


Concept Paper

The Paradox of Brexit and the Consequences of Taking Back Control

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Abstract: Memorable events of the 21st century that will be rightly or wrongly be remembered includes the global financial crisis of August 2007, the election of Mr Donald Trump as President of the United States of America, and Brexit (the United Kingdom (UK) voting to leave the European Union) in 2016. Others include the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which were discovered in Wuhan, China that spread across the world, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24 February 2022. Since 2016, Brexit has continued to dominate global politics. Conceptually, this article explores the Brexit dilemma, the formalization of Brexit agreements, and the post-Brexit impact on the economy and society. How did Brexit happen? What are the underlying causes of Brexit? Is Brexit connected to Euroscepticism and populism? By evaluating these contexts, important issues and debates can be reconciled to advance knowledge on Brexit, UK politics, the regional political system, and the rise of populism. This article is currently relevant since it coincides with an obvious upsurge in interest in the post-Brexit Global Britain.

Keywords: Brexit referendum; Brexit agreement; take back control; populism and policy process theories; EU regional system



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1. Introduction

The election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States along with the Brexit referendum in 2016 produced one of the biggest shocks in modern politics [1]. Consequently, this article examines the Brexit referendum, the negotiations leading to the Brexit agreement, and its impact on the economy and society. Because the process of the UK leaving the European Union (EU) was so captivating, there have been, and continue to be, great amounts of interest and expressions of general concern from business leaders, public servants, politicians, the public, and the press. The “noisy politics” and the high level of media reporting led the public to take an active interest in the negotiations of the Brexit agreement [2]. In the political process, electorates engage with policymaking either by referendums, direct or indirect voting, or lobbying via their Members of Parliament (MP) or social media. A referendum enables citizens to vote directly on legislation or constitutional amendments [3].

In most cases, a “crisis” of representative democracy or dissatisfactions with national policies lead to a demand for a referendum [3–5]. Additionally, demands for referenda have been attributed to concerns about the failure of the traditional representational systems [3,5]. It has been argued that Brexit was a pre-legislative referendum [6]. Even though it took place in 2016, Brexit continues to be a topic of consuming interest to the public, academia, and policymakers. The underlying issues that led to the Brexit referendum have been investigated at length by many scholars [7–13]. Additionally, the problem of post-vote interpretation has been discussed in an illuminating way [14,15]. This article adds to the political science literature by evaluating the pre-and-post Brexit referendum debates and issues.

Clearly, Brexit has different interpretations (pre-legislative referendum, populist pressure, dissatisfactions with European policies connected to Euroscepticism, concerns about

unchecked migration, among other factors such as demand for national sovereignty) [16,17]. Populists often tend to invoke a partisan state and often tend to emphasise a vision of immediate power in the sense of the possibility of the direct expression of the people's will in political institutions [18]. According to Lord Ashcroft evaluation, nearly half (about 49%) of Leave voters said the biggest single reason for wanting to leave the EU was "the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK" [19] (p. 1). For Remain voters (about 43%), the single most important reason for their decision was that "the risks of voting to leave the EU looked too great when it came to things like the economy, jobs and prices" [19] (p. 1).

The different interpretation of Brexit suggest that the very meaning of the vote was ambiguous and open to reframing by political actors in ways that had significant consequences for the resulting negotiations [20]. Since the referendum, it took four years for the UK and EU to conclude the divorce conditions and the terms of the Brexit agreement concerning trade, immigration, the security of citizens' rights, access to fishing waters, and Irish borders, among other issues. On 24 December 2020, both parties reached an agreement on a 100 percent tariff-free liberalisation that took effect from 1 January 2021.

This article applied populism, Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) and policy theories [21,22] to evaluate the underlying factors for the demand for the Brexit referendum. Conceptually, this article provides an assessment of Brexit from the dimensions of governance, impact on the UK economy and the impact on the society. Previous studies mainly focused on predicting the outcome of the Brexit referendum before an agreement was reached [9,23]. Additionally, this article evaluates the underlying factors that led to the demand for referendum and the political process leading to the Brexit agreement.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 analyses the demand for a referendum. Section 3 evaluates the relationships between the referendum, institutionalization, and policy processes. The analyses open a range of questions about the importance of institutions and the capabilities of governance systems in facilitating democratic problem-solving, and what leads to a demand for a referendum. Section 4 reviews Brexit political process and Brexit dilemma. Section 5 evaluates the impact of the Brexit, especially on society, businesses, and the economy. Section 6 summarises the implications of Brexit and post-Brexit Global Britain.

2. Demand for Referendum

Nowadays, the practices of referendum cut across different political and governance systems and nations that enable citizens to express their wishes concerning governance or legislation. Referenda in the UK are used to decide major questions of governance such as accession to the European Economic Community (EEC), regional devolution within the UK and on the voting system. Research on "democratic innovations highlight forms of participation, such as direct democracy and deliberative forums that complement representative institution" [24] (p. 877). Previous studies have revealed that the motives for demanding referenda could either be a manifestation of a populist wave sweeping across many nations [25,26] or instrumental preferences [24]. Previous scholars analysed whether citizens support referenda for intrinsic reasons or because they are instrumentally motivated [24]. In these contexts, intrinsic reasons propose that referenda allow citizens to exercise their democratic rights more directly, whereas instrumental motivations explain that preferences for referenda are predominantly based on the expectation that they will produce desired policy outcomes [24].

Referenda have become popular in western democracies since World War II [27]. Originally advocated by radicals and reformers, it became part of the Danish 1953 Constitution and political culture [27]. Referendum has been defined "as mass public votes on an issue, as opposed to mass votes to choose representatives" [28] (p. 1). Some scholars distinguish between different types of referendums and limit claims accordingly [29]. Various forms of the referenda have emerged such as the problem of intra-party disputes in motivating the

initiation of referenda [30] (Morel, 2001), the problem of post-vote interpretation and the relationship between populism and referenda [25,29].

The Brexit referendum has been interpreted as a pre-legislative referendum, rather than a post-legislative one (see report on Independent Commission on Referendums) [6] and “populist ventriloquism” [26] (p. 21). Some scholars linked Brexit to the manifestation of crisis in the global order [31]. It has been stated that the manifestation of the global order crisis started with the 2007 financial crisis, leading to the election of Mr Donald Trump as the president of the United States and the Brexit vote in 2016, the election of Mr Emmanuel Macron as president of France in 2017 and the election of Mr Volodymyr Zelensky as president of Ukraine in 2019 [23,31,32].

Brexit could be linked to populism and anti-immigration. It could be argued that Brexit was a result of dissatisfactions with European policies connected to Euroscepticism (originating from resentment about the perceived loss of national sovereignty to the EU’s regional governance) and concerns about unchecked EU migration/free movement system. For instance, Brexit prioritised some of the most immediate interests of British citizens over immigrants and enabled the resentment that a large part of the British public feels over the perceived unfair burden-sharing membership of the EU [33]. Perceptions and attitudes towards immigration were among the key issues that divided Brexit Remainers and Leavers. Arguably, Leavers viewed Brexit as an opportunity to restrict immigration among EU migrants [34].

The configuration of populism as an ideology (such as people-centrism and anti-elitism) has become key features of political communication and the media [35]. Therefore, scholars increasingly apply the concept of populism to make sense of current events such as the Brexit referendum [36]. Populism has often been presented as a two-edged sword: on the one side is the voice of the people, on the other edge voices of fear, anger, hatred, and revenge [37]. Populists present themselves as champions of ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’ [38]. The relationship between populism and referendums has been considered in several recent publications [24–26,39]. Therefore, Brexit and the decision to leave the EU have been attributed to the manifestation of right-wing populism [23].

There is now a consensus that populism is, in Mudde’s words, a ‘thin-centred ideology’ that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people [23] (p. 2).

There has been attempts to distinguished different types of populism as “complete populism” which includes reference and appeals to the people, anti-elitism, and exclusion of out-groups [35]. Another type is “excluding populism which includes only references and appeals to the people and exclusion of out-groups, whereas anti-elitist populism includes reference and appeals to the people and anti-elitism” [35] (p. 426). “Empty populism includes only reference and appeals to the people [35] (p. 426). Although populism should be conceived of as a specific set of ideas, it is distinct from classical ideologies such as a fascism and liberalism” [36].

Research on referendum provides two paths—examining institutional features and the substantive issues. The former explains the goal of the referendum, decision-promoting and decision-controlling [40]. The latter explains the legislative and legal requirement for setting up a referendum [40]. Additionally, research on referendum focuses on the role of political discontent (voting against governments), cues and referendum-specific factors [5]. Cues originating from political parties serve as heuristics that help citizens form political views [41,42]. Anti-immigrant parties have been on the rise throughout Western Europe, since the turn of the century [43]. Due to the rise of populism, a referendum has been described as:

An instrument that enables those “who feel unrepresented” and it is populist parties that harvest this resentment to cast a vote against the elites [44], (p. 1300) cited in [5].

Also, regionalism has been defined as the “structures, processes and arrangements that are working towards greater coherence within a specific international region in terms of economic, political, security, socio-cultural and other kinds of linkages” [45] cited in [46] (p. 161). It could be argued that post-materialism is about the empowerment of citizens and their liberation from unfavourable policies [40]. Media populism is associated with the adoption of populist stylistic and ideological elements by media [26]. Therefore, political economy theories focus on labour market competition [42]. It is believed that labour market competition mechanisms drive individuals’ immigration attitudes beyond the effect of non-economic factors [42].

To understand the popularity of anti-immigrant parties, some studies point to the news media as a key contextual-level factor [43]. Additionally, party positions and policies influence citizens’ attitudes [42,47,48]. Citizens tend to become more liberal when party positions move in a more liberal direction. Arguably, citizens become more sceptical of immigration when policies move in a liberal direction or when the stocks of migrants increase over time. Findings show that media attention to immigration contributes to increasing public support for anti-immigrant parties and that the content published in the news strongly affects public attitudes towards immigration [42]. European citizens’ views on immigration are influenced by the stances of the parties they support [49]. Concerns about the effect of immigration on national identity and traditions outweigh the economic ones in explaining the immigration views of natives [42]. A prominent feature of media coverage during the UK’s referendum on European Union (EU) membership was the stark difference between the pro-EU young and their Eurosceptic elders, widely assumed to reflect a generational divide [1].

The driving force of modern democracy includes improving transparency, strong accountability and improved communications between the government and the people. This process helps reduce conflicts, strengthen political institutions, and reduce public disillusionment. Through the referendum, people can put their views to the government of the day, thereby engage themselves in the decision-making process. Although views can be polarized [50], especially on highly salient issues such as Brexit, participation can empower people and reduce dissatisfaction for governance and policies. During the 2016 Brexit campaign, political populism was used to frame the official ‘Leave’ campaign that preceded the EU Referendum vote [26].

It is unlikely that the majority of UK citizens who voted to leave the EU did so solely because they believed EU membership was bad for the country, but because of other concerns as well relating to their national identity, political engagement, associations with other political institutions, and judgements about the performance of the national government [1]. Populism “has three constituent parts [26] (p. 22): (1) it makes reverential reference to the people, (2) it is anti-elitist and (3) it defines ‘the people’ by the rhetorical exclusion of other population categories (e.g., immigrants)”. During the Brexit referendum, two elements stand out: the issue at stake and the referendum campaign [5]. During the Brexit referendum campaign, political parties’ stances cue voters and influence their opinions and attitudes toward immigration [42]. Voters make decisions based on attitudes to the issues or voters “do consider the issue at stake” and “make use of the information provided by parties and the campaign environment” [5] (p. 490).

The official campaign for Leave in April 2016 was supported by many senior Conservative party figures (including Mr Michael Gove, then Justice Secretary) and prominent Labour MPs such as Mr Gisela Stuart, UKIP’s sole Member of Parliament, Mr Douglas Carswell, and leader Mr Nigel Farage. Later, Mr Boris Johnson joined the Vote Leave team, whereas Mr Dominic Cummings became the ‘Vote Leave Campaign’ Director, and Mr Matthew Elliott, a renowned political lobbyist was appointed as Chief Executive [26]. The Leave Campaign directorate played a key role in formulating the campaigning strategy by

“advancing an economic case for withdrawal: promoting a positive and internationalist vision for Britain while also seeking to ‘neutralise’ the fear that leaving may be bad for jobs and living standards” [26] (p. 27). The Vote Remain campaign focused on debates related to risks of Brexit to the economy (which was regarded as project fear). Whereas the Vote Leave Campaign focused its campaign strategy on benefits from control of immigration, saving funding for the UK National Health Services (NHS) and the opportunity that Brexit will provide access to the global market.

It is important to highlight the role played by the Referendum Party, (the UKIP), and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) that led to Euroscepticism becoming increasingly mainstream. The term ‘Eurosceptic’ can be traced back to the mid-1980s in the UK and, in its simplest form, refers to “someone who is opposed to the powers of the EU” [51]. Arguably, UKIP played a prominent role in popularising Euroscepticism. UKIP was not the only party opposed to European integration; elsewhere, various parties adopting ‘hard’ Eurosceptic positions made major gains in the Strasbourg chamber [51].

Indeed, immigration was an issue of central contention throughout the referendum campaign. “Take Back Control” was the slogan, reflecting growing resentment against perceived levels of immigration, perceived loss of national sovereignty in favour of regional (EU) governance and regional over-free movement of people, goods and services. Arguably, the European Union model of regional integration reduces the power of individual sovereign states, and the public vote to leave appears to be a nativist reaction to the threat posed by the EU [23]. Additionally, linked to right-wing populism, the British print media has also been associated with “laying the ideational foundations of populist sentiment through the adoption across sections of the press of an anti-establishment and anti-migrant agenda” [26] (p. 24).

“The media can no longer be treated as a side issue when it comes to understanding contemporary populism. It must be put at the centre of our analysis” [52] (p. 94), cited in [26] (p. 22). The UK press has long been recognised as a significant driver of the British public and media opinion on Europe driving Euroscepticism to become increasingly mainstreamed [26]. The increased electoral success of Eurosceptic parties, at the 2014 European elections, serves to raise the salience of the EU in domestic politics and national media, both of which increasingly question the European project [51]. Therefore, the consolidation of digital media has played a key role in the circulation of populist messages to a large number of people that questioned the political and legitimacy terms of the European Union, leading to the ideal scenario of Euroscepticism [53].

3. Institutionalisation Process and Policy Theories

The institutionalisation process serves to regulate the behaviour of societies [16,22,54–56]. Policymaking serves to deepen our knowledge of political institution [55,57]. A policy system consists of several institutional orders and has distinctive characteristics and unique logics that affect the actors’ behaviour at multiple levels [54]. Policy process theories and policy reforms acknowledge the importance of institutions, context, and capabilities of governance systems to facilitate democratic problem-solving. Individual opinions are shaped by the interaction between three main factors: elites’ discourse, citizens’ level of political awareness, and their political values or predispositions [42].

Although referendum policy is rooted in many national constitutions, the dynamics may be different [5]. A policy-based typology and analysis enable the review of variations in the policy process, achievements, etc. [40]. Arguably, there should be a negative relation between policies and public preferences [42]. As the “level” of a certain policy increases, citizens who were satisfied with the previous policy level will change their relative preference and demand less policy [42] (p. 5). Previous scholars analysed referendums policies across the political system in Europe, which they identified policy areas clustered into four major policy domains: international system, domestic norms, welfare and postmaterialist issues [40]. The EU is a regional economic and political union between 27 EU countries that

was created post- Second World War. The functioning of the EU is founded on an institutionalized foundation and democracy. Arguably, democracy in the EU is weak and indirect. The European Union model of regional integration reduces the power of a sovereign nation and promotes free movement which has become a burden-sharing [58].

The broad domain of the international system includes two policy areas—state formation and foreign affairs—and deals with all the issues of national sovereignty and interstate politics [40]. The second domain is domestic norms related to constitutional, political/electoral system or a new constitution [40]. The third and fourth policies refer to welfare (such as a referendum on economic, health, education social and labour matters) and postmaterialist (related to environment, media, and moral/ethical issues). Arguably, Brexit was a pre-legislative referendum initiated through a political process to determine UK foreign/regional policy with the EU. The process started with the enactment of the EU Referendum Act 2015 in the British Parliament.

Politics, democracy and governance literature encompass the more greatly faceted institutional pillars of governance, society, and organizations. There are at least three actions in the policy process that can be distinguished: (1) rulemaking, (2) rule adaptation, and (3) rule change [16]. In the policy process, public participation serves to empower people and thus to put in practice democratic ideas [59]. It could be argued that Brexit was developed in order to empower the people and enable them to decide their sovereignty. Previous scholars applied the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) to explain the policy process model [17] (Figure 1). The ‘MSA’ is a way of thinking about three aspects of policymaking. MSA model shows how analysing the policy process enables the understanding of how governance factors interact and influence policy decisions.



Figure 1. The Framework of Multiple Streams Approach (MSA).

There are several critical questions within the realm of political theory [4]. The MSA model proposes that policymaking starts with identifying problems in society that requires attention, analysing the potential solutions, setting agenda, and implementing policy changes. However, the MSA model fail to articulate the meaning of its metaphor related to the “swings of the national mood, vagaries of public opinion, election results, changes of administration and interest group pressure campaigns” [17] (p. 468).

The MSA starts with the problems in society that requires attention. It appears that most of the populations across the globe are dissatisfied with the leadership from the political class or elites that manifested in the elections which have been tagged referendums in disguise. The policy process emerges from a process of disputes in different decision arenas. When evaluating the levels of participation in referendums it is important to consider different categories, groups and representatives of the populations of the society to evaluate the effectiveness of the voting and preferences. The most important elements to consider is the extent to which people may participate in referendum voting and reasons that can hold some people back from participating.

Moreover, referenda serve to confer the legitimacy of policies and ensuring effective governance. Governance systems and states must develop collective problem-solving and conflict resolution policies. The decision-making capability of national institutions diminishes with the loss of sovereignty associated with regional integration. During the Brexit campaigns debate on sovereignty dominated. Opposition to the EU and demand for sovereignty were some of the underlying causes for the demand for the UK to leave the EU. Studies on generational trends in Euroscepticism and individual-level determinants of hostility towards the EU, provide causes of generational differences in Euroscepticism caused by a combination of factors, including the experience of the generation with EU, domestic political institutions, and access to education [1]. Additionally, immigration news may be responsible for support for anti-immigrant parties [43].

Although regional integration is a strong pillar of both economic integrations, some voices and groups will continue to support national sovereignty over any merit for regional integration. Additionally, anti-migration and nationalist populism will continue to dominate political debates and increase the demand for a referendum [23]. A referendum provides an opportunity for collective decision-making and to determine whether rules or policies of governance are good enough or whether they need amendments. Despite the UK being a representative democracy and having parliamentary members, they allowed the public to decide if they want to remain in the EU or leave.

Arguably, the decision by Mr David Cameron (then, UK Prime Minister and Conservative party) to promise the UK electorate the Brexit referendum was aimed at gaining political advantage. However, it could be relieving political pressure that has risen through growing right-wing resentment for national sovereignty above regional governance. Additionally, there are political incentives for Mr Cameron promising the referendum. Some scholars argued that, on the contrary, the lasting identities formed by Brexit may not have relieved political pressure so much as produced new political identities [20].

4. Brexit Political Process and Brexit Dilemma

The UK waited 16 years to join the European Economic Community (EEC) [60]. The “UK historically has a troubled relationship with the EU and has always been on the fringes of ‘Europe’ in terms of its commitment to further integration, but in recent years ‘hard’ Euroscepticism has become increasingly mainstreamed in British politics” [51] (p. 240). The UK have a history of joining or leaving the EEC or EU that dates back to as far back as 1975. Since 1973, there have been twelve referendums held in the UK. On 5 June 1975, the ruling Labour government held a referendum on whether Britain should stay with the EEC they joined in 1973. The referendum result received an overwhelming vote in favour of staying.

In 2012, Mr David Cameron (then Prime Minister), promised that his Conservative government would hold a referendum on the UK staying or leaving the EU if re-elected in 2015. Although Mr Cameron is a supporter of the UK remaining in the EU, he kept his promise by announcing in February 2016 that the referendum would be held on 23 June 2016. Concerning the 23 June 2016 referendum on the UK membership of the EU (Leave or Remain), some scholars have labelled the decision a ‘policy fiasco’ and used the concept of policy deception in the terms of how the Electoral Commission and Vote Leave helped create the Brexit policy fiasco [61].

It seemed that the Leave option was real, organised and deliverable as system-wide deceit enabled by the decision to list the Leave option alongside Remain on the Brexit ballot paper [61]. Migration was one of the dominant factors during the Brexit campaign because of the free movement of citizens that the EU membership demands on all its member states. The UK was the top destination for EU migrants being the second-biggest EU country by economic output and the third-largest by population, after Germany and France [60]. Right-wing populism and anti-immigrant sentiment led to the Brexit decision, whereas left-wing populism predicts support for leaving the EU [23].

The interaction of nativist sentiment and anti-elitist attitudes, the cocktail of right-wing populism, led to widespread support for Brexit, even while controlling for other factors [23] (p. 1).

This fragmentation and polarization of the UK political system are important for understanding recent trends of resentment for national interests and regional governance. An assessment of the extent and causes of generational differences in Euroscepticism reveals that young people are the most supportive generation of EU membership [1]. A prominent theme of the Brexit campaign and fallout of the result has been that of conflict of generational effect between the largely pro-EU young and their Eurosceptic elders [1]. Today's young people at the leading edge of a generational decay in Euroscepticism and people become more Eurosceptic as they age [1]. Lord Ashcroft analysed how the UK voted on Brexit and revealed that the older the voters, the more likely they were to have voted to leave the EU, whereas the majority of the younger population voted to Remain. A majority of those aged over 45 voted to leave (rising to 60% of those aged 65 or over) and about 73% of 18 to 24 years old and 62% of 25–34s voted to remain [19].

During the Brexit referendum campaign, one of the most discussed issues is the impact of Brexit on the UK economy. Additionally, Brexit was interpreted differently either viewed as reclaiming sovereignty or disastrous economic consequences [62]. Some scholars have classified the process as “noisy politics” compared the “wide range of groups actively debating and disagreeing over the direction the UK should take, including business's voice that was linked to fears that if the decision went against it, there would be a potential exit of capital with a negative impact on the economy” [2] (p. 112). Throughout the Brexit campaign, business leaders, regions, politicians, and political parties were divided over the Brexit Leave or Remain position [63]. The business community (large, medium-sized, and small firms) was almost entirely united around the need for a Yes vote to join the European Commission in 1975 than in 2016 [2]. To date, the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the First Minister continue to oppose every Leave decision being in support of Remain. Nigel Farage (the leader of UKIP and later the Brexit Party) was a prominent figure in the campaign for Brexit.

Additionally, Brexit divided the UK nations and major cities [63]. A closer look at the overall figures for the referendum votes reveals the depth of the divisions. England (voted 53.4% Leave, 46.6% Remain), Northern Ireland (voted 44.2% Leave, 55.8% Remain), Scotland (voted 38.0% Leave, 62.0% Remain) and Wales (voted 52.5% Leave, 47.5% Remain) [63]. In other words, Scots voted strongly to Remain, unlike England and Wales. The same applies to London, which is packed with Remainers (having voted 24.7% Leave and 75.3% Remain) [63]. It will be mistaken to assume that the same patterns of voting will always exist in future referendums or general elections. Mr Cameron (then, UK Prime Minister and Conservative party leader) campaigned on the “Remain side”. The Labour party leadership under Mr Jeremy Corbyn also campaigned for the “Remain side”. Following the Brexit Leave result, Mr Cameron (the then UK Prime Minister) who campaigned on the “Remain side”, had to resign.

“The British people have voted to leave the European Union and their will must be respected”, said Mr Cameron, “The will of the British people is an instruction that must be delivered [David Cameron resignation speech outside Downing Street]” [63].

Following Cameron's resignation, Mrs Theresa May was elected as the Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister on 13 July 2016. On the 29 March 2017, Mrs May sent a letter to European Council President Donald Tusk, triggering Article 50. It set the date for the UK's departure in the next two years, following a transition period. A major issue during the Brexit negotiations was the Irish border. Under the “Withdrawal Agreement”, Mrs May proposed a Brexit plan to include an all-UK customs union with the EU to resolve the controversial Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland border, which was referred to as the “*Irish backstop*”. This element of the deal did not go down well with the majority of

members of the Parliament, and May was forced to promise to step down. Additionally, US President Mr Joe Biden warned that a future UK–US trade deal was contingent on the UK not unravelling the US-brokered 1998 “Good Friday Agreement” that brought peace to Northern Ireland.

After Mrs May resigned in 2019 following a disagreement within the Parliament over a new Brexit agreement negotiated with the EU, Boris Johnson was elected Conservative leader and appointed prime minister. What followed culminated into another one-year negotiation on the Brexit deal. During the transition period, there were fears that a no-deal Brexit agreement, could mean the UK leave the EU on what is regarded as “Australian terms” (i.e., no free trade agreement with the EU). This platform could have made the UK goods more expensive and harder to sell in the EU, whereas full border checks could cause long delays at ports and affect the supply chain for essential goods.

During the negotiations that intensified during December 2020, both the UK and EU Chief negotiators claimed that the conditions for an agreement are not met, due to significant divergences on the level playing field on governance and fishing rights [63]. The UK wants absolute sovereignty, and no strings attached in the single market. The Brexit trade talks breakdown the level playing issues include such as fishing rights, level playing field (EU wants assurances that the UK cannot undercut the EU by setting its own rules) and governance of a deal (the UK wants to have absolute freedom from EU regulations and laws and the EU wants to protect itself).

Additionally, there were negotiations on the status of the approximately 3.5 m EU citizens who are resident in the UK (and that of their British counterparts elsewhere in the EU) [64]. The agreement on the legal position has proved relatively straightforward, at least when compared with other issues, in particular the status of Northern Ireland [64]. On 24 December 2020, both parties reached an agreement that was applicable from 1 January 2021 with a 100% tariff-free liberalisation. The agreement was presented to all 27 EU countries that unanimously approved the deal with no veto. Additionally, UK MPs have voted on legislation implementing the agreement (more than 1000-page treaty) through the act of parliament.

5. Brexit Referendum-Impact Assessment

Russian army invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 which has triggered Europe’s largest refugee crisis since World War II, Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Mr Trump winning the American presidential election and Brexit Vote in 2016 will be remembered for decades. Since 2016, Brexit issues have continued to dominate UK politics and divide voters, constituencies, and generations. In the 2017 general election, the Brexit issue did have an impact on electoral support and voting patterns [34]. The “patterns in constituency-level voting raise important questions about the salience of Brexit to individual-level voters, as well as a broader cosmopolitan/non-cosmopolitan divide in British politics” [34] (p. 43). The “Brexit referendum have demonstrated a stark demographic and value divide between younger, better educated and more cosmopolitan voters who voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU and older, less well-educated more socially conservative voters who favoured leaving” [34] (p. 43).

Migration (especially, EU free movement) was a key issue that led to Brexit. Since the referendum, there has been a sharp fall in migration from the EU. It could be argued that Brexit has impacted unskilled and skilled labour in the UK economy, for example, in the national health service (NHS) and universities. The number of EU nationals registering as nurses in England has dropped by 92 percent since the 2016 referendum and about 2700 EU nurses left the health service in 2016, compared with 1600 in 2014, representing a 68% increase [65]. However, recruitment from non-EU countries and from within the UK expanded by more than the fall from the EU, leading to a higher level of total employment in the NHS. Additionally, the General Medical Council (GMC) found that 60% of doctors from the EU countries said they were considering leaving the UK at some point in the

future [65]. About 91% of medical professionals stated that the Brexit vote was a factor in their considerations [65].

Brexit is also expected to have a major impact on UK higher education institutions concerning staffing and EU students' recruitment. Before the Brexit agreement, EU and UK students paid the same fees (home fee status) at UK universities. The terms of the Brexit agreement mean that EU/EEA students coming to study at UK higher education will lose the "home fee status" and access to British student loans. It is estimated that the new rules could lead to UK universities losing about GBP 62.5 million (USD 85.9 million) per year in tuition fees [66]. According to the Russell Group of leading universities between 2015–2016 and 2016–2017, there was an 11% rise in the number of EU academics leaving among biosciences, physics, chemistry and engineering academics [67]. Additionally, between 2016–2017 and 2017–2018, the proportion of new EU academics recruited by the Russell Group from overseas fell from 48% to 43% [67].

Arguably, the impact of Brexit will remain complicated and contentious for many reasons. Previous studies predicted negative effects on the economy [15]. Moreover, the impact of leaving the EU was predicted to hit hardest on the recruitment system as well as EU migrants living and working in the UK. Although there "must have been a deliberate attempt to exaggerate the economic risks of Brexit" (Lord Stuart Rose—the former CEO of Marks and Spencer), undoubtedly, Brexit is already affecting UK Businesses in different ways. Exports from the UK to the EU have fallen by 41% as the transition period ended [68]. There was a 28.8% drop in goods imported from the EU to the UK [69]. There is the challenge of new tariffs on some goods made outside Britain that are set for export from the UK to the European Union (EU)-member states.

According to an ITV News business correspondent, the export market is in deep trouble since the beginning of the year 2021 as extensive paperwork, health check on fish and dairy, delays at customs, a tariff on some goods made outside Britain are putting European businesses off trading with the UK. Across the EU countries, some businesses are being put off from doing business with UK firms because they must pay up to a 12% tariff if the product is manufactured outside Britain. Additionally, they must pay for customs clearance and storage cost if clearance is slow and must pay for Value Added Tax (VAT) in advance. This makes the UK less attractive to European businesses since the Brexit agreement came into force in January 2021 [69]. Additionally, the same problems are faced by businesses in Northern Ireland as they battle with new regulations and extensive paperwork on import and export (due to Northern Ireland protocols agreed in the Brexit deal. There are fears that the Brexit agreement could lead to a fresh Irish border crisis and further threaten the Good Friday Agreement).

A major contention is custom checks on goods crossing the Irish sea from mainland UK. Northern Ireland is inside the EU single market for goods and services different to the rest of the UK (England, Wales and Scotland), so goods now require checks which provide additional cost to businesses and costly delays. It also comes amid rising violence and riots over a specific part of the Brexit withdrawal agreement, called the Northern Ireland Protocol, which aims to eliminate the need for border controls between Northern Ireland—which is part of the UK—and the Republic of Ireland, an EU member [70]. This means Northern Ireland remains in the EU single market for goods; therefore, products being moved from Great Britain to Northern Ireland undergo EU import procedures.

In April 2021, there were media reports that over two dozen police officers were injured as riots and fight broke out as a loyalist protest turned violent in Belfast, starting because of the Brexit agreement which created a border in the Irish sea. According to BBC News over 70 police officers were hurt in what police called Northern Ireland's worst violence for years [71]. The Brexit Agreement creates a de facto border down the Irish Sea as goods entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain are subject to EU checks—a move which has angered pro-British Unionists [70]. According to one Northern Ireland business owner interviewed by CNN Nic Robertson:

We had to employ 10 new staff to do custom clearance and to make sure all the paperwork is correct to be able to engage in business transactions with businesses in the rest of the UK [70].

Additionally, businesses in Northern Ireland now find it easier to source some goods from the EU than from the rest of the UK leading to frustrations and anger among business owners. Another business manager interviewed by CNN state: “I think we have been let down and I feel there was not enough investigation of what the rules are going to be” [70]. There has been a sense of frustration and betrayal among business leaders with the new Brexit Agreement that have angered Unionist and non-unionist politicians. “We’re simply saying to tear up the agreement which breaks up the UK, tear up the agreement which breaks up all the promises you made to the people of Northern Ireland that you would have unfettered access to your biggest market in GB [Great Britain]” [70]. Arguably, going by the terms of the Brexit agreement, the UK has become unattractive to EU businesses.

The UK is now free of EU rules on migration which was a major factor in the Brexit referendum. An estimated 3.7 million EU citizens were living in the UK in 2019 [72]. A report from Migratory Observatory [72] indicates that EU immigration to the UK has been falling substantially after the 2016 Brexit referendum. Immigration from the EU had consistently increased from 2011 to 2015, in large part due to the arrival of Southern European and Romanian nationals. EU citizens are more likely to come to the UK for work. In 2019, 48% of EU citizens moving to the UK for at least a year said that work was their main reason for migrating, whereas for non-EU citizens, the most reported reason for moving to the UK in 2019 was to study [72].

Although immigration and emigration have undoubtedly fallen, it is not clear how the COVID-19 pandemic and restriction on travel have contributed to the fall in immigration. Under the Brexit agreement, EU citizens will no longer have the right to move to the UK to work and settle, and vice versa. The UK has introduced a new UK skills-based immigration system with equal treatment for EU and non-EU citizens under a points-based system from January 2021 [73]. The new set of migration rules for workers and student will have an impact on employers’ recruitment options, the number and profile of migrants as employers seek to address labour and skill shortages.

Opinion polls suggest there has been a major shift in UK public opinion on migration matter, with voters simultaneously becoming both much less concerned about immigration and much more positive about its impacts [64]. During the Brexit referendum, immigration was the most important single issue for voters. However, it had dropped to ninth and has now disappeared from the top ten altogether [64]. More so, a fall in the salience of immigration has been accompanied by a parallel change in attitudes towards immigration, with an increasing proportion of the population regarding immigration as positive, both from an economic and cultural perspective [64].

Under the terms of the Brexit divorce deal, both EU and UK citizens already resident and living on the continent have the right to remain and retain existing rights, in areas including employment and social security [73]. However, residence permits will be needed in the future [73]. A contentious issue, crisis over COVID-19 has triggered intense debate about whether Britain can afford to restrict the movement of Europeans working in the critical health and social care sectors—as well as broader questions about the role and status of immigrants in contemporary Britain [64]. It is not clear what will happen when restrictions relating to COVID-19 pandemic are eased and international travel returns. What will change concerning migration? [64]. Under the Brexit agreement, EU visitors to the UK will be able to stay as a tourist for up to six months without a visa [73]. However, tourists will also not be allowed to work, or attempt to live in the UK, and visitors may be asked for details of accommodation arrangements, financial support, and return journeys [73].

6. Conclusions and Implications

The Brexit debate revealed a sharp division in political opinion that was not evident prior to the referendum in 2016. On the 'Leave' side were those who valued national sovereignty and wished to be governed by those within the nation. On the remain side were the population who put more value on international cooperation including a willingness for much of government to come from the EU. Additionally, Brexit referendum results provided an interesting dimension. Big cities such as London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow voted overwhelmingly against Brexit. Additionally, the majority of young people opposed Brexit, whereas the majority of older voters voted Leave. These reflect the generation gap and the results of internationalisation of the three cities: all three have more diverse population than the rest of the UK. These cities also embrace Europe, and their sense of identity is Europeanness more than Britishness. In northern England and the Scottish Border, where the population is generally older and more in agreement with Britishness, majority voted for Brexit.

Arguably, Brexit is connected with resentment towards national interests above regional integration and a sign of dissatisfaction with regional governance. Nations are more difficult to govern today than ever before and there is undermined trust in politicians. Across many regions, there are several instances of referendums and growing support for populist appeals to emotion and resentment for national or international policy. Demands for a referendum will continue to dominate many national and regional political institutions as referendum enthusiasts often share a similar ideology or view of governance or society. Regional withdrawal and negotiations for the Brexit deal have shown that regional union and relationships are entangled and regional divorce complicated and contentious. There may be more countries holding national referenda in deciding whether to join or leave the EU.

Brexit is not just about immigration concerns. Brexit "is a departure that many in Britain will relish, whereas many others continue to lament sorely" [33] (p. 4). More than 12 months since the UK left the EU (after 43 years as an EU member state), it is difficult to predict the impact of Brexit on the economy and society. Currently, there are no data to undertake a comprehensive assessment. The argument among the Leave group is that the more access the UK has to the global market (such as the USA, India, China, Australia, etc.), the better for the economy rather than being trapped in the EU single market. Both Leavers and Remainers knew that Brexit will come at a cost, but no one can accurately predict the cost in the long term. From immigration, jobs, wages, exports, imports, health, agriculture, science, and technology, there will be winners and losers.

Immigration (the scale of migration from the EU) was the main issue that led to Brexit. To the Leave Campaigners and supporters, sovereignty, judiciary independence, and border control ("take back control") were worth the risk of leaving the EU. To the Remainers, the risk to the economy, economic chaos, recession, and avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were reasons to remain with the EU. The Brexit agreement was based on improving the terms of trade between the UK and EU. Although the long-term effect of Brexit remains elusive, the short-term result of the economy has been negative. The forecasts have assumed that total UK imports and exports will eventually both be 15 per cent lower than had UK stayed in the EU [74]. The short-term assessment reveals that exports from the UK to the EU have been down due to extensive paperwork and custom checks between the rest of the UK and Northern Ireland and the EU.

Although the UK now controls its borders and has the freedom to strike its free trade deals, Northern Ireland remain aligned to the EU single market, whereas goods entering Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK are subject to customs checks. Northern Ireland remains in the EU single market based on the terms of the Brexit agreement. That means that Northern Ireland can export or import from other parts of the EU, whereas businesses in England, Scotland and Wales cannot undertake frictionless trade with Northern Ireland and the rest of the EU. If loss of trade due to the Northern Ireland protocol continues, the

loss may not compensate for the gains from freedom to strike global free trade. The custom checks at the Irish protocols between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK threaten the Good Friday Agreement.

Across the globe, there are many voices and calls for a referendum on sovereignty or political issues (e.g., Scottish independence). Despite the agreement on Brexit, demand for a Scottish referendum remains in the UK political sphere. The mechanism of radical policy change underlines the MSA framework, which emphasises the process of the problem-solving, political process, and opportunities [17]. More than four years of Brexit referendum, divorce dialogue, and months of negotiations finally came to an end in December 2020. Despite Brexit and trade agreement, key issues that were raised during the Brexit referendum campaign will not disappear. The issue of migration will continue to dominate the political debates. In the long-term, Brexit will be judged successful or not, depending on the degree of economic impact. The impact will have implications towards the demand for a referendum on Scotland Independence.

The UK has introduced a point-based system to boost the quality of migration. The UK cannot meet the whole of their professional, enterprise, industrial and labour' talent needs, so migrants contribute towards filling the void. A reduction in EU migration has implication on farmers ability to recruit low-skilled labour to work in the UK farms. A decline in the supply of labour will lead to increase in wages, supply chain challenges, and lower productivity. To better explain UK-wide referendum results, there is a need to provide distinctive regional and county evaluation. An interesting question is what will be the post-Brexit 'Global Britain' banner? [75]. Perhaps Britain can reconnect to the Commonwealth by taking a leading role in defending the global order, rule of law, democracy, freedom, and political values [75]. The role of Britain is crucial given that the liberal international order is in deep trouble and there are red flags just about everywhere—from outbreaks of populism, outright trade wars and threats of war from Russia [76,77].

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