

## The Road to Brexit

On June 23, 2016, Britons took to the polls by the masses to decide on whether or not to leave the European Union for the second time since joining the grouping of member states in the early 1970s. Across and within political parties, voters were split — those who embraced globalization and believed in reform with the European Union to address problems of immigration, the economy, a single market for non-eurozone countries, and bureaucracy, and those who did not. From the beginning of the United Kingdom's participation in the European Economic Community, Euroscepticism arose and many feared of a loss of the country's sovereignty.

Ultimately, proponents for staying in the European Union were unable to rally popular support and lost the vote, with 51.9 percent of voters wishing to leave the European Union.

### Buildup to 21st-Century Tensions

After previously-rejected attempts in the 1960s, Britain finally joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 in hopes of stopping its economic decline. In 1950 the United Kingdom's per capita GDP was roughly a third larger than the EU6<sup>1</sup>, however, by 1973 the UK's GDP fell 10% below<sup>2</sup>. The Commonwealth could not compete with the increasingly international community; there was a significant deficit in Britain's budget due to weak exports

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<sup>1</sup> The "EU6" were the six inner or founding members of the European Communities; Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and West Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Campos, Nauro, and Fabrizio Coricelli. "Britain's EU Membership: New Insight from Economic History." *VOX CEPR Policy Portal*, The Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), 3 Feb. 2015, Web.

causing increased international payments and a devaluation of the pound sterling, as well as, a decrease in the United Kingdom’s influence in the world<sup>3</sup>.

Prime Minister Edward “Ted” Heath had been a strong supporter of the EEC since his office in Parliament where he had been a part of the first two applications for membership. Heath was convinced this would be the innovation Britain needed. He strongly believed that his Conservative government and their acceptance to the EEC would ensure “nothing less” than “to change the course of history of this nation.” Their government, however, was riddled with economic difficulties, high inflation, and major strikes across the country.

Heath was not reelected in 1974 and was replaced by Harold Wilson of the Labour Party. The Labour Party was starkly divided over Europe and in order to appease them, Wilson made a promise to renegotiate the terms of Britain’s membership and to offer the terms up to the people in the form of a referendum<sup>4</sup>. This first-ever United Kingdom referendum took place on June 5, 1975, asking voters if they were in favor of remaining a part of the European Communities or if they should leave — roughly 67% voted to stay and 33% voted against<sup>5</sup>.

***The Iron Lady.*** Among the many voting to stay was Conservative opposition leader Margaret Thatcher who stated that “the minority which is against [staying in Europe] is getting smaller”<sup>6</sup>. Later on, however, she became concerned that the EEC’s approach contradicted her central goals of smaller government and increased deregulation<sup>7</sup>. Thatcher became a prominent figure from 1975 to 1979 as she led the Conservative Party through the “Winter of Discontent”<sup>8</sup> and represented a new energetic party that focused on greater independence of the individual from the state, something which was popular given the extent of the economic and political turmoil in

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<sup>3</sup> Dogan, Hansin. *Why Did Britain Join the EEC in 1973, and Not before or Later?* Anakara, Web.

<sup>4</sup> Saunders, Robert. “Britain Decides: the First European Referendum.” *History Extra*, Immediate Media Company Ltd, June 2016, Web.

<sup>5</sup> The 1974-75 UK Renegotiation of EEC Membership and Referendum

<sup>6</sup> “Conservatives Favor Remaining in Market.” *Star-News*, 3 June 1975, Web.

<sup>7</sup> Senden, Linda. *Soft Law in European Community Law*. Hart, 2004. Print.

<sup>8</sup> “The Winter of Discontent” was the winter season of 1978/’79 in Britain wherein there were large strikes by the public sector trade unions because of the Labour Union’s rigid pay policy limits (raises had to be kept below 5%) or ongoing pay gaps to control inflation. During the coldest winter in 16 years, people demanded larger pay rises. Spending decreased and the economy tanked. The term comes from the opening line of William Shakespeare’s *Richard III*.

the late 1970s<sup>9</sup>. In her Conservative Manifesto of 1979 she wrote of “a feeling of helplessness, that we are a once great nation that has somehow fallen behind” and touched on the need to reverse high unemployment and the popular struggles amid an ongoing recession.<sup>10</sup>

Instability led to the return of Conservatives to power and on May 4, 1979, Margaret Thatcher won a clear victory, becoming Britain’s first female Prime Minister. Her focuses included deregulation<sup>11</sup>, more flexible labor markets, the privatization of certain state-owned companies, reductions in expenditures on social services (ex: healthcare, education, etc.), and on reducing the power of trade unions. These policies helped Thatcher become known for a particular style; an over-emphasis on the interests of the individual, a fierce nationalism, and an uncompromising attitude wherein she would not budge when trying to achieve her political goals<sup>12</sup>.

In lieu of these beliefs, in 1980, during Thatcher’s first year in office, the United Kingdom experienced the highest-ever rejection of the EEC with 65 percent of the electorate wanting out<sup>13</sup>. The latter half of her tenure as Prime Minister she came to criticize the British relationship with the European Commission. In the 1980s, Thatcher introduced various financial reforms, including in 1984, reducing Britain’s contribution to the commission’s overall budget.

The only step made towards integration by the Prime Minister was the Single European Act, ratified in 1985. This was the first major revision to the Treaty of Rome<sup>14</sup> and pushed for the completion of a single market. Her backing of the act made complete sense, however, as Thatcher believed it would give Britain the opportunity to change “insidious [barriers of tariffs]

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<sup>9</sup> “Margaret Thatcher.” *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 27 Feb. 2018, Web.

<sup>10</sup> Thatcher, Margaret. *1987 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto: The Next Moves Forward*. Conservative Central Office, 1987. Print.

<sup>11</sup> Deregulation, especially of the financial sector. Greater independence of the individual from the state.

<sup>12</sup> Young, Hugo. “Margaret Thatcher.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 9 Oct. 2018, Web. — This style of hers has become branded as “thatcherism.”

<sup>13</sup> Mortimore, Roger. “Polling History: 40 Years of British Views on ‘in or out’ of Europe.” *The Conversation*, The Conversation US, Inc., 21 June 2016, Web.

<sup>14</sup> The Treaty of Rome was the international agreement signed by the “inner six” European countries, forming the European Economic Community or a community with a common market and free trade amongst themselves.

of differing national standards” with Britain in the lead. In a speech advocating for single markets she emphasized their essentiality for economic growth in the UK:

...the Single Market will be a major factor, possibly the major factor, in our competitive position in European and world markets into the twenty-first century... The task of government is two-fold: —to negotiate in Brussels so as to get the possible results for Britain; —and then to make you the business community aware of the opportunities, so that you can make the most of them.

She went on to add that it was about time to put “the European Community to work for ordinary people” and that it is essential for Britain to embrace a single market for its own economic well-being, saying, “by 1993 Europe will be our home market. That means that we won't just be exporting to eleven other countries. We will be doing business in a single domestic market”<sup>15</sup>.

While Thatcher turned away from the European Community later on as she disliked the push for increasingly integrative measures (such as the Treaties in Maastricht in 1992) and did not believe EEC President Jacques Delors shared her hopes for ‘Thatcherism on a European scale,’ she did for a short moment align with the rest of the community, leading to lasting consequences.

After winning her term in 1987, Thatcher continued to increase her opposition towards complete European integration. In 1988, she delivered a speech at the College of Europe where she warned against the shift in European Commission priorities and against a “European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels.” Thatcher went on to say that although she hopes to see a unified Europe, the system needs to find its “common purpose” and has to preserve Britain’s “different traditions, parliamentary powers and sense of national pride in one's own country”<sup>16</sup>. Thatcher began to lose popularity as many in her own party were opposed to her poll-tax policies<sup>17</sup> and her oppositions to integration.

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<sup>15</sup> Thatcher, Margaret. “Speech Opening Single Market Campaign.” 18 Apr. 1988, Lancaster House, London.

<sup>16</sup> Thatcher, Margaret. “Speech to the College of Europe (‘The Bruges Speech’)” 20 Sept. 1988, Bruges Belfrey, Bruges.

<sup>17</sup> The Community Charge also known as the “poll tax” was implemented by Thatcher in 1989 and was highly unpopular. The tax was based on the number of occupants living in a house rather than the value of the house, causing many to believe it was a shift of the tax burden from the rich to the poor. Rates appeared to be higher than predicted and the discontent led to the “Poll Tax Riots” in early 1990.

## **Thatcher Loses Control**

Amid unpopularity within her own party, Thatcher began to be pressured to accept the Exchange Rate Mechanism which was meant to pave the way for a single currency. Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson and his successor John Major, as well as, Deputy Prime Minister Geoffrey Howe were adamant supporters of pegging the pound sterling to the Deutschmark, and despite Thatcher's deep reservations, were able to push the Prime Minister to sign onto the "Madrid conditions"<sup>18</sup> in October 1990. Yet, for the men, this accomplishment was not enough; both Lawson and Howe resigned from their positions, serious political blows for Thatcher.

Lawson resigned from his post on October 1989 claiming that he could no longer put up with the "war over the conduct of economic policy" with Sir Alan, Thatcher's economic adviser. In his resignation letter, Lawson stated that economic policy was near impossible because in no case "there is, and is seen to be, full agreement" between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor<sup>19</sup>. The Foreign Secretary at the time, John Major was promoted to the post as Chancellor and was the final push that convinced the Prime Minister to sign onto the "Madrid Conditions."

Following the ERM membership agreement in October of 1990, the President of the European Commission Jacques Delors called for the power in Europe to rest within the European Parliament. Thatcher staunchly opposed this notion in her address to the House of Commons, stating, "It is our purpose to retain the power and influence of this House, rather than denude it of many of its powers...[Mr. Delors] wanted the European Parliament to be the democratic body of the Community, he wanted the Commission to be the Executive and he wanted the Council of Ministers to be the Senate. No. No. No."<sup>20</sup>. Thatcher emphasized her fears that the European Commission would threaten Britain's individual sovereignty and that there was a grave danger in handing over the sterling and the power of Parliament.

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<sup>18</sup> The "Madrid conditions" were a promise of eventual ERM membership.

<sup>19</sup> Huhne, Christopher and Patrick Wintour. "Lawson Sparks Reshuffle." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 27 Oct. 1989, Web.

<sup>20</sup> Thatcher, Margaret. "HC Stmt: [Rome European Council]" 30 Oct. 1990, House of Commons.

This was the final straw for Deputy Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey, who could no longer support Thatcher and her anti-Europe agenda. In November 1990, in a speech announcing his resignation, Thatcher’s longest-serving lieutenant described her rhetoric as a “tragedy” and as putting the country at risk of losing influence or of being shut out once again. He famously described the British negotiations on Europe to a game of cricket: “It is rather like sending your opening batsmen to the crease, only for them to find, as the first balls are being bowled, that their bats have been broken before the game by the team captain”<sup>21</sup>.

This was the decisive end of the Prime Minister. Shortly after Geoffrey’s resignation, she failed to receive the Conservative Party’s majority vote to be selected as the party’s leader. Chancellor John Major was chosen as Conservative leader after Thatcher withdrew her nomination. Shortly after, on November 22, Thatcher announced her resignation as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom<sup>22</sup>.

## **Major Integration Changes**

Six days after the resignation of Thatcher, Chancellor John Major assumed the position as Prime Minister. Over the next decade, Major aimed to make peace with both his divided Conservative party and the country as a whole.

This goal was cut short, however, when Major was forced to abandon his own economic policy by exiting the Exchange Rate Mechanism on September 16, 1992. This day came to be known as “Black Wednesday,” wherein the pound sterling was withdrawn after it was unable to stay above its agreed lower limit in the ERM. Inflation in the UK was through the roof and interest rates fell at 15 percent at certain points to keep the pound sterling’s exchange rate in line with that of the Deutschmark. Trading losses for the United Kingdom in August and September were estimated to be roughly £800 million (~ 1,020,252,000 USD), as well as, ample profits were lost due to the devaluation of the currency<sup>23</sup>.

At the same time, conflict arose in the Conservative party surrounding European

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<sup>21</sup> Hughes, David. “How Geoffrey Howe's Bombshell Resignation Speech Led to Thatcher's Fall.” *The Sun*, The Sun, 18 July 2018, Web.

<sup>22</sup> History.com Editors. “Margaret Thatcher Resigns.” *HISTORY*, A&E Television Networks, 9 Feb. 2010, Web.

<sup>23</sup> Dury, Hélène. “Finance Basics: Black Wednesday.” Universitas Masarykiana Brunensis, Web.

integration as a whole. Many members of the party were Eurosceptics following “Black Wednesday” and were hesitant to sign onto the new Maastricht Treaty. The official treaty founding the European Union signed on February 7, 1992, increased the integration of members, tackled competences of the EEC/EU and created the Euro as a single currency with a central banking system. While Major was able to secure a number of opt-outs, such as deferred membership to join onto the Euro and the UK’s involvement in the Social Chapter, many disagreed with the treaty<sup>24</sup>.

### **Britain’s Tipping Points**

Poor economics and trade, as well as, woes with the euro were central to Britain’s discontent with European Union membership, however, they were not the only reasons many were seeking a referendum.

***Euroscepticism.*** From day one of the United Kingdom joining the European Economic Commission back in 1973, levels of support for the EU had been historically lower than most other member states. British identity and national sovereignty were central to British values, making the country significantly more nationalistic. For example, the 2009 Eurobarometer survey of EU citizens shows that support for EU membership was lower in the United Kingdom, with only 28 percent of citizens seeing EU membership as positive.<sup>25</sup>

Sharp distinctions were present within and between the two political parties, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party for much of the 1970s-1990s. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Labour Party was more Eurosceptic; in 1975 the party held a special conference and voted two to one for Britain to end its membership with the European Communities. Later on in 1988, however, the Conservative Party also became highly Eurosceptical with the prominence of Margaret Thatcher and her denunciation of EEC President Delors’ plan for closer integration by creating a single market with tougher labour and social regulations. While Thatcher’s strident skepticism opposed the views of many Britons, including her key cabinet

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<sup>24</sup> “John Major.” *Ohio River - New World Encyclopedia*, New World Encyclopedia, Web.

<sup>25</sup> *European Commission Public Opinion*, European Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2099>.

members, she set a precedent and a wave of Eurosceptic thought into motion. Thatcher’s focus on the individual and nationalism led to a growing desire for people to “take back control of their lives” as many were feeling unrepresented by politicians. For many, there was also a fear of globalization as they saw discrepancies between Britain and the rest of the “mainland” European Union’s economic tendencies — Britain had a history of being a conservative free market, whereas, most of the European Union tended to implement more socialist economic policies.

As party leader in 2005, Tory<sup>26</sup> David Cameron had to address these fears of European dominance and to deal with the ever-growing threat of more Eurosceptic parties like the UK Independence Party. Upon running for Prime Minister, much like Wilson 40 years earlier in 1974, Cameron had to promise renegotiation and referendum in order to appease anti-EU sentiments<sup>27</sup>.

**Immigration.** Britain was transformed from 1993 to 2014, with an unprecedented wave in immigration and the United Kingdom’s foreign-born population doubled. This is due to the mid-2000 EU expansion to include poorer post-communist countries whose citizens were drawn to the wealthier United Kingdom, as well as, the 2008 market crash that hit certain European countries to the point where their citizens had to find jobs in other countries. Seventy-seven percent of Brits today find this influx in migrants alarming and believe that immigration needs to be reduced in the country<sup>28</sup>. Naturally, Eurosceptic parties blame the European Union for the overflow of migrants to the United Kingdom as part of the EU’s core values is the right to live and work in any EU member state.

Prime Minister Tony Blair of the Labour Party was in office when numerous countries in Eastern and central Europe joined the EU. While many member states placed limits on the freedom of movement to prevent an exorbitant influx of migrants, Blair’s government did not, as they believed the flows would be modest. The opposite, however, was true — immigration far

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<sup>26</sup> Tory: (in the UK) a member or supporter of the Conservative Party

<sup>27</sup> “The Roots of Euroscepticism.” *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 12 Mar. 2016, Web.

<sup>28</sup> Chang, Alvin. “Why Britain Left the EU, Explained with a Simple Cartoon’.” *Vox*, Vox Media, Inc., 24 June 2016, Web.

surpassed Blair’s projections<sup>29</sup>. While the economy grew steadily under Blair, productivity remained low, citizens were taxed rather heavily, and Britain lost the bulk of its manufacturing base. This allowed for more dependence on the millions of low-skilled migrant workers settling in Britain, taking on jobs in financial services and low-skilled sectors<sup>30</sup>. Due to EU rules, the immigration was also controversial as newcomers were entitled to the same benefits as all other residents of a specific country. Britain’s increased refundable tax credits to reduce poverty made the United Kingdom highly attractive to immigrants. Only regulations and welfare reform would be able to combat this but would be unfavorable as they would also have to apply to less-skilled British workers under the EU rules. Blair’s government reinvigorated a fear in globalization in many Britains as it exposed the United Kingdom’s economy more than any other Western country<sup>31</sup>.

**Gordon Brown.** Blair’s successor Gordon Brown dealt with the aftermath of this globalization and put a new emphasis on “Britishness.” Brown backed proposals to build new towns, promised to bring jobs to British workers and emphasized cracking down on migrant workers. In an address to the GMB Union, he stated, “It is time to train British workers for the British jobs that will be available over the coming few years and to make sure that people who are inactive and unemployed are able to get the new jobs on offer in our country.” The Leader of the Conservative party David Cameron, warned of Brown’s commitments to single out migrant workers as it was illegal under EU law and feared the “cultural separatism” growing in Britain. Cameron was concerned that there would be stark divisions moving forward if Britain did not create a common sense of identity accepted by all citizens<sup>32</sup>. Again, this anti-European sentiment and fear of domination heavily controlled David Cameron’s approach to his campaign.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown was also responsible for negotiating the EU Treaty of Lisbon, an international agreement to amend and streamline the Maastricht Treaty, Treaties of

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<sup>29</sup> Salam, Reihan. “Why Immigration Pushed Britons to Brexit (It’s Not *Only* About Race).” *Slate Magazine*, The Slate Group LLC, 24 June 2016, Web.

<sup>30</sup> Gallagher, Tom. “Tony Blair.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 20 Sept. 2018, Web.

<sup>31</sup> Salam, Reihan. “Why Immigration Pushed Britons to Brexit (It’s Not *Only* About Race).” *Slate Magazine*, The Slate Group LLC, 24 June 2016, Web.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, George, Toby Helm and Graeme Wilson. “British Workers for British Jobs Says Brown.” *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 6 June 2007, Web.

Rome, and other agreements of the European Union. Brown decided that only ratification by Parliament was necessary to sign onto the Treaty of Lisbon. Many were outraged that Brown did not hold a referendum, including David Cameron, who claimed that the lack of a vote was “just so wrong” and that it was “one of the most flagrant breaches of trust” in British politics. Cameron gave a “cast-iron guarantee” that if he was to become Prime Minister, he would “hold a referendum on any EU treaty that emerges from these negotiations”<sup>33</sup>. Many believe Brown’s actions only intensified citizens’ feelings of misrepresentation by their government and eurosceptic emotions in the United Kingdom, as shortly after the European Union had to cope with the euro crisis in Greece and the mass migrant crisis<sup>34 35</sup>.

## **David Cameron and the Road to a Referendum**

On May 11, 2010, David Cameron succeeded Gordon Brown as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Cameron had ample experience in government; he worked in the Conservative Research Department under Prime Minister John Major, shadowed Conservative leader Micheal Howard and then took over as Leader of the Conservative Party in 2005. Particularly young for his age, Cameron aimed to rebrand the Conservative Party which had not been in power for thirteen years. He embraced a pragmatic mindset and socially liberal position — his premiership was marked by his changes to welfare, immigration policy, healthcare, and education.

Upon stepping into his new position, Cameron also had to tackle the challenge of reducing migration to the United Kingdom on nonracial grounds. The trouble, however, was that European immigration could not be restricted without breaking EU rules and the numbers crept upwards<sup>36</sup>. Cameron claims that EU immigration rules were “a driving factor” behind the Out

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<sup>33</sup> Watt, Nicholas, and Patrick Wintour. “David Cameron to Shed Cast Iron Pledge on Lisbon Treaty.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 3 Nov. 2009, Web.

<sup>34</sup> “Cameron Attacks Brown on EU Vote.” *BBC News*, BBC, 2 Oct. 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/7023458.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7023458.stm).

— While this is what Cameron claimed, he later backtracked on this specific referendum when the treaty was ratified by all EU countries.

<sup>35</sup> Ray, Michael. “Lisbon Treaty.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 24 Nov. 2018, Web.

<sup>36</sup> Salam, Reihan. “Why Immigration Pushed Britons to Brexit (It’s Not *Only* About Race).” *Slate Magazine*, The Slate Group LLC, 24 June 2016, Web.

vote, something which he could have avoided if he had been given more control over migration<sup>37</sup>.

While he initially hesitated to call for a referendum, Cameron was desperate following his inability to halt immigration numbers. In hopes of energizing the Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative Party, Cameron brought up the idea of a European Referendum at the May 2012 NATO summit. Not long afterward, in January 2013, Cameron announced that an “in-out referendum” was to be held on EU membership before 2017 if he and his Conservative government were to be re-elected in 2015.

On May 7, The Conservative Party and Cameron won the 2015 general election with the majority of the electorate vote. Following this success, the Prime Minister set up the first step in the negotiation process, a meeting with the European Council where he set a plan for in-out referendum. When addressing the body he stated:

I want the European Union to be a success... That is why I am here today: to acknowledge the nature of the challenges we face. To set out how I believe the European Union should respond to them... with courage and conviction I believe we can deliver a more flexible, adaptable and open European Union in which the interests and ambitions of all its members can be met. With courage and conviction I believe we can achieve a new settlement in which Britain can be comfortable and all our countries can thrive. And when the referendum comes let me say now that if we can negotiate such an arrangement, I will campaign for it with all my heart and soul. Because I believe something very deeply. That Britain's national interest is best served in a flexible, adaptable and open European Union and that such a European Union is best with Britain in it.<sup>38</sup>

Despite these goals, however, Cameron made it clear that he did not hope to see any fundamental changes to the EU-UK relationship and that he supported the United Kingdom working to stay in the European Union, saying, “Britain is a great country but we have always been a country that makes our voice heard and gets things done by working with others. We don’t quit and walk

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<sup>37</sup> “Cameron Pins Brexit on EU Failure to Grant UK Brake on Migration.” *Financial Times*, Financial Times, 28 June 2016, Web.

<sup>38</sup> “David Cameron's EU Speech - Full Text.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 23 Jan. 2013, Web.

away from organizations, we make them work for us”<sup>39</sup>. Cameron was a central part of the “remainers” campaign.

In 2014, the Prime Minister clearly outlined the changes he hoped to make with the EU and in the UK through a referendum. The demands made included: protection of the single market for non-eurozone countries, decreasing the amount of “red tape,” exempting Britain from the idea of an “ever-closer union,” and restricting EU immigration. He laid out the aims of a referendum in four-points first to the Parliament, and then, in a letter to the President of the European Union’s European Council<sup>40</sup> Donald Tusk on November 11, 2015.

First, he wanted protection for non-euro countries, writing, “...we do not want to stand in the way of measures Eurozone countries decide to take to secure the long-term future of their currency.” He added that he wished for the European Union to respect the Single Market Model and the United Kingdom’s interest even as they are a “non-Euro member.” Second, Cameron addressed competitiveness and the burdens of the existing regulations being too high for Britons. He made it clear he wanted to see a “target cut the total burden on business.” Third, he wanted to end Britain’s obligation to an “ever-closer union” or loss of their national sovereignty by the European Union. He wrote about the importance of ending this idea set out in the treaties, stating, “It is very important to make clear that this commitment will no longer apply to the United Kingdom. I want to do this in a formal, legally binding and irreversible way.” This was crucial in light of the growing fears towards globalization and a general unease with the changes in the European Union in 2015 promoting a tight-knit economic community being pushed by countries like France and Germany<sup>41</sup>. Finally, he wanted to restrict where benefits were allocated in British society. Cameron hoped the this would incentivize domestic growth and decrease the

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<sup>39</sup> Weaver, Matthew. “Boris Johnson's Independence Day Claim Nonsense, Says David Cameron.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 22 June 2016, Web.

<sup>40</sup> The European Council: The part of the European Union which is in charge of deciding the union’s political direction and priorities. It is made up by heads of government of member states, as well as, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission.

<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that Britain was a world superpower up until World War II (when the United States and the Soviet Union rose to power) and had a history of dominating through British imperialism — so, it is reasonable that many Britons are up in arms at the idea of following other European nations they used to be superior to.

number of immigrants as he believed, “people coming to Britain from the EU must live here and contribute for four years before they qualify for in-work benefits or social housing”<sup>42</sup>.

The European Union (Referendum) Bill 2013–14 was the next step, proposed to make a provision for a referendum on European Union membership to be held in 2017. The bill, however, got stuck in the bureaucracies of parliament and ceased to become a law. Cameron chose to present the subsequent bill, the European Union Referendum Act of 2015, to Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond. Hammond introduced the bill to the House of Commons which had won a Conservative majority in the 2015 election. On December 17, 2015, The European Union Referendum Act passed and received Royal Assent. Thus, Cameron was given permission to hold a referendum on the UK’s membership within the EU.

Two months later, European Council President Donald Tusk wrote a proposal for a new settlement for the United Kingdom within the European Union. Tusk referred to the “four baskets” of Cameron’s proposal; economic governance, competitiveness, sovereignty, and social benefits and free movement, citing what could and could not be met and tackled. Regardless, the council president supported Britain’s efforts to hold a referendum writing, “I deeply believe that our community of interests is much stronger than what divides us. To be, or not to be together, that is the question which must be answered not only by the British people in a referendum but also by the other 27 members of the EU in the next two weeks”<sup>43</sup>.

On February 18 and 19, the European Council met to discuss the requests made by Cameron. Cameron fiercely defended his four-points and was certain he made strides in the right direction stating, “all 28 member states have signed up to concrete reforms in each of the 4 areas I set out.” The key reforms made included Britain remaining out of the “ever closer union,” tough new restrictions on EU migrants’ access to welfare<sup>44</sup>, and Britain remaining outside of the euro. Financially, they also ensured that British taxpayers would never be made to bail out

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<sup>42</sup>“David Cameron Sets out EU Reform Goals.” *BBC News*, BBC, 11 Nov. 2015, Web.  
“The Four Key Points from David Cameron's EU Letter.” *BBC News*, BBC, 10 Nov. 2015, Web.

<sup>43</sup> Tusk, Donald. “Letter by President Donald Tusk to the Members of the European Council on His Proposal for a New Settlement for the United Kingdom within the European Union.” *European Council Council of the European Union*, European Union, 2 Feb. 2016, Web.

<sup>44</sup> New emergency brake put in place so that EU migrants have to wait 4 years in order to have full access to the United Kingdom’s benefits.

countries in the eurozone and that British businesses would not face discrimination for being outside of the euro. To address economic competitiveness, Cameron spoke of increased IT firms coming to Britain, of more suppliers in the UK energy market, and of cutting the “red tape” or bureaucratic burden of EU regulations on businesses. Cameron also spoke of reforms to prevent the abuse of free movement and of the British welfare system, as well as, precautions to ensure Britain would never be a part of a “European superstate” nor that the EU would overstep its powers, as it must check the powers it exercises yearly and return power no longer needed to nation states.<sup>45</sup>

These negotiations, of course, were not without criticisms and some leaders cautioned that the reforms would not fall in Britain’s favor as members could not “cherry-pick” requirements as part of the European Union. Angela Merkel opposed the four-point plan stating, “If you wish to have free access to the single market then you have to accept the fundamental European rights as well as obligations that come from it. This is as true for Great Britain as for anybody else”<sup>46</sup>.

On February 22, 2016, Prime Minister Cameron announced the EU referendum vote date as June 24, 2016<sup>47</sup>.

### **“Leavers” vs. “Remainers”**

**Vote Leave.** Vote Leave was one of the organizations campaigning for a “leave” vote in the United Kingdom’s European Union Referendum. The group was known for its Eurosceptic ideologies and argued Cameron’s deal would leave the EU the same as before the negotiations, as the discussions in the European court were not legally binding. The campaign stated, “If we Vote Leave, we will take back control and can spend our money on our priorities”<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street and The Rt Hon David Cameron. “PM Statement Following European Council Meeting: 19 February 2016.” *GOV.UK*, Crown, 20 Feb. 2016, Web.

<sup>46</sup> Woodcock, Andrew. “Cameron warns EU immigration rules could threaten UK trade deal.” *Independent*, Independent Print Limited, 28 June 2016, Web.

<sup>47</sup> If voters chose to leave the European Union, the government would have to trigger Article 50 of the Treaty of European Union which states that following a referendum, “any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements.”

<sup>48</sup> “Why Vote Leave.” *Vote Leave*, 2016, Web.

This message was incredibly appealing to three existing Eurosceptic groups; Conservatives for Britain; Labour Leave and Business for Britain, which quickly joined forces with the campaign. Vote Leave was also fronted by Conservative Party Member of Parliament Boris Johnson, Secretary of State for Justice Michael Gove and Labour Party Member of Parliament Gisela Stuart. The campaign appealed across-party lines and raised roughly £9.8m.

Central to the narratives of the party were politics of fear and hatred. A large portion of the campaign tapped into the fears surrounding immigration at the time, claiming that staying in the European Union would be detrimental as Turkey was about to be admitted to the union and that millions of Turks would flood the borders. This fear of Muslim immigration and the failures in past governments to address immigration issues, caused major disillusionment with the political establishment<sup>49</sup>.

**Boris Johnson.** Boris Johnson is a politician, popular historian, and journalist who served as a Member of Parliament for Uxbridge, South Ruislip and Henley. The rather controversial figure in British politics appealed to many beyond traditional Conservative voters, as he tended to be blunt, and strays away from “political correctness.” Johnson describes himself as a “one-Nation Tory” and was a small-state, Eurosceptic Conservative. In early 2016, Johnson refused to take a stance on Brexit, however, a few months later he endorsed the Vote Leave campaign. As one of Britain’s most charismatic politicians, his support brought significant popularity to the Vote Leave campaign.

In the subsequent months, he repeatedly took jabs at Cameron’s efforts stating that the Prime Minister’s fears were “greatly over-exaggerated” and that the European Union would “only really listen to a population when it says no.” Johnson emphasized the need for Britain to get things done and was adamant that they would never make any progress as part of a bureaucratic organization like the European Union<sup>50</sup>.

Johnson also made incendiary comments leading up to the referendum vote, such as stating that the United States President Barack Obama wanted the United Kingdom to stay in the

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<sup>49</sup> Lowe, Josh. “Why Did Brexit Happen? Hatred of Immigrants Drove British Vote, Study Says” *Newsweek*, Newsweek, 22 June 2017, Web.

<sup>50</sup> “EU referendum: Time to vote for real change, says Boris Johnson” *BBC News*, BBC, 22 Feb. 2016, Web.

European Union because of his “anti-British sentiment” because of his Kenyan roots. Additionally, the member of parliament declared that June 23 should be “Britain’s independence day” on the day before the referendum vote. Prime Minister Cameron was quick to retort, “The idea that our country isn’t independent is nonsense. This whole debate demonstrates our sovereignty,” bringing more press to Johnson and his statements<sup>51</sup>. Johnson proved to be the figurehead the Vote Leave movement needed and was consistently the subject of conversation in England leading up to the vote.

**Leave EU.** Formerly called The Know, Leave EU was Vote Leave’s alternative campaign, also peddling for the “leave” vote in the United Kingdom’s European Union Referendum. In August 2015, the campaign claimed to have registered over 270,000 supporters. Having a Eurosceptic tone much like Vote Leave, many of its supporters included UK Independent Party members such as Nigel Farage<sup>52</sup>.

The tone of Leave EU differed from Vote Leave, however, as their main focus stemmed back to their original name “The Know” — the campaign aimed to “provid[e] the public with information on the effects of leaving the EU.” They believed that once the public was provided with the facts, that they would naturally vote in favor of leaving the European Union.

Thus, rather than tapping into narratives of fear surrounding immigration, Leave EU adopted a “people’s movement” narrative urging citizens to become informed and to unite to “make sure [their] voice continues to be heard”<sup>53</sup>.

**Nigel Farage.** Nigel Farage was one of the founding members of the UK Independent Party and a member of the European Parliament for the South East England constituency since 1999. For years, Farage had been a divisive figure in British politics, known as a stark Eurosceptic and critic of the euro currency<sup>54</sup>. Also a retro-nationalist, Farage played a critical role in the “leave”

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<sup>51</sup> Weaver, Matthew. “Boris Johnson's Independence Day Claim Nonsense, Says David Cameron.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 22 June 2016, Web.

<sup>52</sup> “UKIP's Nigel Farage: I Support Both EU 'Out' Campaigns.” *BBC News*, BBC, 11 Oct. 2015, Web. — While Farage played a key role in Leave EU, he also supported the Vote Leave campaign.

<sup>53</sup> “About.” *Leave.EU*, Leave.EU, 2016, Web.

<sup>54</sup> Adams, Tim. “Nigel Farage: I was never scared of being out on a limb.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 21 July 2012, Web.

vote victory<sup>55</sup>. In fact, it was Farage’s party which forced Prime Minister Cameron to hold the referendum in the first place.

Farage was not well liked—Member of Parliament Caroline Lucas referred to Farage’s legacy as “toxic and unforgivable” as he “used his position to whip up hatred against migrants and divert attention from the real challenges this country is facing.” Supporters of the “remain” campaign consistently tried to bring to light the controversial propaganda-like posters by Farage and to use him as a centerpiece asking voters to reject “Farage’s Britain.” While this worked in some senses as many voters were put off by Farage, the UKIP leader worked behind the scenes spreading the message of Brexit throughout Britain. Farage’s relentless personality and unwavering support for the “leave” campaigns ultimately helped push the campaign along and lead Britain out of the European Union<sup>56</sup>.

***Britain Stronger in Europe.*** Britain Stronger in Europe was the organization campaigning for a “remain” vote in the United Kingdom’s European Union Referendum. The Electoral Commission named it the official “remain” campaign in April 2016, and it was endorsed by individuals such as Prime Minister David Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne. International players like Justin Trudeau, Barack Obama, Shinzo Abe, and Xi Jinping also supported the “remain” efforts. While these big international names supported the campaign, the “remain” campaign lacked a headline-drawing domestic player at the forefront of the discussion like Johnson and Farage<sup>57</sup>.

The Britain Stronger in Europe campaign lacked personality — the “leave” campaigns were consistently making proactive statements about the prime minister and chancellor, criticizing them and prompting them to retaliate, causing the men to consistently fill headlines, something the “remain” campaign failed to do. Despite pleas to inform the public of the benefits of staying in the European Union and the consistent support for Prime Minister Cameron’s

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<sup>55</sup> Daponte-Smith, Noah. “Nigel Farage Bows Out.” *National Review*, National Review, 21 July 2012, Web.

<sup>56</sup> Bennett, Asa. “Nigel Farage Has Earned His Place in History as the Man Who Led Britain out of the EU.” *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 4 July 2016, Web.

<sup>57</sup> “Get the Facts.” *Britain Stronger In Europe*, The In Campaign Ltd, 2016, Web.

negotiations with Donald Tusk, the “remain” campaign failed to clearly show what would change amid the various problems in Britain at the time<sup>58</sup>.

Furthermore, the “remain” campaign was up against a pledge made by “leave” supporters in 2016, to move 350 million pounds (\$465 million USD at the time) from the European Union health service to the National Health Service of England (N.H.S.)<sup>59</sup>. Free health care is seen as essential for most Britons making the N.H.S. extremely popular— as former chancellor Nigel Lawson put it, “[the N.H.S. is] the closest thing the English have to a religion.” While the pledge was later proven to be a “clear misuse” of data and false, it still likely had an impact on the 2016 vote<sup>60</sup>.

***Players Fighting for a Stay.*** While not as large of a personality as Farage or Johnson, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown was a key player in the “remain” campaign. He made various speeches and argued that the only way to tackle the growing globalization was for Britain to thrust itself into the center of it: “The Leave campaign will say that a Britain which gained only grudging concessions from our neighbors before the vote will be treated harshly after the vote. The opposite is true. With a clear domestic mandate, we will be in a far stronger position to shape Europe’s future...we should be leading Europe, not leaving it”<sup>61</sup>.

As Brown was able to singlehandedly keep Scotland in the United Kingdom when they called for independence<sup>62</sup> in 2014 with efforts like his five “big positives” that Scotland gets

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<sup>58</sup> Behr, Rafael. “How Remain Failed: the inside Story of a Doomed Campaign.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 5 July 2016, Web.

<sup>59</sup> The National Health Service of England (N.H.S.) was established three years after WWII (1948) when the United Kingdom was dealing with massive debt. Funded from taxes and available for all Britons regardless of their income bracket, N.H.S. gave all access to free health care.

<sup>60</sup> Castle, Stephen. “Brexit Dividend’ for N.H.S.? British Leader Revives a Pledge.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 18 June 2018, Web.  
— To put it in perspective, N.H.S. is so popular, that the organization was even depicted in the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

<sup>61</sup> Sheftalovich, Zoya. “Gordon Brown: EU Won’t Treat UK Harshly after Brexit Vote.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 25 May 2016, Web.

<sup>62</sup> Many were calling for independence due to the younger generation’s increased pride in being Scottish, and a want to leave England’s nuclear weapon and anti-EU policies (so that they could align themselves more with the peaceful and internationalist Nordic countries).  
(Source: J.C. “Why Do Some Scots Want to Leave the United Kingdom?” *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 16 Jan. 2014, Web.)

from the U.K., the campaign had hoped he could help accomplish the same again<sup>63</sup>. Brown's efforts fell short, however, as many accused him of lacking the passion that was seen with the remain campaign in 2014 — his attempts to amuse and crack jokes and gain popularity among the crowd proved to be lackluster at best. His efforts also seemed late. For months, the campaign and Prime Minister Cameron had been pushing the central message that leaving the union is a large risk for the economy, but many labeled this as “Project Fear” and stated that the campaign only focused on economics when they should have been looking at more pressing issues to the public like immigration. It was not until ten days before the vote that Brown chose to “relaunch” the “remain” campaign and increase efforts to get voters to stay in the EU by addressing more hot-button issues<sup>64</sup>.

Many British companies and banks were also staunchly against Brexit for economic reasons. Around February 2016, thirty percent of Britain's 100 largest companies came out in support of continued European Union membership, followed by 200 other companies in various sectors<sup>65</sup>. Similarly, banks rallied behind the Britain Stronger in Europe campaign — Goldman Sachs paid £500,000 (~ 638,075 USD) in January 2016 and others like JPMorgan, Morgan Stanley and Bank of America followed, making plans to donate six-figure sums. Due to their size and financial clout, businesses and banks played a powerful role in the debate<sup>66</sup>.

## **The Vote**

On June 23, 2016, roughly 46,501,241 voters turned up at the polls to vote on the UK-EU membership referendum, to gauge if the United Kingdom and Gibraltar should “remain” or “leave” the European Union. The voting turnout was 72.2 percent of the population and 26,033 ballots were rejected<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Riley-Smith, Ben. “Gordon Brown Reveals Five 'Big Positives' Scotland Gets from UK.” *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 22 Apr. 2014, Web.

<sup>64</sup> Kuenssberg, Laura. “Gordon Brown and the Remain 'Relaunch'.” *BBC News*, BBC, 13 June 2016, Web.

<sup>65</sup> Gross, Jenny. “Big British Companies Line up against 'Brexit'.” *MarketWatch*, MarketWatch, 23 Feb. 2016, Web.

<sup>66</sup> Arnold, Martin. “Banks Lead as Business Buys into UK's pro-EU Campaign.” *Financial Times*, Financial Times, 22 Jan. 2016, Web.

<sup>67</sup> “EU Referendum Results.” *BBC News*, BBC, 2016, Web.

**The Divide.** Stark divisions between education levels, age, and ethnicity were apparent when breaking down the 2016 referendum vote. The strength in the leave vote was strongly associated with lower educational qualifications; if the proportion of the electorate had one percentage point lower than the leave vote was higher by nearly one percentage point in that area. As for age, areas with older populations had significantly higher concentrations of voters more likely to vote “leave” than “remain.” Some argue this could be because of a “generational decay of Euroscepticism,” as each generation was more used to an integrated relationship between Europe and member states. Ethnicity played a smaller role, but there were clear distinctions between London and elsewhere<sup>68</sup>. For example, wards which had higher ethnic minority populations, particularly in Birmingham and Haringey in north London, were much more likely to support “remain.” This does not mean that “leave” voters were all white, poorly educated or old, nor that “remain” voters were all ethnic, educated or young, but rather that these three key factors played big roles in how social groups voted<sup>69 70</sup>.

**The Results.** On June 24, the result of the referendum was announced with the majority of voters choosing to leave the European Union. By a margin of only 1,269,501 votes, 51.9 percent of voters chose to leave the European Union, with only 48.1 percent wishing to remain. Breaking it down by nation, in England and Wales more than half of the voters wished to leave, whereas in Northern Ireland and Scotland, the majority of the voters wanted to remain in the union<sup>71</sup>. The narrow vote shows contention within the country, leading up to the vote it was not entirely clear whether the “remain” or “leave” camp would win.

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<sup>68</sup> Fox, Stuart and Sioned Pearce. “The generational decay of Euroscepticism in the UK and the EU referendum.” *Taylor and Francis Online — Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* (28:1, 19-37), Informa UK Limited, 4 Sept. 2017, Web.

<sup>69</sup> Rosenbaum, Martin. “Local Voting Figures Shed New Light on EU Referendum.” *BBC News*, BBC, 6 Feb. 2017, Web.

<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the leaves side won meaning that it must have attracted support from many educated, younger, and diverse Britons.

<sup>71</sup> “EU Referendum Results.” *BBC News*, BBC, 2016, Web.

## **Epilogue: The Aftermath**

Immediately after Britain voted to leave the European Union, Prime Minister David Cameron resigned from office, no longer feeling able to lead a country that rejected his proposals and turned its back on the European Union. He stated, “the British people made a different decision to take a different path. As such I think the country requires fresh leadership to take it in this direction”<sup>72</sup>.

The sterling tanked on June 24 as well, hitting its biggest intra-drop (11.9%) to date at a 31-year low of \$1.3679 to each pound. In the following months, it continued to fall until leveling around \$1.21. While the feared recession did not materialize, the United Kingdom’s growth has slowed since 2016; inflation rates hit 3% last year (versus 0.5% at the time of the referendum vote), and business investment saw its first annual decline since the 2009 recession. Time will only tell how the economy will react on March 2019, the official stop date for negotiations (unless there is an extension) and the end of EU treaties applying to the UK<sup>73</sup>.

***Trouble with Direct Democracy?*** The Brexit vote was a clear example of how direct democracy is ineffective in determining foreign policy in the 21st century due to the prominence of social media. Some experts believe that forms of direct democracy like referendums are vulnerable to confusion and echo-chambers within the populous. While the issue of Brexit was complex, the “leave” campaigns emphasized, “if you don’t know, vote no” which resonated with many as they were bombarded with a constant stream of information, opinionated political players, and different advocacy groups from their social media. Similarly, social media obscured certain issues with leaving the European Union as characters like Farage and Johnson pushed more controversial or hot-button issues like their anti-immigrant narratives and the aforementioned false promise to allot more money to the National Health Service. While the turnout for Brexit was quite high in comparison to other referendums, which is promising for a democratic vote,

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<sup>72</sup> Stewart, Heather, et al. “David Cameron Resigns after UK Votes to Leave European Union.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 24 June 2016, Web.

<sup>73</sup> Chu, Ben. “With One Year to Brexit, How Well Is the UK Economy Performing?” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 31 Mar. 2018.

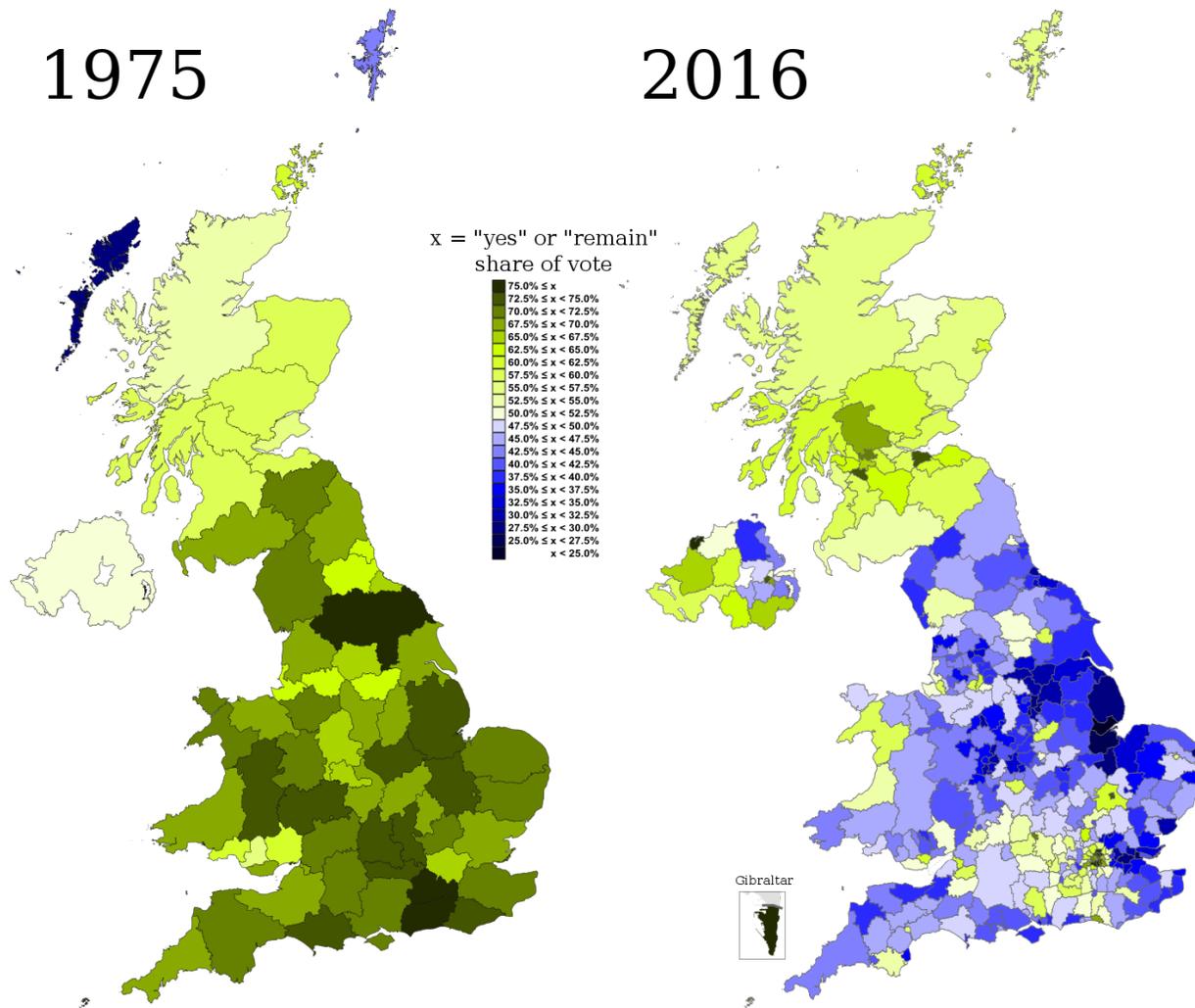
populist frustrations can often bubble to the surface and overshadow the directness of the democracy<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Lowe, Kristi, and Kelsi Suter. "The Trouble with Referendums." *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 8 July 2016, Web.

### Exhibits

#### Exhibit 1: Referendum Results of 1975 vs. 2016 Votes



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75 "United Kingdom European Communities membership referendum, 1975 compared to United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, 2016" by RaviC is licensed under CC BY 4.0

## **Exhibit 2: Key Players**

### United Kingdom

Edward “Ted” Heath (Prime Minister 1970-1974)

Harold Wilson (Prime Minister 1964-1966, 1974-1976)

Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister 1979-1990)

Nigel Lawson (Chancellor of the Exchequer 1983-1989)

Geoffrey Howe (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs 1983-1989, Deputy  
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1989-1990)

John Major (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs 1989, Chancellor of the  
Exchequer 1989-1990, Leader of the Conservative Party 1995-1997, Prime Minister  
1990-1997)

David Cameron (Leader of the Conservative Party 2005-2016, Leader of the Opposition  
2005-2010, Prime Minister 2010-2016)

Tony Blair (Prime Minister 1997-2007)

Gordon Brown (Prime Minister 2007-2010)

Boris Johnson (Member of Parliament 2001-2008, 2015-present, Mayor of London 2008-2016)

Nigel Farage (Member of Parliament 1999-present, Founding Leader of the UK Independence  
Party)

### European Union

Jacques Delors (8th President of the European Commission 1985-1995)

Donald Tusk (President of the European Council 2014-present)

### **Exhibit 3: Timeline of Events**

- 1973** Denmark, Ireland and Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC)
- 1974** Harold Wilson of the Labour Party elected Prime Minister
- 1975**  
June 5 The first-ever United Kingdom referendum took place on whether the UK should remain in the European Communities. 67.2% of the electorate was in favor of staying in the European Economic Community.
- 1979**  
December '78 / January '79  
“The Winter of Discontent”
- May 4 Margaret Thatcher elected Prime Minister of the UK, returning the Conservative Party to power.
- 1980** The highest-ever rejection of EEC membership took place under the first full year of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's office, 65% of the electorate was opposed to staying in the EEC
- 1985** The United Kingdom ratified the Single European Act (revision to the Treaty of Rome)
- 1989**  
October Chancellor Nigel Lawson resigns. Foreign Secretary at the time, John Major, named Chancellor.
- 1990**  
October The United Kingdom joined the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), with the pound sterling pegged to the Deutschmark.
- November 13 Deputy Prime Minister Geoffrey Howe resigns
- November 22 Thatcher does not receive the Conservative Party's majority vote and resigns as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.
- November 28 John Major appointed Prime Minister following the resignation of Margaret Thatcher

**1992**

Feb. 7 Maastricht Treaty (Treaty on European Union) was signed leading to more European integration (including the formulation of the Euro)

September 16 “Black Wednesday” - The United Kingdom abandons the Exchange Rate Mechanism

**1993**

November 1 The European Communities became the European Union

1997

May 2 Labour Party’s Tony Blair elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

**Mid-2000**

EU expansion to include poorer post-communist countries

**2005**

David Cameron elected to be Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Conservative Party

**2007**

June 27 Labour Party’s Gordon Brown elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

December 13 EU Reform Treaty in Lisbon

**2010**

Early 2010 Leader of the Conservative Party David Cameron makes a "cast iron" promise of a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty

May 11 Conservative Party’s David Cameron elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

**2012**

May NATO summit meeting, UK Prime Minister David Cameron and others discussed the idea of using a European Union referendum as a concession

**2013**

January PM Cameron announced that the Conservative government was to hold an “in-out referendum” on EU membership before the end of 2017 (if he was re-elected in 2015)

June 19 First reading of European Union (Referendum) Bill 2013–14

**2015**

- April 14 Launch of the Conservative Party Manifesto for the 2015 General Election
- May 7 The Conservative Party wins the 2015 General Election (with a majority of the electorate vote)
- June 25-26 First step in negotiation process: Meeting of the European Council. UK Prime Minister sets plans for in-out referendum
- October 19 Prime Minister makes a statement to Parliament. Sets out four things he needs achieved for UK's renegotiation package.
- November Prime Minister writes formal letter to President of the European Council Donald Tusk
- December 17 The European Union Referendum Act 2015 receives Royal Assent (a referendum is allowed on the UK's membership with the EU)

**2016**

- February 2 Donald Tusk writes proposal and The European Council publishes the Draft Decision — 'New Settlement for the United Kingdom within the European Union'
- February 18-19 European Council Meeting
- February 22 Prime Minister announces EU referendum date
- April 11-13 An EU referendum leaflet laying out the case for the UK remaining in the EU is delivered to all households in the UK
- June 23 The UK-EU membership referendum takes places to gauge if the UK and Gibraltar would like to remain or leave the European Union
- June 24 Result of the referendum is announced with the majority of voters choosing to leave the EU (Remain: 48.1%, Leave: 51.9%). Prime Minister David Cameron reigns from office.