

## **LESSONS FROM THE UK REFERENDUM ON BREXIT**

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WORKSHOP ON EU CONSEQUENCES OF NATIONAL REFERENDUMS

European University Institute, Florence

## **WHY A REFERENDUM?**

- .Continuing erosion of trust in political class, parliamentary representation
- .Lack of elite commitment to the political goals of EU since 1975
- .Within-party divisions about EU since Maastricht Treaty
- .Cameron's indifference to EU; over-confidence in himself

## THE QUESTION

*Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union  
or  
leave the European Union?*

Written by the government and vetted for fairness

Capable of implementation

Politically binding, though not legally binding

## THE CAMPAIGN

.REMAIN: Fear of cost (not risk of change). Transactional

.LEAVE: Cultural vision. Make Britain great again

Sovereignty: Take back control for British Parliament

Immigration: Reduce flow of skilled white Europeans

Economic Contested and contestable scenarios

## THE OUTCOME: CULTURAL COALITION TRIUMPHS

Victory requires absolute majority.  
No British government has won 50.1% of the vote since 1935.

	<u>Leave</u> %	<u>Remain</u> %	<u>% Leave</u> %	<u>2015 election</u> %
Conservatives	58	42	40	37
Labour	37	63	36	30
Lib Dems	30	70	4	8
SNP	36	64	3	5
UKIP	96	4	12	13
Others	<u>33</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>
Total	51.9%	48.1%	100%	100%
<u>Post script</u>				
				% total
London	40%	60%	(N.a.)	11%
Christian	58%	42%	(N.a.)	60%
Muslims	30	70	(N.a.)	4%

Note: Figures rounded and approximate for clarity. For more precise detail, see Lord Ashcroft's Referendum Day exit poll with 12,369 respondents.  
<http://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>

## THE LESSON

Don't call a referendum if you can't accept defeat

Don't call a referendum if you aren't prepared to deal with the consequences

Don't expect the EU to accept terms dictated by a national referendum

Options for the UK Prime Minister

Demand what you can get, which isn't much (Hard Brexit)

Demand what you can't get (Unilateral withdrawal. Markets disrupted; government united)

Negotiate compromises a la Norway/Switzerland  
(Cabinet splits plus risk of ejection from Downing Street)