This is a repository copy of *Brexistential angst and the paradoxes of populism: on the contingency, predictability and intelligibility of seismic shifts*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/142702/

Version: Published Version

Article:
Hay, C. orcid.org/0000-0001-6327-6547 (2020) Brexistential angst and the paradoxes of populism: on the contingency, predictability and intelligibility of seismic shifts. Political Studies, 68 (1). pp. 187-206. ISSN 0032-3217

https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719836356

Reuse
This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY-NC) licence. This licence allows you to remix, tweak, and build upon this work non-commercially, and any new works must also acknowledge the authors and be non-commercial. You don't have to license any derivative works on the same terms. More information and the full terms of the licence here:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

Check for updates

Political Studies Association
POLITICAL STUDIES

Article

Political Studies
1–20
© The Author(s) 2019
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0032321719836356
journals.sagepub.com/home/psx
SAGE

Brexistential Angst and the Paradoxes of Populism: On the Contingency, Predictability and Intelligibility of Seismic Shifts

Colin Hay

Abstract

The time-travelling political scientist stepping out of her time machine today, having started her journey even 5 years earlier, would be amazed and, no doubt, shocked by the world in which she found herself. What sense, if any, might she make of British politics after the vote for Brexit – and, indeed, of the politics which gave rise to it? And what does the answer to that question tell us about how the vote for Brexit happened, how it was allowed to happen, its wider implications (both political and economic) and the seismic changes in and through which British politics is currently being remade? In an inevitably prospective and necessarily provisional way, I seek to reflect on the paradoxes of populism and neoliberal globalism that Brexit reveals as a way of drawing out a few of its implications for the conduct of British political analysis in a world in which Brexit *could* happen yet was essentially unforeseen.

Keywords

Brexit, prediction, contingency, neoliberalism, political economy

Accepted: 15 February 2019

The Paradoxical Contingency of Brexit

To those who either think that a predictive science of politics is possible or, without having thought about it very much, proceed on the basis that it is, contemporary British politics presents something of a challenge.[1] For who did – and who, credibly, could have – predicted Brexit, certainly the Brexit that Brexit will turn out to be?

But, however chastening in this respect at least it may be, it is hardly unique. Much that was previously solid, or seen to be solid, in British politics has melted into air in recent years; much has changed and little of that change was foreseen. Consider the

Sciences Po, Paris, France

Corresponding author:
Colin Hay, Sciences Po, Centre d'études européennes et politique comparée (CEE), CNRS, Paris, France.
Email: colin.hay@sciencespo.fr

time-travelling political analyst stepping out of her Tardis on 24 June 2016 having just delivered her account of the recent re-election of Margaret Thatcher at the 1984 Political Studies Association Conference. Then, to remind you, Peter Davidson was Doctor Who; the guardians of the Special Relationship were Ronald Reagan and, of course, the newly re-elected Margaret Thatcher; the Cold War was at its height; the Berlin Wall had yet to fall; Gorbachev was on the verge of becoming General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and the terms *glasnost* and *perestroika* were, as yet, entirely unfamiliar even to Western diplomats. The European Union (EU) was still the European Economic Community (EEC) and the debate on European Monetary Union would take a further 5 years to begin in earnest. The Social Democratic Party had just split from Labour, the Liberal Democrats and UK Independence Party (UKIP) had yet to be founded and it was Labour and not the Conservatives who were divided over Europe.

Still reeling from her *chrononautia*, there is much that she might find disconcerting: That an anti-establishment party of the right that did not exist in 1984 (UKIP) would win nearly 13% of the vote in the most recent General Election having won scarcely 3% in the previous one (and, indeed, only 1.8% in the next one)? That the Scottish National Party (SNP) would win 56 out of the 59 available seats in Scotland in the very same election? That Britain's third party (the Liberal Democrats) would suffer the largest single drop in vote share (15%) ever recorded in a post-war British General Election having been in a Coalition administration with the Conservatives until the election? That a Conservative Prime Minister could have called a referendum on British membership of the EU and that Britain could vote for Brexit in such a referendum?

But there is an irony here. For one would not have had to travel forward in time 3 decades to find any of this shocking. The brutal reality is that none of these outcomes would have seemed very likely and virtually none of them were predicted even 5 years before. It need hardly be pointed out that the vote for Brexit has not exactly brought an end to this period of unpredicted and seemingly exceptional outcomes. Who, after all, would have predicted that having expressly said she wouldn't and after the passing of the 2011 Fixed Term Parliaments Act expressly intended to prevent such game playing, Theresa May would both gamble and have the opportunity to gamble her slender parliamentary majority at the polls in order to strengthen her Brexit-negotiating clout? And who would have predicted that with an opinion poll lead of over 20% at the start of the campaign and in an election in which Labour and the Conservatives achieved their highest combined vote share since 1970 (in an era generally considered to have seen the death of bipartisanship in Britain),[2] she would lose her parliamentary majority and end up governing with, of all parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)? You couldn't make it up, and more to the point, no one did.

So, has something profound changed in the nature of British politics and, perhaps, politics more broadly? Has our politics become more profoundly contingent and unpredictable than it has ever been? That, I think, is a very good question to pose. But, for me at least, the answer is no. Exceptional outcomes are, in a way, unexceptional – they are the very stuff of politics. The capacity to produce exceptional outcomes in the sense of outcomes that we would have to be very lucky to predict and, hence, very foolish to think that we could predict, show that the process producing them is itself political. But if exceptional outcomes are the very stuff of politics, then we need to be careful – more precisely, rather more careful than we tend to be – about what we think we know (and, above all, about what we think we can know) about that politics.

It is with these questions that this article is principally concerned. Its argument proceeds in three stages. In the first, I consider the potential contribution of political science to our understanding of seismic shifts unfolding in real time, differentiating between the predictability and (retrospective) intelligibility of Brexit in the light of the necessary contingency of both Brexit and its consequences. In the second, I reflect on the making of the vote for Brexit itself, considering above all the role of turnout differentials (anticipated and unanticipated) and, indeed psephology itself, in the generation of the outcome. In so doing, I hope to tease out some implications about the public responsibility of political scientists for the expertise they project into the public debate. In the third and final section, I turn more prospectively to the implications of Brexit, seeking to identify a series of tensions and paradoxes already present in the vote whose resolution will determine which of the many possible Brexits Brexit turns out to be.

Brexistential Dilemmas

The Predictability and Intelligibility of Brexit

The parable of the time-travelling political analyst suggests the need to draw a clear distinction between *predictability* (the capacity to anticipate), on the one hand, and retrospective *intelligibility* (the capacity to make sense of something after the fact with already existing analytic resources), on the other. Put bluntly, the capacity to anticipate a social fact is not a good (nor, indeed, a legitimate) test of social scientific theory; the capacity to render a social fact intelligible retrospectively is. From such a perspective, the failure to predict that Brexit would happen is not, in and of itself, a theoretical failing in that Brexit is not knowable in advance of the crystallisation of the specific causal sequence bringing it to fruition. But the incapacity to make sense of Brexit in causal terms after the fact of Brexit is a failing (the failure of a legitimate test or expectation).

In this respect, the failure of political scientists and political economists to anticipate Brexit and/or to accord to it a low probability as an outcome is different in kind to the failure of mainstream economics to anticipate the global financial crisis (though cf. Blyth and Matthijs, 2017; Hopkin and Blyth, 2018). For in the latter case, the charge (at least) is that mainstream economics does not have the conceptual and analytic resources and capacity (based, as it is, on essentially equilibrium assumptions) to render intelligible the crisis it failed to anticipate.

While our time-travelling political analyst may lack the analytic resources required to make sense of what, to her, look like twenty-first-century anomalies, the same is not really the case for her twenty-first century peers. For, arguably, each of the exceptional (and unforeseen) outcomes identified above can be rendered intelligible (and has now already been rendered intelligible) in terms of the (contingent) articulation, interaction and interplay of quite familiar processes (some, indeed, familiar even to a political scientist who learned her trade in the 1960s and 1970s). Among such factors are the following: (1) the growing regional and geographical differentiation of political cultures in a more dis-United Kingdom; (2) the increasing presence of non-majoritarian electoral systems in the UK polity and the ability to carry success from one electoral system to another; (3) the declining electoral appeal of valence politics; (4) declining partisan alignment and identification; (5) increasing electoral volatility; the ‘taint of office’; (6) the declining electoral appeal of valence politics; (7) growing divisions within the Conservative Party over Europe; (8) the increasing use of referendums to resolve positional issues; (9) growing

anxieties about immigration and competition for jobs associated (rightly or wrongly) with EU enlargement and the free mobility of labour; and (10) growing economic inequality in a context of austerity and persistently low growth. If Brexit can be seen as a (potentially) seismic shift, then these are the fault-lines making it possible.

The point is that one can go a long way to explaining each and every one of the seemingly exceptional political outcomes identified above, Brexit included, in terms of the interplay of a series of broader political trends already widely identified in the existing literature. If this is right, and the 'exceptional' is in fact explicable at least retrospectively in more general terms, the impression of a new condition of radical contingency afflicting our polity and our politics may well be misleading and something of an illusion. It may well also prove rather transitory. At times, British politics has been quite predictable; at other times, less so. Today it would appear less so. Yet this is not because it is, in some fundamental way, more profoundly contingent than it has ever been. Rather, and more simply, it is that a variety of long-term processes and trends that political scientists would claim to understand quite well come together and interact to produce a conjuncture in which a great many major issues will be resolved together in an unusually short space of time. In this conjuncture, British politics will not just develop, but also potentially change decisively with enduring consequences.

Hobsbawm's Choice: The Inevitable Contingency or the Contingent Inevitability of Brexit

A second window on all of this is opened by an intuitively appealing if paradoxical aphorism of the late, great and much lamented historian Eric Hobsbawm. It looks immediately like an antidote to the kind of argument that I have been making. The line appears only once in his published writings – a characteristically provocative essay on the use of counterfactuals in the history of Britain's post-war reconstruction (Hobsbawm, 1993: 29). But apparently he used it a great deal in the seminar room, which perhaps gives me the licence to misquote it just a little. It goes something like this: 'things turned out the way they did, and because they turned out the way they did they couldn't have turned out any other way' (see also Hay, 2002: 269). Recast in the terms of the present discussion, we get 'the referendum on Brexit, the vote for Brexit and the Brexit to which it gave rise each turned out the way they did, and because they turned out the way they did they couldn't have turned out any other way' (on the contingency and inevitability of Brexit see also Thompson, 2017; Wincott, 2017).

The quote itself, and the implicit challenge it poses, is unsettling (intentionally so). But it is an altogether easier trope to trip from the lips of a historian (with the benefit of hindsight) than it is for a political analyst (who typically lacks such hindsight). Either way, it challenges directly the preceding argument. For it suggests that uncertainty is simply a problem of lack of knowledge – and, consequently, that if we knew more we would be able to predict better. That sounds intuitively plausible. But the clear implication is that prediction is both a legitimate and an *epistemological* test of a theory. The outcome (the thing that turned out the way it did), in Hobsbawm's parable, is certain; it is just our knowledge of it that is lacking (it is only uncertain *to us*). As such, there is no condition of uncertainty in Hobsbawm's ontological universe. Uncertainty, for him, is a purely epistemological phenomenon – epistemologically contingent not ontologically necessary.[3] The problem, as one can almost hear him adding, is that we are simply never capable of acquiring the knowledge that would be required to know how things will turn out in

advance of them turning out the way they were always going to turn out. That, for him, I suppose is the paradox of (our) uncertainty, and it is certainly frustrating for the political analyst. It is reminiscent of the meteorologist who, when asked for a weather forecast for 2020, responds that the causal sequence that will produce the weather in 2020 does not yet exist and that, as such, no prediction is currently possible. The weather *will* be there to be predicted; just not yet!

While there is no problem with the meteorologist's (convenient) retort, social and political systems are different in kind from natural systems – and the problem of certainty and uncertainty presents itself differently. By contrast, Hobsbawm I think is wrong. His position, perhaps more significantly, is an indulgence that I think a political analyst cannot afford; for it is a profound disavowal of the political. Politics is made; and at the moment of its making it is indeterminate. As another, no less renowned historian, Charles Tilly (1991: 86) puts it, 'we now live in one of many possible worlds'. From this perspective, there are always multiple possible outcomes. That does not make all outcomes possible (alas) and it does not make the unlikely more likely (alas). But it means that our future is always uncertain – and uncertain *ontologically* (it could, and at the moment of its making, *can* be made differently) not (just) *epistemologically* (we do not know enough to know how it will turn out).

That is neither good nor bad, though it is the very condition I would contend of things being political. The implication is, again, that while we might hope to make sense of Brexit we shouldn't expect to be able to predict it; and that, in turn, has (or should have) implications for what we might credibly say about the consequences of Brexit (a point to which we return presently).

But there is a second problem, at least in the context of the present discussion, of Hobsbawm's aphorism. For the things we are interested in here (Brexit and its consequences) are still in play. As such, they have yet to turn out the way they will. And since they haven't yet turned out that way, we remain in the dark as to the only way they could turn out. This reminds us again of the difference between the historian (concerned largely with things already resolved) and political analysts (concerned, certainly to a far greater extent, with things still in play). Yet the more one thinks about it, the more problematic even this is. For it is in fact rare for political analysts to be as heavily invested in processes that are still unfolding as they are with Brexit. We tend in fact to have more in common with the historians, typically sharing with them the comparative luxury of waiting for things to have turned out the way they will before we seek to make sense of them. With Brexit, the stakes are simply too high for that (certainly for analysts of British and EU politics and political economy); that means that we need to think very seriously about what we can legitimately expect to know about something still very much in the process of being made, the confidence with which we profess that knowledge and the appropriate caveats surrounding it.

That takes us well beyond our typical comfort zone. Yet if the value of the epistemological distinction that I have sought to draw between predictability and the rendering intelligible of things after the fact is accepted, then it might provide some help and guidance here. Above all it suggests that, if we cannot expect to be able to predict that which we accept to be political and (hence necessarily) contingent, the best we can do is to describe prospectively the field of outcomes that our current approach is capable of rendering intelligible retrospectively. In addition, and by way of commentary, we might perhaps also offer a tentative assessment of the distribution of relative probabilities across this spectrum of conceivable outcomes. But it is difficult to see how we can credibly do

more. In short, those who failed to predict Brexit (and even those lucky enough to do so) need to be careful before telling us what its consequences will turn out to be.

To consolidate the point, it is perhaps worth considering Hobsbawm's implicit epistemological test when applied directly to Brexit. If our general and collective failure to predict Brexit was simply a reflection of our lack of knowledge, it is surely worth asking what would we have needed to know in order to predict that an EU referendum would take place in the way in which it did (and not in some other way) and that it would result in the vote for Brexit that it generated (and not some other vote for Brexit).

Arguably, for things to turn out the way they did, many if not all of the following had to happen:[4]

- Cameron needed to think that he could not win the 2015 General Election, certainly outright, such that he had little or nothing to lose in putting the commitment to a referendum on EU membership in the Conservative Party manifesto;[5]
- The Conservatives needed to win, and to win outright,[6] and then to honour that manifesto pledge in office;
- Cameron had to fail to secure significant concessions from EU negotiators prior to the referendum;
- There needed to be two not just one leave campaign, extending the range of hypothetical (and mutually incompatible) Brexits ostensibly on offer (racist Brexit, protectionist Brexit, 'global British' Brexit and so forth);
- Boris Johnson needed to join the leave campaign (and, in order to do so, and however paradoxically, had to judge that it couldn't win but would nonetheless command the majority support of the Conservative rank-and-file who might provide the decisive electoral momentum for any leadership challenge he was later to make);
- The remain campaign needed to repeat the errors of the 'expert paternalism' that had proved so disastrous in the Scottish Independence Referendum (Jeffery, 2016);
- The 'left behind of globalisation' (as they have come to be known) needed to (be persuaded to) put aside their pocketbooks and discount the potential economic consequences of the Brexit they were to vote in favour of for more clearly political reasons;
- The pollsters needed to under-estimate the leave vote by disproportionately discounting the vote of the disaffected;
- Many 'soft remainers' needed to follow the pollsters' lead and discount the likelihood of a vote for Brexit and stay at home;
- Young remainers, in particular, needed to turnout in lower numbers than their more Brexit-inclined parents and grandparents;
- Corbyn needed to become leader of the Labour Party and, in order for that to happen, moderate and right-wing anti-Corbyn Labour MPs needed (paradoxically) to conspire to vote for him in the first round of the leadership contest so that he might make it onto the ballot;
- Even before that, Ed Miliband needed to have reformed the electoral college of the Labour Party so that it could be captured by Corbyn's rank-and-file support base.

Arguably, that just about gets us from the General Election Campaign of 2015 to the outcome of the Brexit vote itself; to get us from there to where we are today, we need to add a few more similarly contingent factors:

- Theresa May had to seek to extend her majority in 2016, ostensibly to improve her bargaining position and Brexit mandate vis-à-vis the EU negotiators;
- And she had to fail to do so catastrophically that she would end up reliant on the grace and favour (or 'confidence and supply') of the DUP for a parliamentary majority in such a way as to make the Irish border (and, in due course, the 'backstop') a potential breaking point in the Brexit negotiations (Tonge, 2017);
- The Brexiteers had to seek to give Parliament the final say on any Brexit deal, despite the absence of a clear Parliamentary majority for the Brexit they sought (and certainly for any one of the various options proposed for it);
- May had to yield to these self-same Brexiteers in committing herself to a parliamentary vote on the Brexit deal that she was seeking to negotiate despite the fact that it was difficult (either then or subsequently) to envisage any kind of Brexit deal capable of winning a parliamentary majority;
- May had to survive, within the same 2-week period, a vote of no confidence within her own party, the biggest defeat of an incumbent administration in a parliamentary vote in the democratic era and a vote of no confidence in her government, yet decide to continue in office as Prime Minister until Brexit had been implemented;
- The majority of Labour, Liberal Democrat, SNP, Plaid and Green MPs needed to think that by voting against the deal it would be possible to secure either no Brexit or less Brexit while a majority of Conservative MPs thought that rejecting the deal would provide either a no-deal Brexit or the prospect of an as yet harder Brexit (in short, that a vote to reject the deal would have the mirror opposite effect);
- John Bercow, the Speaker of the House of Commons, had to decide to ignore the advice of the Commons Clerk and all historical precedent in ruling that a (mere) backbencher could table an amendment to a Business of the House motion put forward by the government, with the effect that the House of Commons was offered a vote requiring the Government to present a revised Brexit plan within 3 days of any defeat to the proposed Brexit deal.

Put together, this is already quite a list. Clearly some of these factors are the product of short-term, almost whimsical, decisions and may well turn out to be of little or no long-term consequence (Bercow's exercise of the constitutional discretion afforded the Speaker of the House of Commons, for instance). But the point is that we simply do not know what will turn out to be significant in advance.[7] Brexit has been made through the dynamic interplay between the highly contingent and sometimes prosaic on the one hand and the rather more predictable and seemingly significant on the other. Knowledge of the latter can only get us so far. And in terms of the compound contingencies of the Brexit process to date, this is arguably just the tip of the proverbial iceberg – not least since it makes no reference at all to the negotiating stance of the EU27. But the point is surely made already. While some of these contingencies were clearly more predictable than others, it is difficult even to render intelligible, let alone to have predicted in advance, how things turned out the way they did. To do so would, in effect, be the equivalent of having placed the largest successful one-way accumulator bet in history.[8]

The preceding discussion is intended to be chastening. My aim has been to remind us of, and to focus in on, the reasons for, the inherent difficulty of seeking to make sense of unfolding processes of potentially seismic change in real time. As I have sought to suggest, and strange though it may seem, this is not something that we do frequently and it is, arguably, something for which modern political science does not prepare us especially

well. But that is most definitely not an argument for foregoing such a task. It is an argument for thinking seriously about our responsibilities as ostensible experts (purveyors of an expertise to others) in a context in which the use and misuse of that expertise is both highly contested and, crucially, stands accused by those on one side of a highly charged and polarised political debate of a disingenuous and misleading neutrality that disguises an essentially normative commitment to the status quo.

This is, perhaps, the curse of living and writing in Br-exiting times! It is also a challenge. In what follows, I return first to the making of Brexit and then to the potentially paradoxical character of the Brexit that Britain[9] is still in the process of making in the light of my own cautionary remarks. In so doing I seek to address the challenge directly, by exploring how such cautionary reflections might lead me (and conceivably others) to revise or temper what I (and they) might otherwise be inclined to inject into the public debate.

The Making of the Vote for Brexit

Britain's vote for Brexit on 23 June 2016 represents an exceptional, unprecedented, singular and, it is certainly tempting to suggest, an irreversible choice. But the preceding analysis suggests the need for caution even here. Of these four descriptive adjectives, 'irreversible' is certainly the most problematic. For, although unlikely, it is still just about possible to imagine the process initiated by the vote for Brexit ending in a second referendum and, as such, that Brexit might never take place.[10] It is also possible – indeed, perhaps more credible – to imagine some long-term process of buyer's remorse (fuelled perhaps by the economic consequences of actually existing Brexit) leading to a revisiting of Britain's relationship with the EU and a referendum on 'Breturn', 'Brentry' or, perhaps best of all, 'Bre-entry'.

What is clearer is that the choice for Brexit arose from a referendum on an issue of consistently low electoral salience – even in the 2015 General Election (with the Conservative's manifesto containing Cameron's referendum pledge) it was ranked the 11th most salient issue shaping personal voting intentions according to *YouGov*. Yet, whatever its salience to voters, it is likely to have amazingly high domestic and international political and economic implications – not least since it interacts significantly with many issues of much higher salience (like immigration and economic performance). It produced a result that, in effect, the entire Westminster political establishment had campaigned (more or less enthusiastically) against, aided – or, at least, that was presumably their intention – by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and a variety of world leaders, including President Obama himself. The unanticipated result shocked the political establishment including, of course, many prominent Brexiteers. The irony, of course, is that one suspects that Boris Johnson supported Brexit because he thought it couldn't win while Theresa May supported remain because she thought it couldn't lose. Either way, the result cruelly exposed, and not for the first time, the methodological challenges of polling in an age of widespread and growing political disaffection (especially where disaffection is itself a variable correlating strongly with one's stance on the issue at stake).

For political analysts, the vote for Brexit is a fascinating and important event – rich in its potential to furnish a series of more generalisable inferences (the question typically being, 'of what is Brexit an instance?'), and, for political elites around the world, a

frightening episode no less rich in its potential lessons and warnings – and with a series of alarming parallels (the election of Donald Trump perhaps being the most obvious and the most widely debated).

Although the result is, of course, well known, and has now been exposed to most forensic and sustained analysis, it is nonetheless important to remind ourselves of a few features of it, on which I will rely, before we proceed further. As we know, 51.9% voted leave on a 72.2% turnout (interestingly, turnout in the 1975 EEC membership referendum was a mere 64%). As such, the vote for leave in 2016 represents the largest vote for anything in UK electoral history (with 17.4 million votes for leave against 16.1 million votes for remain).[11] Yet, crucially, only two of the four constituent nations of the UK voted for leave (with 53.4% and 52.5% of the vote being for leave in England and Wales, respectively, while 62% and 55.8% voted for remain in Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively, on rather lower turnouts). There was majority support for remain in all local authority areas in Scotland, while 241 of the 293 English local authority areas outside of London voted for leave. Support for leave has now been shown to correlate strongly (whether using individual or district-level data) with low educational attainment, low income, age, recent increases in (but not aggregate levels of) in-migration, anti-migrant sentiment, political disaffection, prior UKIP and Conservative support, national (as opposed to European or British) identification and, perhaps more surprisingly, low (not high) self-reported Internet and smartphone usage (see Alabrese et al., 2018; Clarke et al., 2017; Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017; Hobolt, 2016). Finally, and in part through these various analyses, the vote for leave has come to be widely characterised as a vote of those 'left behind' by globalisation (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017; Hopkin, 2017; see also Ford and Goodwin, 2014).

So Why Did Brexit Succeed?

Why did British citizens vote to leave the EU, albeit by a narrow margin, on 23June 2016? Four factors, I will suggest, are crucial, though really only one of them has been extensively discussed in the wider literature on the subject to date, which has tended to focus on the psephological variables and the composition of the vote rather than the context in which the vote took place (though, see the various contributions to *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* volume 19 (3/4), 2017; Diamond et al., 2018; Jennings and Lodge, 2018). They are (1) Cameron's negotiating strategy – similar in certain respects to that of Harold Wilson in 1975, but playing out very differently in a very different political context; (2) differential turnout between potential leave and potential remain supporters (associated, in turn, with the differential mobilisation of those for whom the issue was a valence question as against those for whom it was a positional question, with turnout significantly higher in the latter category); (3) the combination of political disaffection and socio-economic dislocation – with strong support for Brexit among those feeling displaced by globalisation, by labour-market precarity and the perception that such precarity was a product of high levels of in-migration (significantly from East European accession states after 2004) and (4) the failure of the political establishment to convince the electorate of the (singularly malign, in its terms) economic consequences of Brexit – and the wider failure of a valence politics of what might be termed 'expert paternalism'. Each factor is worth exploring in a little more detail.

Cameron's Political Brinkmanship

The first is Cameron's negotiating strategy with the EU and the parallels with that of Harold Wilson in 1975 (on which, see Butler and Kitzinger, 1976; Daddow, 2016; King, 1977). It is difficult to think of a more disastrous piece of political brinkmanship by any British Prime Minister (certainly since the Suez Crisis of 1956) than Cameron's decision to put to the British electorate the question of continued EU membership and the politics leading up to that decision (see also Tooze, 2018: 545–548).

To be fair to him, the commitment to such a referendum in the Conservative manifesto for the 2015 General Election was made at a time when it seemed exceptionally unlikely that it would need to be honoured (though, for a different view, see Thompson, 2017: 444).[12] While it was not unthinkable that the Conservatives might emerge as the largest single party after the election, few if any commentators and none of the Party's advisors anticipated the Conservatives governing alone after 2015. Moreover, of potential coalition partners it was only UKIP who would be likely to accept a referendum as part of any coalition governing agenda (and they were likely to make the chance to vote for Brexit, a condition of any coalition agreement anyway). As such, the referendum pledge might well have seemed at the time a costless gesture.

It is just about possible, then, to see the Brexit referendum to which Cameron felt he had committed himself in the manifesto, as an unintended (and even slightly embarrassing) consequence of his own success at the polls – and, in particular, his success is obliterating his former coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats, in an election he had never expected to win.

But the more important point is that a Brexit referendum would have been unthinkable, even to Cameron, in the absence of the lingering internecine warfare in his own party over the question of Europe. In the 1970s, it was Labour that was divided over Europe (leading to the 1975 referendum); since the mid 1980s and especially since Thatcher's Bruges Speech (1988) and Black Wednesday (1992), it was the Tories. The point is that the only conceivable question to which a Brexit referendum was the answer was one that started and finished with Conservative Party unity. The positing and eventual calling of a referendum on Britain's EU membership was only ever a strategy for managing internal party discipline.

In a way, Cameron gambled what he regarded to be Britain's economic future on an always rather tenuous strategy for re-uniting his party – and one that failed so spectacularly that it ended up costing him his own job and which still threatens to split the party today. Yet in so doing, he was arguably not entirely unlike Harold Wilson in 1975 (see also Saunders, 2016). But what Wilson got right, Cameron got catastrophically wrong – in large part because of the rather different political context in which their respective forms of brinkmanship were played out.

Wilson, too, was something of a reluctant European. He had argued passionately against Britain's membership of the EEC in 1972. Yet, by 1975, he was (in today's parlance) a pragmatic 'remainer', unimpressed by the, for him, nauseatingly integrationist tenor of the European 'project', but convinced in a rather more prosaic and practical way of the economic advantages of continued membership. Thus, when it came to preparing the ground for his own 'in/out' referendum on continued EEC membership, he picked, as negotiating points, substantive issues on which he was likely to gain significant concessions (unlike Cameron), he secured essentially all the concessions that he sought during the renegotiation (unlike Cameron), he refused to campaign actively for the remain that

he tacitly embraced while making it very clear that his position was one of simple pragmatism (unlike Cameron) and he was positively surprised by the result, a significant majority in his favour in each region of the UK (most unlike Cameron).

It could be argued that Wilson was lucky – he, too, gambled what he also regarded to be Britain's economic fate on political contingency. But he did so in a context in which pragmatic economic paternalism (the expert adjudication of what was presented as a narrowly economic issue) was significantly more likely to pay off. What is striking today is quite how difficult it is for political elites to make the case to citizens for something being in *their* shared or collective interest (Hay, 2007). In British politics, at least, it seems that the electorate is no longer capable of believing that something is in *their* interests if it is not directly opposed to the interests of someone else. The campaigners for Brexit seemed to understand that intuitively, and certainly, far better than their Remain counterparts with Michael Gove in particular seeking at times almost to turn the vote for leave into a rejection of the political appeal to dispassionate expertise – to considerable effect.

Turnout and Turnout Differentials

The second factor to which I would draw attention is that of turnout differentials – which, strangely, are hardly debated at all in the existing literature on Brexit (though for a rare exception, see Clarke et al., 2017: 208–211). It is almost certainly not the case that a majority of voting age British citizens supported Brexit on 23 June 2016. For, as ever, there were significant differences between the preferences of eligible potential voters, on the one hand, and the preferences of those of the electorate who were both registered to vote and who chose to vote on the other. This is not, in anyway, to question the democratic legitimacy of the outcome – turnout was, of course, high and the furnishing of a democratic mandate has never relied upon 100% participation. So Brexit was the democratically legitimate outcome of the referendum. As such, it is difficult to argue that it should not now be honoured (whatever one might think of the potential economic consequences).

But it is nonetheless instructive to reflect on the fact that the vote for Brexit was the product of significant turnout differentials between potential 'remainers' and potential 'Brexiteers'. What is now clear is that, had there been a 100% turnout, Britain would have voted for remain and would probably have voted clearly for remain. Perhaps more significantly, had remain-minded and leave-minded voters turned out at a common and rather more credible 70%, the result would almost certainly have been different. The point is that predictable differences in turnout made Brexit always more likely than the polls suggested (for precisely such a 'prediction', see Hay, 2016).

There are, in fact, a number of differential turnout effects at work in the Brexit result. Among these, three are familiar, well established and relatively widely discussed. They are: (1) age cohort effects – the propensity for the elderly to turnout at much higher rates than the young and disproportionately to vote for leave (Franklin, 2004; Hay, 2007: 49–54); (2) national variations in turnout levels, with participation rates in remain-supporting Scotland (67%) and Northern Ireland (63%) being significantly lower than those in leave-supporting England (73%) and Wales (72%) (and with turnout typically lowest in areas where there was either little or no campaign for 'leave', as in much of Scotland, or where electorates were accustomed to having little or no impact on the result of UK-wide elections); and (3) a London (and more general metropolitan) effect – with turnout both low in London and lowest in those areas of London in which support for remain was strongest

(typically areas characterised by high levels of both migration and poverty). The only significant factor pushing in the other direction was education – which was strongly correlated with both turnout and with support for remain (see, for instance, Alabrese et al., 2018: Table A.2).

These factors are all well known and well documented. But arguably there is a fifth, that although largely absent from the debate is arguably at least as important. It is the difference in engagement, mobilisation and, ultimately, turnout between those for whom the question of Brexit was a *valence* issue (a question of determining the shared collective good of the community) and those for whom it was a *positional* question (a simple question of political preference). From the perspective of the remain campaign, the question of continued membership of the EU was a valence issue. Brexit was simply bad for all. The question was, in effect, a technical and largely economic matter to be determined through the use of appropriate expertise. In stark contrast, for both the official and unofficial leave campaigns, Brexit was a positional issue – a question of politics not of economics, a question of values, personal conviction and identity which simply couldn't be reduced to a set of technical considerations that might be adjudicated through the use of such expertise (or even sub-contracted to the experts).

In drawing attention to this distinction, my aim is not to pass a judgement on the political merits or otherwise of the remain campaign's valence construal of the question of Britain's EU membership. It is not difficult to understand why a more emotional and more political appeal was rejected in favour of a form of 'expert paternalism' as I shall call it. Instead, my aim is to point to one of the potential consequences of that choice – namely, a lower capacity to mobilise voters, especially in a campaign in which one's opponents were engaged in a very different style of (positional) politics. The valence politics of remain was always likely to leave more of its natural support at home than the positional politics of Brexit, particularly with many voters discounting the possibility that leave could win. *In terms of turnout, positional politics trumps valence politics every time*.

Bringing these factors together may well make Brexit seem almost inevitable, at least with the benefit of hindsight (and not just in the Hobsbawmian sense that since things turned out the way they did they couldn't possibly have turned out any other way). But that is the wrong inference to draw here. The success of the Brexit campaign in 'getting out its vote' should not be underestimated – and there are lessons to learn from this. While we should not exaggerate the extent to which the vote for Brexit was a product of political disaffection and economic alienation (the majority of those who voted for Brexit were, after all, typical and habitual Conservative voters), we should not underestimate the capacity of the Brexit campaign (official, unofficial and in combination) to mobilise those typically characterised in the literature on political disengagement and disaffection as apathetic non-voters. The Brexit vote gave many of them a voice. Arguably, this is its most remarkable feature.

This leads to a final observation about turnout and expertise, albeit expertise of a rather different kind – the expertise of the pollster. It is credible, I think, to suggest that the pollsters played quite a significant, if inadvertent, role in the making of the vote for Brexit. Throughout the campaign, it is now clear, they systematically underestimated the likely size of the leave vote. In large part, they did so because they underestimated the capacity of the leave campaign to mobilise the serially disaffected and those serially accustomed not to vote. There is nothing terribly surprising about that failure, especially given the methodological difficulties inherent in seeking to construct a vote projection from polling

data for a one-off referendum of this kind (in which all sorts of potentially problematic turnout estimations need to be made).

But three points of some significance nonetheless follow from this. First, getting it wrong in this way may well have contributed to keeping portions of the remain vote at home in that it encouraged them to think that they did not need to vote in order for Britain to remain an EU member state. Second, and conversely, it may well have contributed to boosting the vote for leave, by making it easier to think of this as a relatively costless and largely symbolic protest against the political establishment (both domestic and European).

The third implication is of a rather different kind. When the pollsters came to re-assess their methodologies in the light of their (perceived) failure to have anticipated the vote for Brexit (and, indeed, Cameron's majority in 2015 and May's vanishing majority in 2017), their conclusion was that they had actually done rather well (see, for instance, Sturgis et al., 2016). Electoral outcomes aren't easy to predict, especially in times characterised by high electoral volatility, referendums pose even greater challenges and, crucially, their predictions for the 2015 and 2017 General Elections and the EU referendum, though wrong in the rather obvious sense that they failed to anticipate the result, all fell within the declared margin of error. The implication of the preceding discussion is that such a conclusion is simply not good enough.

The question is not whether the pollsters did the best job they could have done methodologically. It is credible to think that they did. Their failure was not methodological but presentational. If polling is inherently tricky, polling in referendums doubly so, then the caveats need to come first and in a rather larger font size. The responsibilities of the political analyst (pollsters included) demand a sharing of the methodological limits of the analysis with those for whom it is intended from the outset. They also demand a much greater sense of responsibility for how the expertise provided is and might be used and misused. It is simply not sufficient to say that the science was good and that the result fell within the margin of error if most of those who consulted the poll were not even aware that there *was* a margin of error.

That brings us to the third and fourth set of factors, which it makes sense to discuss together.

Brexit and the Politics of Expertise

Brexit represents the failure of a certain style of politics and the triumph of another. That triumph might well prove temporary, but it is certainly credible to think that it might endure. Above all, Brexit represents a rejection of the politics of expertise, at least in its current form, and of expert paternalism in particular. Arguably, the zenith of this expert paternalism was the 'this is good for you because we tell you that it is' of the remain campaign in both the Scottish Independence and EU referendums.

In stylised terms, the rise and demise of expert paternalism might be seen to have passed through three stages.

In the 1960s and 1970s, political elites were themselves trusted to deploy appropriate expertise, and the growth in the expertise available to them led to a confidence in their ability to govern (paternalistically) in the collective good.

By the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in the Anglo-liberal democracies, political elites were typically no longer trusted to deploy expertise themselves. Such expertise needed to be depoliticised and placed at one remove from them (Burnham, 2001). Only experts, in this conception, could genuinely discern the collective good – and could only do so if

their expertise were protected and insulated from political influence. The result was a politics of 'expertocracy' and depoliticisation, in which positional issues were recast as valence issues and placed in the hands of (nominally) independent experts – central bankers and the like.

Brexit rejects that. Its mantra – 'taking back control' – is not just about taking back control from Brussels, but taking back control of politics from experts too (and perhaps also taking back control of politics from those political elites who would seek to cede it to experts). In a sense, there is little point and hence little to be gained by taking back control from Brussels if that control is simply to be passed domestically from the elected representatives of the people to their favoured purveyors of expertise. The implied re-politicisation of the domestic polity could take, and might still take, a variety of forms. But, for now, it is predictably the right, and the populist right at that, that has shown itself most at home with, and most deft in deploying, this new vernacular. It is populist; it is nationalist; it is dis-integrationist; it is anti-internationalist; it is, as Albert Weale (2016) puts it, nostalgically democratic – and it has the capacity to recast British domestic politics and, in the process, its political economic interdependence.

It also has potentially profound implications for political scientists as, at least potential, purveyors of expertise, in a context in which such expertise (in the form of 'impact' or 'publicly relevant research') is an ever more highly incentivised marker of professional standing and achievement. Here is not perhaps the place to pursue these issues in the detail that their significance warrants. Suffice it to note that if there is to be an, arguably, long overdue, recalibration of the relationship between the suppliers of expertise and the exercise of democratic governance, then we will need to think long and hard about the responsibilities that come with the provision of such expertise. Four points immediately present themselves. First, even the genuine, neutral and dispassionate provision of a non-normative scientific knowledge (such as the pollster's psephology) can have a significant partisan effect, as in the potential contribution to the making of the vote for Brexit played by polling data in the preceding discussion. Second, and rather more generally, the use by political elites of expertise as a mechanism of governance has served to mask, obfuscate, depoliticise and, arguably, de-democratise decision-making processes, not least by turning positional issues and questions ('who benefits and who suffers from an interest rate rise?') into valence issues and questions ('what is the optimal interest rate setting for an economy such as ours at a moment like this?'). Third, any attempt to define more clearly the responsibilities of the expert needs surely to insist on a much more sharply drawn distinction between the expertise itself and the use made of that expertise by decision-makers if the democratic accountability of the decision-making process is to be maintained. And, fourth, a much greater emphasis needs to be placed on communicating the limits to the expertise provided (the margin of error and the methodological reasons for it are just as important as the most probable predicted outcome).

Brexit and the Paradoxes of Neoliberal Globalism

In the concluding section of this article, I turn to some more prospective considerations, in identifying some of the potential contradictions, tensions and paradoxes of Brexit, particularly in terms of its political economic implications. These paradoxes arise in part from the fact that Brexit still remains to be made (and, as a consequence, might still turn out very differently) and in part from the fact that the aspirations for Brexit of those who voted for it (and, indeed, those who campaigned for it) are so diverse and contradictory.

The vote for Brexit was not, and never could be, a vote for a particular Brexit; it was a vote for as many different Brexits as it was possible to imagine wishing to vote for. How those multiple imagined Brexits become one substantive Brexit is a process which can scarcely fail to disappoint many, if not most, of those who voted for it.

The first paradox is that Brexit (and, above all, the anti-migration sentiment with which it has retrospectively come to be associated) has become, in effect, the *political imperative to trump all economic imperatives.* Yet, at the same time, it will almost certainly turn out to be a medium- to long-term mechanism for ratcheting up such economic imperatives and the disciplinary logic they tend to impose (see also Baker and Lavery, 2018; Gamble, 2018, 2019; Lavery, 2019; Rosamond, 2018). After almost 3 decades in which the British polity has danced to the tune of competitiveness, labour market flexibility, price stability and austerity in such a way as to place them and any policy associated with their attainment, above political debate and contestation, Brexit looks like a staggering reversal. For, albeit only in honouring a referendum verdict that it campaigned against, the British government has chosen to prioritise above all else the implementation of the staunchly anti-immigrationist sentiment that it interprets the vote for Brexit to be, regardless of any economic harm it might cause.

What is perhaps most striking about Brexit, then, is that we see a British government, arguably for the first time in recent political history, taking what it clearly regard to be a phenomenally significant political and economic choice without regard for its own economic assessment – indeed, in open violation of the advice of its own Treasury and, more recently, the Bank of England. So much, one might think, for governance by perceived economic imperatives; so much for normalised neoliberalism. So much for 'there is no alternative' (TINA); it turns out that there was an alternative after all.

On the one hand, then, Brexit might be seen as the end of 3 decades of depoliticisation – a political and politicised 'taking back control' of things (arguably like migration policy) previously subject to a dull logic of economic expediency. Yet, on the other hand, and perhaps more credibly, it might be seen as a highly politicised, but temporary moment in the transition to the next phase of depoliticisation. In this conception, the process of economic adjustment to the yet harsher competitive conditions of the post-Brexit scenario can only serve to ratchet up several notches a logic of compulsion in which economic imperatives trump, as never before, political choices. In a sense, it is both; and, as such, it reminds us of the potential fragility of the institutionalised depoliticisation of economic governance that we often associate with neoliberalism, particularly in the face of a newly resurgent populism.

In a similarly paradoxical vein, Brexit might also be seen either to herald the return of protectionism (and certainly to arise from the expression of a protectionist reflex) after 4 decades in which the mantras of liberalisation have predominated (Hopkin, 2017). Or, conversely, it might be seen to signal the rise of a more purist neoliberalism – neoliberal globalism in one country, as it were. Here it might be remembered that, for Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and the official Brexit campaign, the problem with the EU (to which Brexit was the solution) was a problem conceived largely (if not explicitly) in neoliberal terms. For them, the EU represented not greater market integration and the elimination of barriers to free trade and free capital mobility (the basis of Thatcher's reckoning and rapprochement with the idea of Europe), but a mountain of 'Brussels red tape', unnecessary and over-burdensome regulation, the carrier and promoter of an illiberal 'social model' and the triumph of the 'super-state'. It was a market distortion and an impediment, in other words, to neoliberalisation. The irony, of course, and the associated paradox is that

this is not really the Brexit of the May government – which has tended to resolve the ambiguity in the meaning of Brexit in favour of the unofficial Brexit campaign, thereby privileging a neo-conservative rather than a neoliberal objection to the EU. Like many of the targets of the new right in the 1980s, the EU appears in the cross-wires of both neo-liberals and neo-conservatives and the campaign for Brexit was led by both. This has left a significant interpretive ambiguity around the meaning of Brexit – does honouring Brexit involve pandering to sovereigntist, neo-conservative, anti-immigration sentiment or to a neoliberal deregulatory disposition? The implications for Britain's place in the world economy of resolving the ambiguity one way or the other could scarcely be more different. But, as yet, we have no significant clarification of the extent to which populist impulses and neo-conservative reflexes will be allowed to trump neoliberal economic expediency.

A further paradox relates to the implications of Brexit for the character of Britain's external economic interdependence. On the face of it, and intuitively, Brexit might be imagined to unleash a series of de-Europeanisation tendencies. All things being equal, it should suppress the ratio of intra-regional to inter-regional cross-border economic transactions involving Britain, after 40 years in which the figure has grown steadily and consistently and 10 years of modest decline. As such, Brexit might be expected to lead to a de-regionalisation and hence geographic globalisation of Britain's external economic relations. But all things are not equal – and things are more complicated than this implies (see also Siles-Brugge, 2018). For, in the short- to medium-term at least, Britain's term of trade with the rest of the world are likely to suffer from Brexit just as much, if not more, as those with the EU27. For it was, of course, primarily through its EU membership that Britain came to enjoy its privileged access to non-EU markets. Thus, whether Brexit leads to a net-globalisation or a net-regionalisation of the British economy remains to be seen (and will be contingent upon negotiations that have really yet to begin in earnest). It is also likely to vary over time. Paradoxically and somewhat ironically, the short-term effect of Brexit may well be to deepen Britain's regional economic interdependence, reversing the recent trend.

What is rather clearer is that Brexit is likely to lead, at least in the medium-term, to a yet more swinging and brutal form of austerity, even if its short-term effects are to postpone the point at which deficit reduction becomes debt reduction. For it can only suppress the growth potential (relative to pre-Brexit trends) of the British economy and that can only serve to escalate the costs of (pre-existing commitment to) austerity and to reinforce Britain's reliance on private, asset-based welfare rather than public welfare (Farnsworth, 2017; Hay, 2013). The macroeconomically destabilising and pro-cyclical character of that reliance suggest the long-term dangers of such a dependence.

This brings us to two final and rather different paradoxes. The first is that the revenge of the sovereign state – the victory of the nation-state over the member state as Chris Bickerton (2013) might put it – threatens the fragmentation and dis-memberment of the British state itself. For it is not clear that the increasingly fractious alliance of Great Britain, yet alone the increasingly anachronistically entitled United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland can endure the combined political and economic trauma of Brexit (McHarg and Mitchell, 2017; Wincott, 2018).[13] Time will tell.

Finally, and perhaps most paradoxically of all, Britain's rejection of neoliberal globalisation (insofar as that is deemed an appropriate characterisation of at least some of the support for Brexit) is, of course, likely to result in a reinforcement of the neoliberal character of Britain's growth model at precisely the moment it becomes more exposed than at any point in the last 50 years to the rigours of a more genuinely global competition for

market share. It seems, in other words, that in and through Brexit, the 'left behind' of neoliberal globalisation have come to reject neoliberal globalism in favour of a yet more intense version of the same (Baker and Lavery, 2018; Perraton and Spreafico, 2019). That is some paradox and it is difficult to see it ending well.

Conclusion

That this is so is, of course, a consequence of the fact that Brexit is, like Thatcherism before it, a product of the complex interplay of liberalising and counter-liberalising tendencies and counter-tendencies and a combination of neoliberal and neo-conservative reflexes. Put like that, it is hardly surprising that its effects are likely to prove both neo-liberalising and counter-neoliberalising.

Each of these paradoxes and the contradictions and tensions, tendencies and counter-tendencies from which they arise are already present and visible in the vote for Brexit and the ensuing politics of translation now in play. That translation process needs to find a way of turning a panoply of multiple imagined Brexits into one substantive Brexit – and it needs to do so through a process that is both bilateral and multilateral. In and through this negotiated process and its interaction with the domestically engendered paradoxes identified above, Brexit will become the thing that (in Hobsbawm's terms) it was always going to become. At that point, things will have turned out the way they did (for good or ill) and we will see that they could not have turned out any other way. Without the foresight of a predictive science of politics and in the absence of a time-travel machine, the anticipation is already unbearable.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Earlier versions of at least parts of the argument developed here have been presented, at earlier stages in the making of Brexit, in public lectures at l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III (November 2016), Sciences Po, Paris (December 2016), the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Society in Cologne (January 2017), the University of Sheffield (March 2017) and, more recently, King's College, London. I am grateful to participants on each occasion for their probing comments and thoughtful suggestions, as I am to both the referees and editors of *Political Studies*. The usual caveats apply with even more than the usual vigour.
2. See, for instance, Webb (2016).
3. This is, of course, to assume that the aphorism accurately encapsulates that ontological universe and was not just conjured for the benefit of the cut and thrust of the seminar room.
4. Precisely which and what combination, of course, depends on one's preferred account of the vote for Brexit after the fact.
5. Or, alternatively, as in the account of Adam Tooze (2018: 545–548; see also Thompson, 2017), that at the time of the Bloomberg speech in 2013, Cameron had to think that the threat of a referendum on EU membership would prompt the EU into a significant reform of its founding treaties sufficient to resolve the question of Britain's long-term future in Europe (thereby obviating the need for the referendum ever to be held). The issue is, of course, a complex and intriguing one which cannot be adjudicated here. What is clear is that, as Tooze and Thompson both make clear, the dispositional divide between London, on the one hand, and Brussels and Frankfurt, on the other, on the regulation of financial service provision in the wake of the global financial crisis was an important factor (see also Hay and Bailey, 2019).
6. Or, indeed, to govern in coalition with UKIP – but that would not have been for things to turn out the way they did. Things turned out the way they did and this is not how they turned out, so they couldn't have turned out this way in the logic of Hobsbawm's aphorism.

7. With the benefit of the additional hindsight afforded by the passage of time since this was written, you (the reader) are better placed than I to sift the list for the ephemeral and irrelevant, on the one hand, and the no-less ephemeral yet enduringly significant, on the other. That the ephemeral might turn out to prove significant is the ontological precondition of our epistemological uncertainty; and that is the point. It is by no means specific to Brexit, just as it is by no specific to Bercow's machinations as the Speaker of the House in the making of Brexit.
8. If only to find the currency in which the bet was placed crash on international exchanges the second the final horse crossed the finish line!
9. In and through a simultaneously unilateral (if internally fragmented) and yet bilateral (and ostensibly diplomatic) process.
10. This is certainly not to imply that a second referendum would in any sense lead naturally to a reversal of Brexit – but simply to suggest that it could.
11. Interestingly, the vote for remain in 1975 was the second largest vote for anything in UK electoral history, narrowly squeezing into third place the vote for remain in 2016.
12. Thompson's argument is that Cameron contemplated, in effect, the threat to the EU of a referendum on Britain's continued membership, as part of a strategy designed to increase the pressure for the reform of the EU's founding treaties and for a more favourable regulatory environment for the City of London. This is certainly true – as the Bloomberg speech of January 2013, in which the threat was first articulated publicly, makes clear. But, by 2015, this strategy had failed utterly and completely (see also Tooze, 2018: 546).
13. There is, of course, a certain irony here. For Brexit comes after 2 decades of major constitutional-territorial change. This has arguably contributed significantly to the dis-unification and, in a sense, the re-nationalisation of the constituent political cultures of the once United Kingdom. It is powerfully present in the very different levels of support for, and resulting politics of, Brexit in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. And it now poses a Brexistential challenge. For Brexit itself can hardly fail to further widen these already deep political-cultural fissures (see particularly Hendersen et al., 2016, 2017; Wincott, 2018).

ORCID iD

Colin Hay https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6327-6547

References

Alabrese E, Becker SO, Fetzer T, et al. (2018) Who Voted for Brexit? Individual and Regional Data Combined. *European Journal of Political Economy* 56: 132–150.

Baker A and Lavery S (2018) Brexit and the Future Model of British Capitalism. In: Diamond P, Nedergaard P and Rosamond B (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*. London: Routledge, pp.66–79.

Bickerton CJ (2013) *European Integration: From Nation-states to Member States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blyth M and Matthijs M (2017) Black Swans, Lame Ducks and the Mystery of IPEs Missing Macroeconomy. *Review of International Political Economy* 24 (2): 203–231.

Burnham P (2001) New Labour and the Politics of Depoliticisation. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 3 (2): 127–149.

Butler D and Kitzinger U (1976) *The 1975 Referendum*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Clarke HD, Goodwin M and Whiteley P (2017) *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Daddow OJ (2016) *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC*. New York: Routledge.

Diamond P, Nedergaard P and Rosamond B (eds) (2018) *Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*. New York: Routledge.

Farnsworth K (2017) Taking Back Control or Empowering Big Business? New Risks to the Welfare State in the Post-Brexit Competition for Investment. *Journal of Social Policy* 46 (4): 699–718.

Franklin MN (2004) *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ford R and Goodwin MJ (2014) *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain*. London: Routledge.

Gamble A (2018) Taking Back Control: The Political Implications of Brexit. *Journal of European Public Policy* 25 (2): 1215–1232.

Gamble A (2019) After Brexit the Past and Future of the Anglo-Liberal Model. In: Hay C and Bailey D (eds) *Diverging Capitalisms: Britain, the City of London and Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.17–42.

Goodwin M and Milazzo C (2017) Taking Back Control? Investigating the Role of Immigration in the 2016 Vote for Brexit. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19 (3): 450–464.

Hay C (2002) *Political Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hay C (2007) *Why We Hate Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hay C (2013) *The Failure of Anglo-liberal Capitalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hay C (2016) Brexistential Crisis: What Would Cassandra say? *SPERI Blog*, January. Available at: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2016/06/24/repost-brexistential-crisis-what-would-cassandra-say/ (accessed 1 February 2019).

Hay C and Bailey D (eds) (2019) *Diverging Capitalisms: Britain, the City of London and Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hendersen A, Jeffery C, Liñeira R, et al. (2016) England, Englishness and Brexit. *Political Quarterly* 87 (2): 187–199.

Hendersen A, Jeffery C, Wincott D, et al. (2017) How Brexit was Made in England. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19 (4): 631–646.

Hobolt SB (2016) The Brexit Vote: A Divided Nation, A Divided Continent. *Journal of European Public Policy* 23 (9): 1259–1277.

Hobsbawm E (1993) Britain: A Comparative Perspective. In: Brivati B and Jones H (eds) *What Difference Did the War Make?* Leicester: Leicester University Press, pp.26–39.

Hopkin J (2017) When Polanyi met Farage: Market Fundamentalism, Economic Nationalism and Britain's Exit from the European Union. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19 (3): 465–478.

Hopkin J and Blyth M (2018) The Global Economics of European Populism: Growth Regimes and Party System Change in Europe. *Government and Opposition*. Epub ahead of print 4 December 2018. DOI: 10.1017/gov.2018.43.

Jeffery C (2016) The United Kingdom and the Scottish Referendum. In: Heffernan R, Hay C, Russell M, et al. (eds) *Developments in British Politics 10*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.244–265.

Jennings W and Lodge M (2018) Brexit, the Tides and Canute: The Fracturing Politics of the British State. *Journal of European Public Policy*. Epub ahead of print 31 May 2018. DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2018.1478876.

King A (1977) *Britain Says Yes: The 1975 Referendum on the Common Market*. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press.

Lavery S (2019) The UKs Growth Model, Business Strategy and Brexit. In: Hay C and Bailey D (eds) *Diverging Capitalisms: Britain, the City of London and Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.149–170.

McHarg A and Mitchell J (2017) Scotland and Brexit: What Does Brexit Tell us about the UKs Territorial Constitution? *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 17 (3): 513–527.

Perraton J and Spreafico MRM (2019) Paying Our Way in the World? Visible and Invisible Dangers of Brexit. *New Political Economy* 24 (2): 272–285.

Rosamond B (2018) Brexit and the Politics of UK Growth Models. *New Political Economy*. Epub ahead of print 14 June. DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2018.1484721.

Saunders R (2016) A Tale of Two Referendums: 1975 and 2016. *Political Quarterly* 87 (3): 318–322.

Siles-Brugge G (2018) Bound by Gravity or Living in a Post Geography Trading World? *New Political Economy*. Epub ahead of print 18 June. DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2018.1484722.

Sturgis P, Baker N, Callegaro M, et al. (2016) *Report of the Inquiry into the 2015 British General Election Opinion Polls*. London: Market Research Society/British Polling Council.

Thompson H (2017) Inevitability and Contingency: The Political Economy of Brexit. *British Journal of Politics and International Studies* 19 (3): 434–449.

Tilly C (1991) How (and What) are Historians Doing? In: Easton D and Schelling CS (eds) *Divided Knowledge: Across Disciplines, across Cultures*. New York: SAGE. Publishing, pp.86–117.

Tonge J (2017) Supplying Confidence or Trouble? The Deal Between the Democratic Unionist Party and the Conservative Party. *Political Quarterly* 88 (3): 412–416.

Tooze A (2018) *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*. London: Allen Lane.

Weale A (2016) Nostalgic Democracy Triumphs over Democratic Internationalism. *Political Quarterly* 87 (3): 352–354.

Webb P (2016) The Party System: Turbulent Multipartyism or Duopolistic Competition? In: Heffernan R, Hay C, Russell M, et al. (eds) *Developments in British Politics 10*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.57–80.

Wincott D (2017) Brexit Dilemmas: New Opportunities and Tough Choices in Unsettled Times. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19 (4): 680–695.

Wincott D (2018) Brexit and the State of the United Kingdom. In: Diamond P, Nedergaard P and Rosamond B (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*. London: Routledge, pp.15–26.

Author Biography

Colin Hay is Professor and Director of Doctoral Studies in Political Science at Sciences Po, Paris and Co-Director of SPERI at the University of Sheffield, UK. He is the author of many books, including, most recently, *Diverging Capitalisms* (Palgrave, 2019, with Daniel Bailey). He is lead editor of *New Political Economy*, founding co-editor of *Comparative European Politics* and *British Politics* and a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Science.