# BREXIT

## WHY BRITAIN VOTED TO LEAVE THE EUROPEAN UNION


HAROLD D. CLARKE
MATTHEW GOODWIN
AND PAUL WHITELEY

'Do not read *Brexit* – unless you want truth rather than propaganda, objectivity rather than bias and evidence rather than prejudice. Harold Clarke and his team of sleuths have written a book that will still be standing when the post-truth claims of those on both sides of the referendum have rightly crumbled to dust.'

**PETER KELLNER**
*Former president of YouGov*

'Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley have written what is sure to be a standard reference on Brexit. A wonderfully written history of the rise of UKIP and the Brexit referendum lead to a diverse array of empirical analyses: a survey of UKIP members, longitudinal national surveys and pre-post referendum surveys. Instead of simple explanations, they show the variety of diverse factors that produced the final referendum outcome and discuss the implications for British politics going forward.'

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'An empirically rich and insightful analysis of the dynamics of the Brexit vote. Essential reading for understanding the social and political forces underlying one of the most important and consequential electoral decisions of our times.'

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'It would be hard to come up with a better line-up of analysts to dig into both the long- and short-term drivers of Britain's decision to leave the EU. Whether you're a Leaver or a Remainer, the vote for Brexit needs explaining – and this is just the book to do it.'

**TIM BALE**
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HAROLD D. CLARKE
*University of Texas, Dallas*

MATTHEW GOODWIN
*University of Kent, Canterbury*

PAUL WHITELEY
*University of Essex*

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# *Brexit*

In June 2016 the United Kingdom shocked the world by voting to leave the European Union. As this book reveals, the historic vote for a Brexit marked the culmination of trends in domestic politics and in the UK's relationship with the EU that have been building over many years. Drawing on a wealth of survey evidence collected over more than 10 years, this book explains why a majority of people decided to ignore much of the national and international community and vote for Brexit. Drawing on past research on voting in major referendums in Europe and elsewhere, a team of leading academic experts analyse changes in the UK's party system that were catalysts for the referendum vote, including the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the dynamics of public opinion during an unforgettable and divisive referendum campaign, the factors that influenced how people voted and the likely economic and political impact of this historic decision.

HAROLD D. CLARKE is Ashbel Smith Professor at the University of Texas, Dallas. His recent books include *Austerity and Political Choice in Britain* (2015) and *Affluence, Austerity and Electoral Change in Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).

MATTHEW GOODWIN is Professor of Political Science at the University of Kent and Senior Visiting Fellow at Chatham House, London. He is the author of four books, including *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Public Support for the Radical Right in Britain* (2014), which was awarded the Paddy Power Political Book of the Year 2015. In early 2016 he authored a report that predicted Brexit. Matthew tweets @GoodwinMJ.

PAUL WHITELEY is a Professor of Government at the University of Essex and is currently the director for the Centre for the Study of Integrity at the University of Essex. He is the author of eighteen academic books including studies of electoral behaviour, party members and citizenship in Britain.

Every week we send £350 million to Brussels. I'd rather that we control how to spend that money, and if I had that control I would spend it on the NHS.

Gisela Stuart, 15 April 2016

Theresa May says it's difficult to control immigration as part of the EU. She's wrong – it is not difficult, it's impossible.

Nigel Farage, 29 April 2016

... maybe some point down the line, there might be a UK–US trade agreement, but it's not going to happen any time soon ... the UK is going to be in the back of the queue ...

Barack Obama, 22 April 2016

I am absolutely convinced that our economic security will be better if we stay in a reformed European Union and it will be seriously at risk if we were to leave.

David Cameron, 15 May 2016

Napoleon, Hitler, various people tried this [unifying Europe], and it ends tragically. The EU is an attempt to do this by different methods.

Boris Johnson, 15 May 2016

As Chancellor, I would have a responsibility to try to restore stability to the public finances and that would mean an emergency Budget where we would have to increase taxes and cut spending ... [Q]uitting the EU would mean less money. Billions less. It's a lose-lose situation for British families and we shouldn't risk it.

George Osborne, 15 June 2016

It's a pretty overwhelming case when you have a huge body of economists [that agree] that it's going to cost [the UK], it's going to be negative for income purposes, it's going to reduce trade most likely as a result of uncertainty and those are blatant facts.

Christine Lagarde, 17 June 2016

We know how bad our government is at defending our borders, and within a few years all of these people [Middle East refugees] will have EU passports. We are much less safe as part of this European Union.

Nigel Farage, 22 June 2016

# *Foreword*

Brexit changed everything. Or at least so it seemed. For many amongst what have come to be known as the 'liberal metropolitan elite', it overturned several decades of thinking about what Britain is and where it is headed. 'What have we become?' became a common refrain around middle-class dinner tables.

Obviously, and as ever, reality is slightly more complicated. Britain's decision to leave the European Union revealed as much about how its society had been changing for many years as it did about the impact of the short and bitter referendum campaign itself.

Yet there can be little doubt that the decision that was taken will have profound consequences for the future of the country. Obviously, the nature of its relationship with the European Union will change. As important, however, will be the impact of the decision on our politics.

Already, we see the way in which the Scottish National Party is using Brexit to further its own political and independence-related agendas. There is lingering uncertainty about the future of the UK Independence Party now its central aim has been achieved, and still more over where its voters might go should they decide to withdraw their support. Prime Minister Theresa May clearly has half an eye on these people as she renews her pledge to reduce immigration and bring the country out from under the jurisdiction of the EU's Court. Meanwhile, the Labour Party, largely ineffective within parliament as Her Majesty's Opposition, confronts the danger of haemorrhaging votes at the next election as its leader's popularity rating shows no sign of improving.

In order to understand the way in which politics might develop at this unique moment in our history, it is crucial to have a firm understanding of what has happened to date. And here it is important to understand the importance of careful, detailed, empirically based analysis.

The failure of pollsters accurately to predict not only the Brexit outcome, but also the election of Donald Trump and, 18 months earlier, of a majority Conservative Government in the UK have led many people

to conclude that an accurate understanding of contemporary politics is impossible. Yet this is to confuse prediction with explanation. The former has never been simple, and depends, in part, on the ability of pollsters to predict who will vote at all. In contrast, whilst failing to anticipate the outcomes, analysts have proven extremely good at identifying the kinds of choices that people are liable to make.

This book provides an excellent example of the way in which good, clear, methodologically rigorous analysis can further our understanding both of what has happened, and what the implications of these events might be. Following the vote in June, we all knew our country was profoundly divided, but the nature of the divisions and their potential to fundamentally reshape our politics are made abundantly clear in what follows.

Moreover, what the authors have achieved here is to present their findings in a clear and accessible way. Too much academic research is simply impenetrable to non-specialists, meaning that their insights into the social world remain largely undiscovered.

Brexit is too important for that. What follows is of relevance not only to academics but to all those – politicians, journalists, civil servants and 'the public' – who want to understand what has happened and where our politics might be going. I can't think of a better compliment than that.

Anand Menon
Director
*The UK in a Changing Europe Initiative*
*Oxford*

# *Acknowledgements*

*Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* relies heavily on survey data gathered in two projects. The first are monthly surveys with representative national samples of the British electorate conducted over the period April 2004 to June 2016. These 'Essex Continuous Monitoring Surveys' (ECMS) have generated a wealth of data on the dynamics of the political attitudes and behaviour of the British electorate during a 12-year period when the country was experiencing large-scale economic and social change and major political upheaval. In the latter category, Britain's long-lived political party system was encountering serious stress from several sources, one of the most important of which was the rise of the right-wing populist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). After the 2010 general election, UKIP support increased dramatically, setting in motion a series of events that culminated in the United Kingdom's historic decision in the 23 June 2016 referendum to leave the European Union. The ECMS data provide us with a detailed record of the opinions, beliefs and behaviour of the British electorate as these highly consequential political dynamics unfolded.

The second data set we employ in *Brexit* is the product of a chance encounter between two of the authors, Clarke and Whiteley, and the third, Goodwin, at the September 2014 Elections, Public Opinion and Parties annual conference in Edinburgh. Seated at the same table at the conference banquet, as wine was poured (and consumed!), we talked about the rise of UKIP and the work that we had been doing on the party, as well as earlier studies of party activists in the UK, Canada and the United States that Clarke and Whiteley had undertaken. But UKIP was definitely the focus of attention. All three of us had been using mass survey data to study factors affecting the growing electoral support that UKIP was enjoying. In addition, for his recent book, *Revolt on the Right* (co-authored with Rob Ford), Goodwin had done

in-depth interviews with UKIP's leadership and fieldwork observing the party's local organizations and campaign activities.

As the conversation progressed (and more wine was consumed), we agreed that it would be valuable to conduct a large-scale survey of people who had become members of UKIP, using questions that would permit comparisons with data on public attitudes gathered in the ECMS. UKIP generously agreed to permit us to do the member survey, provided us with contact information and, in November 2014, we were in the field. The data gathered via our UKIP party member survey help us to understand the sources of UKIP support and key factors motivating voters to choose the Brexit option in the EU referendum. The analyses in the chapters that follow employ both the ECMS and the UKIP members study data to help us understand the party's rise and its impact on the referendum decision.

We are pleased to have this opportunity to thank those individuals and organizations that made the *Brexit* project possible. First, we thank Anand Menon, Director of The UK in a Changing Europe Initiative, for his interest in our proposal to do the pre- and post-referendum surveys. These surveys are essential for the success of the project and they would not have been possible without generous support from the Initiative. Additional funding for the referendum surveys was provided by the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) and the University of Essex. At the University of Essex, we particularly wish to thank Lawrence Ezrow, Chair of the Department of Government, for his interest and support. At UTD, we are pleased to acknowledge the encouragement of Vice President Hobson Wildenthal, Dean Denis Dean and Political Science Program Head, Jennifer Holmes.

We also are pleased to acknowledge the Economics and Social Research Council (ESRC) for its generous financial support for the 2005 and 2010 British Election Studies (BES). The monthly ECMS data collections were funded for several years by grant monies from the 2005 and 2010 BES. Major funding for the ECMS also was provided by a grant from the US National Science Foundation (NSF). We especially appreciate the interest in our work shown by NSF Political Science Program Officers, Frank Scioli, Jim Granato and Brian Humes. We also acknowledge ongoing financial support provided by UTD. In addition to assisting with the ECMS surveys, UTD supports the Qualtrics survey platform used for the UKIP members survey.

There are also a large number of people who helped us to develop our knowledge about how to study the important choices that people make in elections, parties, referendums and other democratic political settings. In particular, we wish to thank Robert Ford, Jeff Gill, Ron Johnston, Peter Kellner, Allan Kornberg, Matt Lebo, Larry LeDuc, Mike Lewis-Beck, Helmut Norpoth, Jon Pammett, Jason Reifler, David Sanders, Tom Scotto, Pat Seyd, Randy Stevenson, Marianne Stewart, Guy Whitten and Stan Wong. Also, like many other social scientists, we owe a special debt of gratitude to our colleague and dear friend, the late Allan McCutcheon, who developed valuable tools for studying the dynamics of public attitudes and behaviour and then generously taught us how to use them.

There are also people who assisted us with administrative and technical aspects of the project. At UTD, Cheryl Berry, Political Science Program Assistant, cheerfully kept the paperwork moving smoothly and efficiently, while Karl Ho and Russell Hoffman provided the computing expertise needed to build the *Brexit* website. A very special shout-out is due to Karl for the many hours he spent developing the web survey of UKIP party members. His services are greatly appreciated.

In addition, we are pleased to thank UKIP for permitting us to conduct a rigorous, non-partisan survey of the party's members. In particular, we thank Matthew Richardson, Damian Wilson and Steve Crowther for helping us to field the web and mailback versions of the survey and Nigel Farage for endorsing the project with the membership. Their willingness to assist us made the study possible and we appreciate their co-operation.

Last, but most certainly not least, we are very pleased to acknowledge the assistance of Joe Twyman, Head of Political and Social Research, YouGov, plc. All of the ECMS surveys since April 2004 were conducted by YouGov under Joe's careful supervision. His assistance has been generous, unflagging and invaluable and he is an excellent colleague and great friend. Thanks so much, Joe!

# *A Note About Data*

In this book we draw on a wealth of quantitative survey data to examine public attitudes and the vote for Brexit. Not every reader will be familiar with this kind of data analysis. For this reason, we advise those readers who are unfamiliar with quantitative methods to focus their attention on the text that surrounds the tables and on our write-up of the results, which we have tried to make as accessible as possible.

For those who would like further information about the data that underpins this book – including a description of the variables used in the multivariate analyses, questionnaires, data and a data dictionary for the pre- and post-waves of our EU referendum survey – please visit the following website and click on 'Brexit': www.utdallas.edu/epps/hclarke/. The questionnaires, data and the data dictionary will also be posted on the Harvard Dataverse Archive.

Readers can find further information relating to the book at: www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/politics-international-relations/british-government-politics-and-policy/brexit-why-britain-voted-leave-european-union?format=PB.

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