



This is a repository copy of *Brexit, positional populism, and the declining appeal of valence politics*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/156334/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Hay, C. orcid.org/0000-0001-6327-6547 and Benoit, C. (2020) Brexit, positional populism, and the declining appeal of valence politics. *Critical Review*, 31 (3-4). pp. 389-404. ISSN 0891-3811

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2019.1722531>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Critical Review* on 10 Aug 2020, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/08913811.2019.1722531>.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

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/>

ABSTRACT: *A factor that may account for the largely unanticipated victory of Brexit in 2016 is the difference in engagement, mobilization, and, ultimately, turnout between those for whom the question of Brexit was a valence issue (a dry and almost technical question of determining the policies by which uncontroversial shared ends can be achieved) and those for whom it was a positional issue (a question of raw, almost visceral, political preference). The declining appeal of valence politics may reveal a phenomenon that goes beyond Britain: a change in the nature and character of contemporary electoral competition that may help to explain the newly resurgent populism characteristic of Western liberal democracies.*

Keywords: *Brexit, populism, valence politics, valence issues, positional politics, positional issues, positional populism, post-neoliberalism, political economy, public opinion*

Colin Hay, colin.hay@sciencepo.fr, Centre d'études européennes de Sciences Po, 27 rue Saint Guillaume 75337 Paris cedex 07 France is Professor and Director of Doctoral Studies in Political Sciences at Sciences Po, Paris and founding Co-Director of the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI) at the University of Sheffield.

Cyril Benoît, cyril.benoit1@sciencespo.fr, Centre d'études européennes de Sciences Po, 27 rue Saint Guillaume 75337 Paris cedex 07 France is CNRS Researcher at the Centre d'études européennes et de politique comparée, Sciences Po, Paris.

Future political analysts will certainly regard the 23rd day of June, 2016, as a milestone in the history of the United Kingdom. Forty-four years after the European Communities Act of 1972, through which the British Parliament ratified the Treaty of Accession to the European Economic Community (EEC), 51.9 percent of British citizens voted to leave the European Union into which the EEC had evolved.

Among the many scholarly analyses that have attempted to explain the outcome, turnout differentials have attracted much attention and are now widely considered to have played a decisive role. Age cohort effects, education, and national and metropolitan variations are now thought not only to have produced the “leave” vote but to have made it so difficult to predict.² While we agree that it is right to point to turnout differentials, they remain poorly interpreted, as we still lack a substantial explanatory model to explain *why* potential Brexiteers were (apparently) more inclined to vote than were potential Remainers. The motives of the leave supporters (often depicted as the “left behind” by globalization) also merit more inquiry. There is, indeed, a tendency in existing scholarship to infer a typical Brexiteer profile within the wider electorate that fails to account for the interactions of behavioral and attitudinal factors operating at the individual level. In addition, most of the

Brexit scholarship tends to omit crucial ideational determinants of turnout and turnout differentials that might be linked, as we shall argue, to the significant differences exhibited by the Leave and the Remain campaigns' construal of British membership of the EU. In short, both contextual and structural explanations of the 2016 vote are still missing (though see Diamond et al. 2018 and Jennings and Lodge 2019).

A factor that may account for both turnout and turnout differentials is the difference in engagement, mobilization, and ultimately, turnout between those for whom the question of Brexit was a valence issue and those for whom it was a positional issue. We suggest that the valence politics of the Remain campaign was always likely to leave more of its potential support at home than the positional politics of the Leave campaign.³ Positional politics, in other words, *trumped* valence politics.

In the first section of the paper, we emphasize the different framings of EU membership propagated by the Remain and the Leave camps. We also present survey evidence to account for the impact of these framings on the electorate. The valence politics of the Remain campaign appear through this lens as less appealing than the positional politics of the Leave campaign. In the second section, however, we point out the similarities between the ideational framing of the 1975 referendum campaign and that of 2016, leading us to suggest that what has changed since the 1970s is the capacity of valence framing to mobilize affective support (and participation). In the third section we reflect on the declining appeal of valence politics, showing that several dispositions that were strong predictors of the vote for Brexit were successfully attracted by the positional politics of the Leave campaign. In the fourth section, we suggest that these findings provide a framework for interpreting a number of current debates in political research and political analysis. In the fifth section, we discuss some further implications of the declining electoral appeal of valence politics, of which the wider resurgence of populist nationalism is perhaps the most obvious contemporary symptom.

I. BREXIT, POSITIONAL POLITICS, AND VALENCE POLITICS

Prior research has established strong correlations between support for Leave (whether using individual or district-level data) and low educational attainment, low income, high age, recent increases in (but not aggregate levels of) in-migration, anti-migrant sentiment, political disaffection, prior support for the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the Conservative Party, national (English as opposed to European or British) identification, and low self-reported Internet and smartphone usage (Abrams and Travaglino 2018, Alabrese et al. 2019, Clarke et al. 2017, Goodwin and Milazzo 2017, and Hobolt 2016). On this overall basis, the vote for leave has come to be widely considered as a vote of those "left behind" by globalization (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017 and Hopkin 2017; see also Ford and Goodwin 2014). However, one must also consider the turnout factor.

With 17.4 million votes for Leave against 16.1 million votes for Remain, the vote for Brexit represents the largest vote (for anything) in the electoral history of the United Kingdom. Yet 62 percent and 55.8 percent voted for remain in Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively. The bulk of the Leave vote originated in England and Wales, despite the narrower margins there: 53.4 percent and 52.5 percent respectively. Not just the larger

population of England and Wales but higher turnout determined the outcome. The three regions of the United Kingdom that saw the lowest turnout (below 70 percent) were the only three to back Remain (London, Scotland and Northern Ireland). All of the other nine regions voted to Leave, with turnout levels ranging from 71 percent to 77 percent. Had Remain-minded and Leave-minded voters turned out at 70 percent, the result would have been different (Hay 2016).

Four general sets of turnout effects were at play. The first is age-cohort effects, understood as the propensity for the elderly to turn out at much higher rates than the young and to vote disproportionately for Leave (Franklin 2004; Hay 2007, 49–54). A second factor bears on the national variations in turnout levels, which were lowest in areas where there was either little or no campaign for Leave (as in much of Scotland) and where electorates are accustomed to having little or no impact on the result of UK-wide elections (as again, in Scotland and Northern Ireland). A third series of factors relates to a London effect and, more generally, a metropolitan effect. Turnout levels were both low in London and lowest in metropolitan areas characterized by high levels of both migration and poverty, where support for Remain was strong. The last factor is the only one pushing in the opposite direction: educational attainment positively correlated with both turnout and support for Remain (Alabrese et al. 2019, Table A2).

Most pollsters predicted a defeat for Brexit until the last few days before the vote. Part of the reason was that EU membership and more generally, Europe had had low electoral salience. When the Conservative Party's manifesto for the 2015 general election was issued, including David Cameron's referendum pledge, this item was ranked as the eleventh most salient issue shaping personal voting intentions, according to *YouGov* (Jordan 2015). This made it difficult to determine how big the Leave vote might be once Brexit was broken out of the usual bundle of electoral issues. The mobilization of the disaffected and those accustomed not to vote was another unanticipated factor. This part of the electorate—consisting of those “left behind” by globalization—played a crucial role in the victory of Brexit.

Most of this seemingly unexpected mobilization is attributable to the campaign. The Remain camp was made up of a large coalition of parties, unions, and interest groups, and was supported by a large array of transnational organizations, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and a number of world leaders, such as U.S. President Barack Obama. All the major parties at Westminster campaigned for it, although the Conservative Party was strongly divided; the referendum was a device by which Prime Minister David Cameron expected to stamp out the party's internal division over Europe (see Tooze 2018). Thus, a large number of Conservative MPs backed Remain, but some, including current Prime Minister Boris Johnson, joined the Leave campaign championed by UKIP, the radical right-wing party, and its controversial leader, Nigel Farage.

A recent study has established that in the asymmetrical information environment of the 2016 referendum was, the arguments for Brexit were “priced in,” meaning that they were difficult to hear and came primarily from figures, such as Farage, who were presented disparagingly in the media. Thus, “the potential for campaign effects was high for the pro-EU

frames” (Goodwin et al. 2018). There is also the fact, however, that the Remain and Leave camps adopted two contrasting and highly polarized strategies throughout the campaign. Brexit was essentially presented by the Remain camp as a valence issue for which there was and should be widespread agreement, unlike issues in which it seems natural for voters to take opposed positions (Bale 2006). Brexit was said to involve a number of economic issues and to be an economic issue in itself; the potential (economic) consequences of this “leap in the dark” were said to be a source of major (economic) uncertainty. In stark contrast, the Leave campaign consistently presented Brexit as a positional issue that could in no sense be reduced to an economic calculation of cost and benefit. Rather, the Leave campaign (both official and unofficial) sought to frame it as a question of values, of personal conviction, and, above all, of identity, which simply could not be framed as a set of technical considerations. Technical expertise enlisted to defend the benefits of EU membership was explicitly and repeatedly delegitimized by the Leave camp, as illustrated by Justice Secretary Michael Gove, a prominent Leave supporter, who declared that “people in this country have had enough of experts.”⁴ The identitarian political slogan, “taking back control,” was also applied and connected by the Leave campaign to issues with higher public salience, such as immigration and the National Health Service (Jarman 2018).

The overall impact on the electorate of this rather simple and binary choice between the valence politics of Remain and the positional politics of Leave is echoed by survey evidence. Drawing on a survey in which a representative sample of over 5,000 British citizens “were asked to think about the arguments they have personally heard during the referendum campaign,” Sara B. Hobolt (2016) finds that “immigration and the economy emerge as the main arguments.” More precisely, she identifies “around nine distinct arguments mentioned by voters that centre on immigration, sovereignty, the economy, lack of information, and distrust in the government.” But what is clear in the Brexit vote is that the populist and positional politics of the Leave campaign was able to attract more of its potential supporters than the valence politics of the Remain campaign. Should we infer that it is, in part, because of these respective orientations?

III. WHEN VALENCE POLITICS WAS ELECTORALLY APPEALING

At a first glance, it is not necessarily startling that the more emotional and, in a sense, political campaign proved more appealing than the Remain campaign’s construal of the issue as a matter of coldly calculated costs and benefits. Yet a look back at British political history reveals that it has not always been thus. The 2016 referendum was not the first time the British electorate was asked to vote on the question of Europe. In 1975, the Labour government of Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson, as promised in his pledge during the 1974 general elections, organized a referendum on Britain’s membership in the EEC.⁵ (Britain had entered the EEC in January 1973, under the Conservative government of Edward Heath.) The “Yes” response received 67.23 percent of the vote on a rather low turnout (64 percent, compared to 78.8 percent in the 1974 general elections).

Despite the already considerable literature on the Brexit vote, few have sought to explore the parallel with 1975 (though see Daddow 2016). An examination of the archival history of the 1975 referendum reveals strong similarities to Brexit, but also intriguing

differences from it. In their introduction to a quantitative analysis of the 1975 result, Andrew Hill and Alan Brier asserted that the referendum took place “in a situation in which the positions of the major party leaderships were too similar and one of the parties of government in the British system was itself too deeply divided on the issue of terms of entry to permit of the conventional process of legitimation of policy through a general election” (Hill and Brier 1977, 93). The similarities are palpable, with David Cameron calling for a referendum in a clear attempt to restore party unity, or at least discipline. The difference here is obviously that Labour, not the Conservatives, was divided in 1975, notably on the EEC’s Common Agricultural Policy and on the loss of economic sovereignty associated with European integration, which would pose a barrier to imposing a socialist industrial policy in Britain. Like Cameron, Wilson was in many respects a pragmatic Remainer, convinced in a rather practical way of the economic advantages of EEC membership. Unlike Cameron, however, he refused to campaign actively for Yes to continued membership. He tacitly embraced it while making it very clear that his position was one of simple economic pragmatism (Butler and Kitzinger 1976).

By drawing this parallel, our intention is not to suggest that everything was the same in 1975. For one thing, fears induced by the Cold War were widely ventilated during the referendum campaign. Despite its lack of military functions, the EEC was largely regarded as a vector of stability and peace over the Continent. Wilson himself believed that the capacity of the American leadership to protect its allies was declining, and many national newspapers were publishing pieces insisting on the major shifts undergone by the world balance of power following the recent collapse of the Bretton Wood system—shifts likely, to quote an article published in the *Spectator*, to favour “the Communists” (Saunders 2018, 14).

On the other hand, in 1975, Conservatives and the moderate fringe of the Labour Party presented Britain’s continued membership as a valence issue, one that should not generate fierce opposition because of its unambiguous benefits for the British economy. According to the Yes camp (“Britain in Europe”), Britain’s economy needed the EEC’s stability (Bogdanor 1981). The Labour government, and particularly the new Chancellor, Dennis Healey, framed the current economic situation as one of “crisis” and EEC membership as an appropriate response to it (Saunders 2018). Survey data suggest that this framing made a great impression. Most polls during the campaign showed that the economy became both a major issue for the electorate and that the campaign positively affected the general public’s perception of continued EEC membership as a means through which Britain might recover economic prosperity. Food prices, particularly, were a major issue during the campaign, by the end of which polls were showing “that only about a third of people expected food prices to be lower outside the EC than inside, a lesser figure by far than in many previous years” (Gliddon 2017). Moreover, while with less sophistication and intensity than the Remain campaign, the Yes campaign framed its pitch in terms of economic expertise.

On the other side of the debate was the National Referendum Campaign, comprised largely of Labour backbenchers and the left wing of the Labour party, along with the Scottish National Party and Ulster Unionist Party. Crucially, several Conservatives were also involved, such as MP Edward Duncann, even while the Conservative Party, like the Liberal Party in 2016, officially backed continued EEC membership. Like the Leave campaign, but again with less

intensity, the opponents of EEC membership engaged in a positional framing of the issue. Two strands of arguments were mobilized, quite different in nature and with seemingly paradoxical ramifications. Members of the Labour Party who opposed the EEC appealed to its damaging effects for the British economy, with Tony Benn, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist, claiming that 500,000 jobs had been lost in the first two years of membership, bringing the risk of a “potential disaster” for the economy (Saunders 2018). By contrast, EEC membership was more explicitly presented by nationalist Conservatives and the National Front in terms of sovereignty and the challenge to both British exceptionalism and parliamentary democracy. This position was fiercely defended by Enoch Powell, a member of the Ulster Unionist Party and former Conservative minister, who was notorious for the anti-immigration sentiment expressed in his “rivers of blood” speech a few years before. Yet the positions defended by the two sides of the No camp were not as different as this might seem to imply. National sovereignty, though framed in the language of democratic socialism, was explicitly espoused by some of the most prominent figures of the Labour’s left wing. An examination of speeches and arguments during the campaign reveals these figures’ strong belief in the exceptionalism of the British political system. Most embraced “not only a truly democratic socialist agenda but one which was also distinctly Anglo-British” during the campaign (Vines 2015). Indeed, the fierce and polarized debates over Europe during the campaign have come to be considered a source of contemporary populism in Britain, with its emphasis on “Englishness” (Wellings 2012), which combines populist expression and parliamentary sovereignty and associates the United Kingdom with England’s symbols, history, and institutions.

In direct contrast to 2016, however, the appeal to British exceptionalism, the connection made by the No camp between parliamentary sovereignty and populism, and the threat that EEC membership could pose to socialist economic policy were not sufficient for the victory of No. At the district level, the vote for Yes was positively correlated with support for the Conservative Party and with income, with stronger support in England and Wales than in Scotland and Northern Ireland, although No won in two Scottish regions. The vote share for Yes was weaker in areas characterized by high levels of poverty and support for Labour. These figures suggest that Yes camp’s appeal to economic pragmatism sufficed. Crucially, a majority of those who backed Yes were also Conservative Party supporters. At least as instructive is that the populist campaign of the No camp, and its emphasis on popular sovereignty, while attracting a rather smaller share of the electorate, was also more appealing to long-standing supporters of the Labour Party, especially in Scotland and in several areas in the North of England.

IV. VALENCE POLITICS AND THE NEW POPULISM

There are certainly a number of differences between the 1975 and 2016 votes, most of which are well captured and amply discussed in the existing scholarship on Brexit. However, at least one of them remains inadequately explored in the literature: namely, the reason that Leave’s positional and populist campaign was able to trigger greater support than the valence politics of Remain.

Arguably, two key factors were at play. The first of these, our analysis of 1975 suggests, is the changing structure of the British electorate. The second is the relative (and respective) propensity of valence and positional politics to mobilize electoral participation. While these two dimensions are admittedly highly interdependent, it is worth examining them separately to draw out their immediate and (in the following section) their more general implications.

Consider first valence politics and its declining electoral efficacy. Prior research has established that valence models (relative to spatial models) are losing their explanatory purchase on voting patterns in contemporary Britain (Clarke et al. 2011). With Brexit, it can be argued that valence politics is not only declining in the realm of political competition, but also—and perhaps, more fundamentally—as a vector of electoral mobilization.

Put succinctly, the rise and demise of the electoral appeal of valence politics has passed through three stages, at least in Anglo-liberal democracies. The 1960s and the 1970s were a time where political elites were trusted to deploy appropriate expertise, and the growth in the expertise available to them led to an overall confidence in their ability to govern in the collective good. This phase could, to a large extent, be referred to as the golden age of a certain form of “expert paternalism” (Hay 2020). This conception gradually eroded during the two following decades, with political elites increasingly distrusted to exercise discretion and increasingly reliant, as a consequence, on ostensibly independent sources of expertise (Hay 2007). Valence issues were dissociated from positional issues, with the former coming to play a greater role in political competition. It is not surprising, in this regard, that the first signs of the differentiation of valence politics from positional politics were identified in a burgeoning literature challenging the relevance of the spatial (Downsian) models of political competition (Stokes 1963). This new literature drew attention to the role played by the (perceived) qualities of parties and leaders, their honesty, and above all their competence in handling issues where what constituted the public good (e.g., ends such as economic prosperity) was thought to be clear (Stokes 1992). In the 1980s and the 1990s, the growing reliance on valence politics in party political competition (linked, in turn, to intensified competition for the median voter) gave birth to a new form of “expertocracy,” in which only non-politician experts were trusted to discern the policy means to the ends that were equated with the collective good, and only if their expertise were insulated from political influence (Burnham 2001). This was reflected in a form of depoliticized governance in which positional issues were recast as valence issues and placed in the hands of (nominally) independent experts: central bankers, regulatory agencies, and the like.

In effect, Brexit inaugurates a third phase by signifying the failure of the politics of expertise. As suggested by survey data gathered by Hobolt (2016), Brexit is a rejection of “expert paternalism” and of the associated depoliticization of economic choices. Data from the British Election Study (2016) amply document this trend. In this survey, a representative sample of the British electorate was asked to react to the following proposition: “I’d rather put my trust in the wisdom of ordinary people than the opinion of experts.” Fully 80 percent of those expressing “strong agreement” with the proposition voted for Brexit, while fewer than 20 percent of those who expressed “strong disagreement.” “Taking back control”

should be regarded as referring to taking back control not only from the EU, but also from expert governance.

The implied repoliticization of the domestic polity might, of course, take a variety of forms. But for now, at least, the ideational entrepreneurs of this new politics are predominantly those of the populist right, which, in its mixture of nationalist, dis-integrationist, anti-internationalist, and “nostalgically democratic” discourses (Weale 2016), appears well positioned to recast British domestic politics and, in the process, its political-economic interdependence with the EU and the rest of the world.⁶

While the valence politics of the Remain campaign proved to be more attractive overall, it was not equally attractive to all corners of the British electorate. In a wider project to assess the legacy of Thatcherism, we have constructed a representative sample of citizens aged over 16 living in Britain, and commissioned a national survey, with several items specifically designed to assess the causes of the vote for Brexit.⁷ What is revealed by this analysis is that the holding of a combination of socially conservative⁸ and economically nostalgic⁹ values is a powerful predictor of support for Brexit. More precisely, those who scored high on social conservatism and economic nostalgia (i.e., in the top half of each scale), and yet crucially low on neoliberalism (i.e., in the bottom half of the scale), were significantly more likely to vote for Brexit (64 percent) than those who did not (49 percent). No less interestingly, those who scored high on economic nostalgia and social conservatism were also significantly more likely than the rest of the sample to vote for parties of the left or center-left (61 percent versus 52 percent) (Farrall et al. 2020). The rejection of neoliberal values despite the embrace of socially conservative values by these voters, and their support for the positional politics of the Leave camp constitutes a fascinating paradox of the Brexit vote.

The (perhaps increasing) tension between socially conservative and neoliberal values, and the affinity of socially conservative values with support for the Conservative Party, have a long history in the United Kingdom. During the 1980s, the Conservatives were able to attract a share of the economically nostalgic post-industrial working class from Labour. Our survey responses suggest that this was more on the basis of these voters’ social conservatism than their adherence to the economic project of Thatcherism. During the 2000s, growing support in the Conservative establishment for immigration and EU membership—and more fundamentally, the recasting of each as valence issues (Bale 2006)—gradually eroded the party’s capacity to attract this part of the electorate, explaining, in turn, a large part of UKIP’s success and that of the Brexit party (Evans and Mellon 2016). In this light, the electoral appeal of a newly resurgent populism in Britain might best be regarded as a consequence of political entrepreneurs’ recasting of immigration and EU membership as positional issues. It is credible to think that this might have attracted a significant share of the Conservative electorate as well as a fringe of former Labour voters usually accustomed not to vote. Thus, this additional explanation of turnout differentials in the Brexit vote complements rather than contradicting prior research, both on Leave support and turnout effects.

The rise of positional politics is not confined to the electoral arena. After the chaotic premiership of Theresa May (July 2016-July 2019), Boris Johnson’s leadership of the

Conservative Party brought the positional politics of the Leave camp to the House of Commons. During his campaign for the Conservative Party's leadership in June and July 2019, Johnson explicitly repurposed the Leave campaign's slogan, "taking back control," to cover a number of issues including, but not restricted to, immigration and the EU (adding such issues as domestic economic policy). This distanced Johnson from his rival Jeremy Hunt, who "sought to capture the entrepreneurial appeal of conservatism" and framed similar issues in valence terms (Crines 2019).

After his victory by a large majority (he won 66.4 percent of the vote) and his induction as prime minister, he faced a number of defections and withdrew the whip from 21 of its MPs after they supported an emergency motion aiming at avoiding a "no-deal" Brexit without the consent of the House. Soon after, his Secretary of State for Work and Pensions resigned, protesting against an "assault on decency and democracy."¹⁰ This suggests that positional politics can be trickier in a more iterated, game-theoretical scenario such as a legislature than in electoral campaigns. What works well in a two-sided a binary debate, such as a referendum, works less well when there are multiple issues on the table and multiple parties that may take multiple stances on these issues. Moreover, the mobilization of core supporters may annoy those in the legislature who are on the other side of the positional debate. They might have come to be on that side of because they though in valence terms about the issue(s) at stake, but when the other side (here, the leadership) is thinking in positional terms they may, in reaction, adopt contrary positional views. Thus, the growing tension between valence and positional politics may have strong implications for policy making.

V. POSITIONAL POPULISM BEYOND BRITAIN

Similar trends to those reported here may be at play in other countries witnessing the rise of a new populism. Recent comparative research has shown resemblances in voting patterns between the Brexit vote and vote for the far-right leader Marine Le Pen in the 2017 French presidential election—and notably, its propensity to attract those "left behind" by globalization and, to a lesser extent, those accustomed not to vote (Becker et al. 2017). There are also, at least arguably, some similarities with the election of President Trump. In the United States, increasing partisan polarization is widely regarded as creating a potential constituency for off-diagonal candidates (Shafer and Wagner 2019). However, it is also true that Trump's campaign was able to attract traditionally Republican "conservative values" voters even as it rejected the party's agenda on a number of issues, namely by recasting them as positional questions (e.g., immigration, foreign trade, and domestic economic policy).

As this suggests, the Brexit case should invite political analysts, particularly those of a more critical disposition, to pay a greater attention to the potential connection between the declining appeal of valence politics amongst large shares of contemporary electorates and the mobilization and exploitation of populist sentiment, notably by the political right. What it may show, more fundamentally, is that such appearances should not be regarded as a purely demand-led phenomenon, or as being solely related to the sets of issues on which political elites tend to take a position. They may have to do with how the elites frame and promote their ideas and the kind of politics they play when they try to attract electoral

support. Capitalist democracies, especially in Europe and the United States, are currently facing a number of dilemmas, and the new populism undoubtedly flourishes in a context of wider tensions pervading liberal polities (see Goodman 2019). In the face of these dilemmas, Brexit might appropriately be seen as inaugurating an era in which the domestic polity is repoliticized by means of positional campaigning; an enterprise that is, for now at least, championed by the populist right in a growing number of countries.¹¹

NOTES

- 1 See Hix 2018 for an analysis on where the UK-EU relationship is heading. See Heath and Goodwin 2017 on the impact of Brexit on the UK 2017 general election result.
- 2 See Hay 2020 for a discussion on the predictability of Brexit and on how the pollsters' underestimation of the likelihood of a vote for Brexit influenced the outcome of the election.
- 3 Here, "valence politics" refers to the operation of recasting a positional issue as a valence issue, not to Stokes' critique of spatial models of political competition (see Evrenk 2019).
- 4 *Financial Times*, June 3, 2016.
- 5 The European Economic Community is the precursor of the European Union. In 1975, it was formed of 9 countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, The Federal Republic of Germany, and the United Kingdom.
- 6 Jeffrey Friedman (2019, ch. 6), presents the rise of Trump, too, as a rejection of expertise, but Friedman does not think that this type of populism is particularly new; and he contends that it amounts not to a rejection of valence politics, but a configuration of them in terms that are understandable to voters disconnected from elite discussions of the complexities of valence *policies*.
- 7 These data are part of a project led by Professor Stephen Farrall (University of Derby), *The Long-term Impact of Thatcherism: Crime, Politics and Inequality*, which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (April 2017-March 2020).
- 8 The items for the survey were selected following two rounds of interviewing, two field experiments, and a pilot survey during 2018. Items were grouped into seven batteries: "behavioral Thatcherism" (with proxies ranging from business ownership to consumption patterns); neoliberal values; socially conservative values; beliefs about Thatcher and Thatcherism; social nostalgia; economic nostalgia; and political nostalgia.
- 9 In the survey, agreement with the following propositions is used as a proxy for socially conservative values: "*Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional values*"; "*For some crimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence*"; "*People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences*"; "*Schools should teach children to obey authority*". Agreement with the following propositions is used as a proxy for neoliberal values: "*Ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation's wealth*"; "*There is no need for strong trade unions to protect employees' working conditions and wages*"; "*Private enterprise is the best way to solve Britain's economic problems*"; "*Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership*"; "*It would be*

better for everyone if we all paid less tax”; “Welfare benefits should be reserved for only the extremely needy”. Agreement with the following propositions is used as a proxy for economic nostalgia: “I feel that there has been a loss of community spirit around here since the 1980s”; “The profit motive has come to dominate all aspects of our society”; “The reliance on market forces has increased the gap between rich and poor”; “It feels to me like the country lost something when coal mines, steel mills and shipyards closed”. Though selected in the survey to capture a sense of economic nostalgia, it is easy to see these responses as also tapping into a certain socialist value set typically expressed by millennial Corbynites. For the wording of the survey items on social and political nostalgia and for further details on its methodology, see Farrall et al. 2020, 13-14.

10 *The Guardian*, September 7, 2019.

11 As such, Brexit could be regarded as inaugurating in Britain a form of post-neoliberalism. While many observers have assumed that critiques of neoliberalism could stem only from the left, a range of recent political events indicate that it is primarily from the populist right that neoliberalism is currently being challenged at the mass level (Hay and Benoît 2018).

REFERENCES

- Abrams, Dominic, and Travaglino, Giovanni. 2018. “Immigration, Political Trust, and Brexit: Testing an Aversion Amplification Hypothesis.” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 57: 310-26.
- Alabrese, Eleonora, Sascha O. Becker, Thiemo Fetzer, and Dennis Novy. 2019. “Who Voted for Brexit: Individual and Regional Data Combined.” *European Journal of Political Economy* 56: 132-50.
- Bale, Tim. 2006. “Between a Soft and a Hard Place? The Conservative Party, Valence Politics and the Need for a New Eurorealism.” *Parliamentary Affairs* 59(3): 385-400.
- Becker, Sascha, Thiemo Fetzer, and Dennis Novy. 2017. “Who Voted for Brexit? A Comprehensive District-Level Analysis.” *Economic Policy* 32(92): 601-50.
- Bogdanor, Vernon. 1981. *The People and The Party System: The Referendum and Electoral Reform in British Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brier, Andrew, and Alan Hill. 1977. “The Estimation of Constituency and Party Voting in the British Referendum of June 1975.” *Political Studies* 25(1): 93-102.
- Burnham, Peter. 2001. “New Labour and the Politics of Depoliticisation.” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 3(2): 127-49.
- Butler, David, and Uwe Kitzinger. 1976. *The 1975 Referendum*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clarke, Harold, Matthew Goodwin, and Paul Whiteley. 2017. *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, Harold, David Sanders, Marianne Stewart, and Paul Whiteley. 2011. “Valence Politics and Electoral Choice in Britain, 2010.” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 21(2): 237-53.
- Crines, Andrew S. 2019. “Boris Johnson and the Future of British Conservatism.” *Political*

- Insight*, September: 4-6.
- Daddow, Oliver. 2016. *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC*. London: Routledge.
- Diamond, Patrick, Peter Nedergaard, and Ben Rosamond. 2018. *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*. London: Routledge.
- Electoral Commission. 2019. "Results and Turnout at the EU Referendum." July.
- Evans, Geoffrey, and Jon Mellon. 2016. "Working Classes Vote and Conservative Losses: Solving the UKIP Puzzle." *Parliamentary Affairs* 69: 464-79.
- Evrenk, Haldun. 2019. "Valence Politics." In *The Oxford Handbook of Public Choice*, vol. 1, ed. Roger Congleton, Bernard Grofman, and Stefan Voigt. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Farrall, Stephen, Colin Hay, Emily Gray, and Phil Jones. Forthcoming. "Behavioural Thatcherism and Nostalgia: Tracing the Behavioural Consequences of Holding Thatcherite Values." *British Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41293-019-00130-7>.
- Ford, Robert, and Matthew Goodwin. 2014. *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for Radical Right in Britain*. London: Routledge.
- Franklin, Mark. 2004. *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Friedman, Jeffrey. 2019. *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gliddon, M. 2017. "The Labour Government and the Battle for Public Opinion in the 1975 Referendum on the European Community." *Contemporary British History* 31(1): 91-113.
- Goodman, Sara. 2019. "Liberal Democracy, National Identity Boundaries, and Populist Entry Points." *Critical Review* 31(3-4).
- Goodwin, Matthew, and Caitlin Milazzo. 2017. "Taking Back Control? Investigating the Role of Immigration in the 2016 Vote for Brexit." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19(3): 450-64.
- Goodwin, Matthew, Simon Hix, and Mark Pickup. 2018. "For and Against Brexit: A Survey Experiment of the Impact of Campaign Effects on Public Attitudes toward EU Membership." *British Journal of Political Science*, Epub Ahead of Print.
- Hay, Colin. 2007. *Why We Hate Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hay, Colin. 2016. "Brexistential Crisis: What Would Cassandra Say?" *SPERI Blog*, January.
- Hay, Colin. 2020. "Brexistential Angst and the Paradoxes of Populism: On the Contingency, Predictability and Intelligibility of Seismic Shifts." *Political Studies*, 68(1):187-206.
- Hay, Colin, and Cyril Benoît. 2018. "Postnéolibéralisme." In *Dictionnaire d'économie politique*, ed. Colin Hay and Andy Smith. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Heath, Oliver, and Matthew Goodwin. 2017. "The 2017 General Election, Brexit and the Return to Two-Party Politics: An Aggregate-Level Analysis of the Result." *Political Quarterly* 88(3): 345-58.
- Hix, Simon. 2018. "Brexit: Where Is the EU-UK Relationship Heading?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 56(S1): 11-27.
- Hobolt, Sara B. 2016. "The Brexit Vote: A Divided Nation, a Divided Continent." *Journal of*

- European Public Policy*, 23(9): 1259-1277.
- Hopkin, Jonathan. 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): 465-78.
- Jarman, Holly. 2018. "Let's Fund Our NHS Instead! Welfare Chauvinism and the Brexit Debate." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston.
- Jennings, Will, and Martin Lodge. 2019. "Brexit, the Tides and Canute: The Fracturing Politics of the British State." *Journal of European Public Policy* 26(5): 772-89.
- Jordan, W. 2015. "Health Overtakes Immigration as an Issue for Voters." YouGov, April.
- McHarg, Alieeen, and James Mitchell. 2017. "Brexit and Scotland." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19(3): 512-26.
- Saunders, Robert. 2018. *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shafer, Byron, and Regina Wagner. 2019. "The Trump Presidency and the Structure of Modern American Politics." *Perspective on Politics* 17(2): 340-57.
- Stokes, Donald. 1963. "Spatial Models of Party Competition." *American Political Science Review* 57(2): 368-77.
- Stokes, Donald. 1992. "Valence Politics." In *Electoral Politics*, ed. Dennis Kavanagh. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Tooze, Adam. 2018. *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*. London: Allen Lane.
- Vines, Emma. 2015. "A Common Appeal: Anglo-British Nationalism and Opposition to Europe, 1970-1975." *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 61(4): 530-45.
- Weale, Albert. 2016. "Nostalgic Democracy Triumphs over Democratic Internationalism." *Political Quarterly* 87(3): 352-54.
- Wellings, Ben. 2012. *English Nationalism and Euroscepticism: Losing the Peace*. Bern: Springer.