit will actually work' [↗](#) / 'Generation Y wakes up to fear and despair'.