B.THE UNITED KINGDOM

A clear division about the UK's future in Europe

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A referendum differs fundamentally from a conventional parliamentary election: it offers a choice on a single issue rather than a choice between a multiplicity of parties, each offering a multiplicity of policies. In a parliamentary election, voters who do not agree completely with all policies of any party must balance conflicting views when deciding how to cast their ballot. In a referendum people can vote in accord with their views on a single issue.

1.   Mobilising a coalition of support

The referendum held in the UK on 23rd June offered a simple choice between remaining in or leaving the European Union. The wording was chosen following careful evaluation by an independent research institute of how wordings were viewed by focus groups. By contrast, public opinion polls about attitudes toward the European Union usually offer three or more choices. A standard Eurobarometer evaluation of the EU asks: "Do you think our country's membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, neither a good thing nor a bad thing, or don't know? When this question was asked Britons a few months before the 2015 general election, a plurality of 38 percent said that EU membership was a good thing as against 28 percent describing it as a bad thing. The median group, 34 percent of all Britons, were undecided or don't knows. The practice of British parliamentary elections converting a plurality of votes into a majority of seats in the House of Commons encourages politicians to think that finishing first is sufficient to achieve victory. However, this is not the case in a referendum.

The threshold for winning the referendum, an absolute majority of 50.1 percent, is abnormally high by the standards of British politics. No British party has won that big a share of the vote since 1935. A coalition of voters is necessary. Political science theories identify three ways in which support may be mobilized in a referendum campaign. Electors can cast a ballot in keeping with the position of their national party; they can follow a trusted leader; or they can vote on the issue on the referendum ballot.

The two major parties could not mobilize an absolute majority for remaining in the EU. The governing Conservative Party was split at all levels from the Cabinet through the ranks of Members of Parliament to its voters. In consequence, the Conservative Party organisation remained neutral during the campaign. According to Lord Ashcroft's election-day poll of 12,369 voters, 58 percent who had voted for a Conservative government a year earlier endorsed leaving the EU rather than following the recommendation of their party leader, D. Cameron. The Labour Party was consumed by internal quarrels. A majority of Labour MPs were pro-EU but they were against the parliamentary party leader, Jeremy Corbyn. While Corby gave lip service to the party line of endorsing a vote to remain in the EU, his lack of enthusiasm for the EU was evident and many of his hard core left-wing supporters were against the EU because of its promotion of austerity policies and free market rather than socialist policies. Nonetheless, 63 percent of Labour supporters voted to remain in the EU,

The two parties actively committed to a "remain" vote—the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish

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National Party—between them had only one-eighth of the total general election vote in 2015. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) enthusiastically campaigned to leave the EU. It had one-eighth of the vote at the last general election and was also the most united; 96 percent of UKIP supporters favoured leaving the EU. With only one Member of Parliament, the UKIP leader claimed the referendum outcome was a victory for the people against Parliament.

Both sides in the EU Referendum vote were coalitions of people who disagreed about which party was best for governing Britain. Two-fifths of the vote to leave the EU came from Conservatives and one-fifth from Labour voters. Britain's protest party, UKIP, contributed a quarter of the vote. The majority for leaving the EU thus owed more to supporters of established parties than to protest parties. Among the group voting to remain in the EU, two-fifths were Labour, almost a-third Conservatives and one-eighth were Liberal Democrats.

There was no way in which an absolute majority could be obtained by mobilizing support behind the personality of a popular leader. David Cameron, the leading advocate for remaining in the EU, had only attracted 37 percent of the vote for the Conservative Party at the 2015 British general election. The other attractive pro-remain leader, Nicola Sturgeon, represented the Scottish National Party, a party that finished fourth in total UK votes in 2015 because it only sought votes in Scotland. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, vigorously repeated economic warnings of the consequences of leaving, but his domestic promotion of austerity policies made him unattractive to Labour voters. The Leave side had two very striking advocates, Boris Johnson, a Conservative, and Nigel Farage, leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). When a BMG survey at the start of the campaign asked which of three groups of politicians was best suited to lead the country in the world today, a majority expressed no confidence in any of the alternatives. Only 22 percent chose David Cameron and George Osborne, 15 percent favoured the Conservative campaigners for leave and 11 percent believed the Labour leaders were best.

The lack of trusted leadership from parties and personalities has led to a fall in turnout at national elections in Britain. Turnout has been even lower in European Parliament elections, which the UK's major parties had treated as second-order ballots of no special consequence for themselves. The 2014 EP turnout of 35.6 percent was barely half that of the turnout at the 2010 and 2015 British general election. Instead of offering Britons a choice of how they wanted the EP to reflect their views, the 2016 referendum offered Britons a choice of whether they wanted to be represented in European institutions. This produced a turnout of 72 percent, double that for the preceding European Parliament election. It was also above the average turnout for continental referendums on EU affairs.

2. National and European issues linked

The turnout was high because most British people are now aware that what happens in Brussels has an impact on what happens in Britain and the referendum ballot gave people a chance to say whether they thought the linkage was good or bad. It was not necessary to have any knowledge of how EU institutions operate. An awareness of interdependence is evident in the opening of Polish shops in Britain and in ease with which British people can travel to their holidays. The old distinction between first order national politics and second order European politics has been replaced by the two being combined in what might be called 1.5 order politics. Whereas continental leaders will vigorously defend the benefits of being involved in both levels, British leaders have at most been ambivalent about calling attention to the importance of second-order EU politics and its benefits. By contrast, the popular British

press has recognised interdependence only to denounce it and argue for making first order politics the only politics that affects the governance of Britons.

The great majority of British people realise that even though Britain is an island, there is no drawbridge that can be pulled up to isolate the country from risks that arise beyond its shores. When asked about the biggest risks facing the country, an absolute majority of BMG respondents, 55 percent, thought terrorism was a big risk and 47 percent that immigration presented a big risk to British society. Only 22 percent saw globalisation as posing a big risk and only one in eight saw war as a big risk.

In response to risks, the government has two broad alternatives: to look after the country on its own or to work with allies. The former is the alternative endorsed by the United Kingdom Independence Party while working with allies is a major argument of European Union advocates. Britons are divided about whether self-reliance or alliances with others is better. The BMG survey offered three possible institutions to work with: the United Nations, the EU, and the United States--as well as the alternative of looking after ourselves. Two-thirds think that the best way to deal with the challenge of immigration is to have the British government decide what should be done. Less than one in five think that the European Union is best suited to help Britain deal with immigration. There is greater readiness to seek allies in dealing with terrorism. However, there is a division of opinion about where to turn for help. One-sixth see the globally oriented United Nations as most useful; he same proportion put Brussels first instead. Even though world trade requires partners, half think that problems in the global economy are best dealt with nationally. Only 19 percent believe the European Union is best suited to help Britain deal with the challenges that the global economy presents. The EU is seen as even less relevant to helping with military threats; the United Nations come first and the United States second as preferred associates. Only one in ten think the EU would be the best military ally.

The best way to deal with risks is that Britain must look after itself. This view appears to be less an expression of bulldog nationalism than of disagreement or uncertainty about whether there is any institution—the United Nations, the American government or the European Union—that can offer effective help. Less than one in five think that the European Union can best help Britain deal with the big risks that are seen in the world today.

Two-dimensional politics characterized the opposing sides in the referendum. Reflecting the motives that led Britain to join what was then the European Economic Community, the "Remain" campaign invoked the economic benefits of the EU and sought to stir up fear of losing these benefits if Britain withdrew from the EU. By contrast, the leave side emphasized cultural values, such as the supreme sovereignty of the British parliament and threats to national identity and security from open borders and immigration. A nationwide online survey of 1,518 people conducted by BMG Research at the start of the referendum campaign in March showed that single-minded concentration on the economy was unwise. When asked to identify the most important issue facing the country today, 36 percent put immigration and asylum first; only 9 percent named the national economy.

There was a big division between "remain" and "leave" voters in the issues that each group thought important. Among those who voted to leave the EU, Lord Ashcroft's Poll found that 49 percent justified their choice on grounds of political culture: they were for leaving the EU because they believed that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK. The most important decision that they wanted to be in British hands was control over immigration and national borders. Third in importance was the risk of the EU further expanding its powers and membership. This was a reflection of the influx of immigrants from the EU's most recent Member States, such as Romania and Bulgaria. Only 6 percent cited benefits for the economy

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and trade as a reason to leave the EU.

Britons voting to remain in the EU thought along economic lines. A total of 43 percent were concerned leaving the EU would create risks for the economy, jobs and prices. Fewer than one in ten said that they had a strong attachment to the EU, its history, culture and traditions. Consistent with the UK's restricted engagement in EU affairs, more than three in ten favoured remaining because the country had the best of both worlds: it was in the single market but outside the Schengen area and the eurozone. Only nine percent who voted to remain said they were moved by a strong attachment to Europe, its history and culture.

During the campaign, each side emphasized views that it owned, that is, more voters agreed with the position taken by that side. According to Lord Ashcroft's poll, remaining in the EU was considered better for job security, the cost of living and the encouragement of foreign investment. The issue most strongly associated with leaving the EU was having control of all laws in British hands, especially those concerned with immigration and the control of borders. Leaving the EU was also expected to be better for social welfare, especially the National Health Service. A higher proportion endorse issues owned by the anti-EU campaign than issues emphasized by the "Remain" group.

The two sides in the referendum campaign were not so much debating a single issue as disagreeing about which issue should determine the choice of voters. The "Remain" side emphasized the risk of change that leaving would bring. Emphasizing risk was consistent with the theory of Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman that most people are risk averse. Moreover, social science surveys find that when people are asked their views on European integration, the biggest group endorses remaining in the EU as it is. Less than one-third want to see greater integration, a process that has been continuing for decades.

The campaigners for remaining offered both hope and fear. The hope was that by leaving the European Union Britain could return to a past in which European institutions had no influence on British affairs, and immigration was a trickle. Voters were not so much nostalgic about a lost past as they were prepared to believe that this was a credible alternative. The "Remain" camp was hesitant about directly confronting this hope by arguing that you can't turn the clock back half a century to an era when the UK was content and not in the EU. Unwittingly, David Cameron had stoked their opposition by first promising to repatriate significant powers from Brussels in ignorance of the acquis communitaire, and then failing to do so in February.

To bolster their case, the "Remain" campaign called attention to future risks to national and household incomes of departure from the EU, without qualification of the inevitable margin of error in any forecast of the future. Nonetheless, the numbers were big enough to encourage risk-averse voters to stick with the EU. The leave campaign challenged the numbers, pointing out that they were not facts but forecasts, and the forecasting record of many economic experts left something to be desired. The Leave campaign eschewed numbers for rosy scenarios of how Britain, once free of EU economic regulations, could establish itself as a global economic force by strengthening links with China, India and the United States. The "Remain" campaign dismissed this as a unicorn vision, since no one had ever seen what was being promised, and the details of how the vision would be implemented were few. Leave voters were more hopeful that Britain could manage its future better than by having the EU as a partner.

3.   The outcome

The dichotomous nature of the referendum ballot produced a clear division of the vote. The vote for leaving the European Union, 51.9 percent, was a higher share than that won by any British governing party since 1931. The vote for leaving was very different from that found in parliamentary elections. It was more than four times that won by UKIP at the 2015 general election and almost half again as much as David Cameron's party gained in winning a majority in the House of Commons then. Although the outcome appeared close in percentage terms, the winning margin for leaving was more than 1.2 million votes. This was much greater than that required by the British standard of decision-making: a one vote margin is enough to win. The "Remain" campaign claimed 16.1mn votes, a very large number by general election standards, but a losing share in the referendum.

Public opinion poll questions about whether people ever think of themselves as Europeans often receive a positive, polite response. However, very few Britons see themselves as primarily European; it is a secondary identify. In the United Kingdom of Britain & Northern Ireland, primary identities have a geographical dimension. Among people who think of themselves as English, 79 percent voted to leave the European Union, while among those who think of themselves as British not English, a category that racial minorities, Scots and Welsh could embrace, 60 percent voted to remain in the EU.

Although London is the capital of the UK it is also the least British in its population. Less than half its residents are English-born. It has 40 percent of the flow of immigrants to the UK, more than three times London's share of the UK population. It is also a paradigm of prosperity based on a population that is culturally diverse and global in outlook, especially in the City of London. London rejected the leave campaign's appeal to repatriate control of immigration to Britain. Instead, 60% of Londoners voted to remain in the European Union. By contrast, outside London, more than four in seven voted to leave the EU.

The campaigning of the Scottish National Party for a vote to remain in the EU was successful; 62 percent voted in favour of remaining, a margin almost one-quarter greater than the support the SNP got in the Scottish Parliament election the month before. Paradoxically, most Scots voting to remain in the EU also favour withdrawing from the UK and becoming an independent state. This would be a necessary condition for the SNP to achieve its goal of Scotland being among the many small and prosperous countries in the European Union.

The highest share of votes for exit occurred in the old industrial regions of the East and the West Midlands, the North Est, and Yorkshire. These are regions that have had more New Commonwealth immigrants from the West Indies, India and Pakistan than from the European Union. They have also traditionally been Labour Party strongholds.

The age division in the referendum vote implies that Britons are becoming more accepting of Europe. Whereas 60 percent of the oldest bloc of voters were in favour of leaving the EU, 73 percent under the age of 25 favoured remaining. Older voters were on the winning side because they are more numerous than youths and more likely to turn out to vote. They favoured a return to a Britain closer, culturally though not geographically, to Australia and Canada than to France or Belgium. A majority of those who had lived all their lives while Britain was an EU Member State voted in favour of remaining. In theory, the turnover in the population due to births and deaths will gradually remove from the electorate older anti-EU voters. But by the time this occurs, younger people will be coming of age when Britain is no longer a Member State of the European Union.

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4.   Consequences

All sides in the referendum agreed that a one-vote rather than a super-majority was sufficient for victory. While the outcome was not a legally binding vote on an Act of Parliament, it was politically binding. The stark clarity of the alternatives of remaining of leaving the European Union left no room for compromise between the two sides. David Cameron, who had endorsed calling the referendum, resigned as prime minister within hours of the outcome being known. The leave campaign was full of statements about how ignorance of EU institutions is widespread within the British political class. All the leave campaign required was a catalogue of faults about what was wrong with the EU and the popular press offered an exaggerated supply of faults. It also proclaimed a faith that Britain's future place in the world would be better by exiting the European Union. To achieve this, it promised to seek stronger political and economic links with major countries on other continents. There was an assumption that Britain was sufficiently important to continental Member States that the EU would allow Britain to keep benefits of membership after withdrawal free of accepting EU conditions that would impose political and economic costs.

Theresa May became the new prime minister after assuring Conservative anti-Europeans that Brexit means Brexit, a tactically shrewd gnomic statement that left everything open about how this was to be achieved and what relations a post-Brexit Britain would have with EU Member States. Whitehall could not have a plan at hand for exit, since until the outcome was known the government's policy was to remain an EU member. While administrative constraints suggested caution, the politics of the Conservative Party dictated maintaining the momentum for leaving. Hence, the prime minister's initial cautious statement of officially notifying withdrawal at some point in 2017 was soon converted into a pledge to invoke Article 50 before the end of March.

The "Remain" camp has sought to mitigate the consequences of defeat by focusing on the possibility of retaining significant economic advantages of EU membership by retaining access to the single Europe market on terms similar to Norway and Switzerland. In principle, this is achievable, but it is politically irreconcilable with the UK government's pledge to regain UK control of immigration and economic regulation. A second reaction has been to seek another referendum on EU membership once the dire consequences it forecasts are evident. This is based on the belief that a fall in sterling, cuts in investment and businesses moving bankers'; jobs to the continent would produce a majority for "de-withdrawal" before the UK's withdrawal was completed in spring, 2019. Another theory is that once the UK's post-Brexit relations with the EU are negotiated with EU institutions, they will be sufficiently unpalatable for Parliament or a referendum to reject an agreement. Neither theory has any support within the Conservative government.

The lack of preparedness by both sides to deal with the consequences of an election outcome is not unique to referendums. It is often revealed when a parliamentary election gives control of government to a party long in opposition. In the case of the 2016 referendum, the Conservative government had been in office for six years and debating relations with the European Union for a quarter century. Winning the exit referendum has forced Conservative politicians to switch abruptly from talking about what Britain's place in the world ought to be to finding an attainable position that has eluded successive British prime ministers for half a century. A pro-European British intellectual described the country's entry into the European Economic Community in 1973 as a journey to an unknown destination. The 2016 referendum result has placed Britain on another such journey in the opposite direction.

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