**Analyzing the Brexit Referendum Motivations, (2016)**

**تحليل دوافع استفتاء خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي، (2016)**

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**Abstract**

The disintegration of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU) was the question put to the British people in a referendum in 2016. In that referendum, many British citizens wanted to remain while many others wanted to leave. The decision to leave the European Union shocked and disappointed the British political establishment, and the Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron, duly resigned. Clearly, the referendum results showed how divided the UK has become. Therefore, this article analyzes the manifold opposing arguments of both the ‘leave’ and ‘remain’ campaigns that surrounded the 2016 referendum in the UK and **shows** how recent events like the economic recession and the refugee crisis helped the Brexit campaign win that referendum.

**Key** **words**: Brexit, United Kingdom, European Union, national sovereignty, economic calculations, immigration, national identity.

**الملخص**

كان خروج بريطانيا من الإتحاد الأوروبي هو السؤال الذي طرح على الشعب البريطاني في استفتاء عام 2016. في ذلك الاستفتاء، أراد الكثير من المواطنين البريطانيين البقاء، بينما فضل أخرون المغادرة. صدم قرار مغادرة الإتحاد الأوروبي الحكومة البريطانية وأصابها بخيبة أمل، فقام رئيس الوزراء ديفيد كامرون بالإستقالة على النحو الواجب. ومن الواضح أن نتائج الاستفتاء أظهرت حالة الإنقسام التي وصلت اليها المملكة المتحدة. لذلك، يحلل هذا المقال الحجج المتعارضة والمتعددة لحملتي 'المغادرة' و 'البقاء' ويوضح كيف ساعدت الأحداث الأخيرة مثل الركود الإقتصادي وأزمة اللاجئين حملة خروج بريطانيا من الإتحاد الأوروبي على الفوز في الاستفتاء.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :**بريكست، المملكة المتحدة، الإتحاد الأوروبي ، السيادة الوطنية، الإعتبارات الإقتصادية، الهجرة، الهوية الوطنية.

**Introduction**

In 2016, the issue of Brexit showed that the British people had varying positions, and Britain seemed to be roughly divided as never before. While some British voters leaned toward disintegration from the European Union, other voters strongly defended the benefits of a united Europe. The British government pledged to respect the referendum results because it expected a referendum defeat for the Eurosceptics; however, the results of the Brexit referendum, that took place on 23 June 2016, shocked the political establishment in the UK as 52% of voters voted for disintegration (Electoral commission, 2016). The most momentous decision in modern British history was in favor of leaving the European Union. Significantly, the referendum campaign has been awash with claims and counterclaims about the factors that have taken a central stage in the debate of Britain’s independence from Europe. Therefore, this article examines the factors behind the Brexit referendum results and explains how recent crises strongly contributed to Britain’s choice of leaving the European Union.

1. **Fear from the loss of national sovereignty**

The European dream wanted to make Europe recover from the Second World War and to exterminate the threat of nationalism. After decades of unity, it is true that European nations live in peace and prosperity, yet the union struggles to find common responses to the crises of the 21st century. For anti-EU supporters in Britain, the biggest threat to European identity is the EU itself. Acute criticism to the EU is mainly related to democratic deficiency. The ‘leave’ campaign argued that the European Union is undemocratic because its members are technocratic experts rather than democratically elected politicians. It is, therefore, illogicalto suppress British nationalism for the sake of a bureaucratic superstate institution like the EU. Politician Boris Johnson led this claim describing the EU as “a dysfunctional bureaucracy that ha[d] no proper democratic oversight” (qtd in Rankin, 2016). However, this claim is misleading. The EU cannot impose laws on the member states. EU laws are passed by the council of ministers that has members from all EU governments (Fileder, 2018, pp. 211+). Allegations about the democratic deficiency of the EU are exaggerating and inaccurate. Probably, the EU is even more democratic than the UK parliament itself because the latter contains the controversial House of Lords which is still the subject of intenseloathing because of its completely undemocratic composition.

Relentless criticism to the EU is also related to the idea of super-state centralization.Brussels is the heart of the EU where supranational decisions are taken. In certain circumstances, EU decisions forced some member countries to make drastic measures against their will. One good example is Greece. In 2008, the economic recession in Greece boiled into street riots and violence. To receive rescue loan, Greece was required to cut public spending and liberalize its markets (Kiryakopoulos, 2014, pp. 332-338). This left vitriolic resentmentamong the Greek citizens as their country was made to pay for the money they received and swallow the pill of austerity to stay in the union. It was crystal clear that Greece’s economic policy came under the ultimate authority of the EU. The real power that prevailed in the bailout was Germany whereas Greece was the country that paid the price of austerity (Irwin, 2015). The crisis gave British Eurosceptics the opportunity to rush in and claim that Europe was not united. For them, economic union did not mean political union as well. In times of hardship, EU measures proved to be a recipe for national suicide.

Another key Brexit argument is the UK annual contribution to the EU budget. Brexiteers thought that it would be very beneficial for the UK to stop paying money into the EU. The UK contributed annually about 8 billion pounds to the EU budget, and this was the second largest payment after Germany (Erket et al, 2018, pp. R46+). Though Brexit campaigners tended to pick this argument to support their side, the other side of the argument is that member countries are only required to contribute one percent of their national GDPs; nonetheless, the UK has always paid less than this proportion (Begg, 2016). Furthermore, all EU members must contribute to the EU budget and receive funding in turn from the EU for developmental programs, based on their contributions. Still more, Brexiteers neglected the fact that in the case of leaving the EU, the UK would have to pay a heavy ‘divorce bill’ which would range between £35 billion and £ 39 billion (Reality Check Team, 2021). This massiveamount of money would be terribly shockingfor Brexit campaigners who based their arguments on financial considerations. Uncannily, their tendency was to misrepresent the facts and obstinately vote to leave the EU.

Further, recent crises proved thatthe EU served the interests of international companies above those of ordinary people. International banks from France, Britain, Germany, and even America used to lend money to Greece before the 2008 economic recession. Because Greece was unable to pay its debts, loans from the EU and the International Monetary Fund were used to pay-off the reckless banks (Toussaint, 2017). In other words, the bailout was designed to pay banks while Greece was obliged to take austerity measures. Before the Brexit referendum, large companies endeavored to convince the British public opinion that there country was far better off in the EU. These companies included HSBC Holdings, AstraZeneca, Shell, and Goldman Sachs International (Gross, 2016). The reliance of British pro-Europeans on big companies to support their claim convinced Eurosceptics that the EU was obsessed with internationalism and not Europeanism. For Brexit campaigners, the EU was working for the benefit of the elite while the downtrodden masses always paid the price.

The 2016 refugee crisis also revealed how limited national sovereignty was. The overflow of immigrants to Europe showed that the EU members disregarded EU authority in favor of nationalist benefits. While Germany welcomed refugees in Europe, Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orban refused them entry to his country. Orban even refused a refugee settlement quota with the EU claiming that immigrants could not be classed as refugees, but rather “economic migrants in search of a better life.” (qtd in Staudenmaier, 2018). Ironically, while Hungary still defends its citizens right to migrate to other wealthier countries inside Europe, Hungarians voted in a referendum in 2016 to reject the migrant quota imposed by the EU (Than and Szakacs, 2016). Germany’s policy of welcoming immigrants did not stem from humanitarian reasons. Economist Herbert Brucker argues that Germany’s declining birth rate made massive immigration a necessity to keep the German economy competitive (cited in Kaniewski, 2019). While Germany believes that nationalism threatens Europeanism, German leaders think only about their country’s interests. Therefore, though Hungary and Germany seem to have diametrically opposing attitudes towards immigration, the driving force behind their policies is narrow nationalism rather than European common interest. The crisis convinced Eurosceptics that the EU did not represent the interests of its member states whose powers were very limited in front of stronger countries like Germany.

As the economic recession of 2008 and the refugee crisis undermined national sovereignty in some EU countries, fear of loss of sovereignty compelled the UK citizens to seriously question European integration. Two main campaigning organizations, Vote Leave and Leave EU, were particularly set up to deter the arguments of the ‘remain’ campaign and lead the UK to quit the EU. Prominent figures adhered to the ‘Vote Leave’ campaign. Among them were Justice Secretary, Michael Gove; London’s Mayor, Boris Johnson; Labor’s biggest donor, John Mills; and UK Independence Party’s biggest donor, Stuart Wheeler. ‘Leave EU’ was founded in July 2015. That campaign was backed by key politicians and businessmen like: UKIP leader, Nigel Farage; UK’s biggest donor, Arron Banks; and property entrepreneur, Richard Tice (Menon and Brigid, 2016, pp. R4+). While ‘Vote Leave’s’ message was on how to control borders and make UK’s own laws by electing democratic representatives, ‘Leave EU’ focused more on a decent national health service and a restriction on immigration (Travis, 2016). Yet, the undisputable point was regaining national sovereignty.

As both Eurosceptic campaigns stressed the need to reclaim national sovereignty, they worked tirelessly to persuade the UK electorate about the usefulness of their argument. Consequently, Lord Ashcroft polls (2016) showed that nearly half (49%) of leave voters ranked the “principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK” first. In other words, UK citizens believed that national sovereignty was clearly at stake, and it needed to be fully restored by voting for Brexit. Leavers neglected the simple fact that abandoning the EU also means being deprived of the four freedoms that the EU members enjoy (i.e. the free movement of goods, capital, services, and labor) (Menon and Flower, 2016, pp. R 4+). It is highly important to remember that the crises that engulfed the Euro zone helped the argument of national sovereignty thrive whereas the pro-European discourse failed to acknowledge the advantages of membership.

1. **Scarcity of jobs and low wages**

Brexit was a slap in the face for the European economic project. It is worth mentioning that the creation of the European Union was drafted in late 1991 when leaders of the European Economic Community introduced the Maastricht Treaty to create “an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe” (Research and Innovation, 2015). The European Economic Community was officially transformed into the European Union in November 1993, starting a new phase of economic cooperation to the benefit of the citizens of the European member states (History.com Editors, 2010). However, the political atmosphere in Britain became grimas the ruling Conservative party tore itself asunder. Margaret Thatcher, who was forced to resign from premiership in 1990 because of her stand over Europe, was vehemently critical (Watt, 2016). The battle lines between pro-Europeans and anti-Europeans were clearly drawn up.

In May 2004, the European Union embarked on its most grandiose expansion welcoming the accession of ten new countries; eight countries were from central and eastern Europe. Britain became the best destination for hundreds of thousands of workers who applied to work and live in that small island. Consequently, the UK population increased rapidly due to immigration. According to the Office for National Statistics, the UK had a population of nearly 65 million inhabitants in 2016. It was the third largest population of the European Union countries after Germany and France, respectively (2016). While heavy migration to the UK drove members of the Conservative Party apart, bitter resentment among British citizens was exuded in electoral support for the United Kingdom Independence Party whose cardinal goal was to end the torrential floods of immigrants (Gough, 2017, pp. 366+). The implication was that the streams of immigrants were the source of British workers’ troubles and hardships.

Among workers, support for the ‘Leave’ vote was galvanized by scarce job opportunities, low wages, and indecent public services (Bailey, 2017, pp.333+). Certainly, the colossal numbers of immigrants were to blame for such problems. As immigrants competed for the jobs, opportunities for British citizens became thin, and they were doing their work for less salary. In this regard, Leavers insisted that they were not racist. Their main demand was to be treated fairly by their government which was pampering immigrants with social services at the expense of its citizens’ well-being. However, the UK labor market comprised around 11% non-UK nationals in 2016. This percentage is not terrifying as 89% UK nationals filled the void in the labor market (“International Immigration and the Labor Market,” 2017). Therefore, it would be a flimsy argument to suggest that immigrants deprived the UK-born nationals of their jobs, housing, or health services.

Additionally, Brexit may ostensibly reduce the flow of immigrants and lead to an increase in wages, yet there is abundant evidence that the UK businesses have gained significant advantage through the use of large supplies of cheap labor (Somai, 2018, p. 119). Besides, the UK was among the European countries that had the highest minimum wages with rates exceeding 1,000 euros per month (Karel, 2016). Therefore, the argument of low wages is not valid. Another intriguing point, used mainly by the Labor Party in the referendum campaign to backits ‘remain’ position, is that immigrants contributed vigorously to the successful British economy. The *Migration Observatory* suggested that “the fiscal impact of immigrants is relatively small compared to the size of the whole economy (less than 1 percent of GDP) (2019). Moreover, a report by the University College of London argued that “immigrants have made a positive fiscal contribution, even when the UK was running budget deficits.” (qtd in Tejvan, 2021). This meant that immigrants benefited the UK economy and contributed strongly to its growth.

During the referendum campaign, major businesses expressed their strong support for ‘Remain.’ Giant companies like defense contractor BAE Systems and oil group Shell were clearly in favor of remaining inside the European Union. Additionally, CBI, Britain’s biggest business lobby group, was anti-Brexit (Inman, 2016). All these big corporations believed that EU membership would make their businesses prosper whereas Brexit would hinder the UK economy. They expressed real concern over possible trade barriers, economic uncertainty, and the loss of jobs (“EU Referendum: More than 1,280 Business Leaders Sign Letter,” 2016). On the other side, medium and small companies were split over the issue of Brexit, depending on particular sectors and localities. According to a poll conducted by the research consultancy *TNS*, 37% of small and medium-sized enterprises were in favor of Brexit while 38% had a preference for Europe (cited in Farrell, 2016). While some companies were worried about increased import costs and uncertainty regarding access to European markets, others concluded that restoring independence and controlling immigration would make their business better off outside the EU. Even companies were divided as never before.

Despite the fact that the potent arguments of the ‘remain’ campaign made a great degree of plausibility, leavers did not relinquish their claims. They thought that the solution to all these troubles would be a reduction in the size of immigrants who were painfully bearing a burden of suspicion. In England and Wales, working- class voters, living in areas of heightened immigration, were more convinced by the ‘leave’ campaign. They felt abandoned by their government and voted, accordingly, to leave the European Union. The pro-leave vote in England and Wales in the 2016 referendum was 53.4% and 52.5%, respectively. Meanwhile, Scotland and Northern Ireland voted vigorously for ‘remain’ with 62% and 55.8% (“EU Referendum Results,” 2016). Arguments of the ‘remain’ campaign were true for the UK as a whole country, but they were not true in England and Wales that had a far larger population than that of Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In densely populated areas where the numbers of immigrants were continuously soaring, the referendum results were a defiant act of rebellion led by the skeptical working-class voters who feared their social position was waning. Becker, Fetzer, and Novy concluded in their working paper *Who Voted for Brexit* (2017) that “areas with relatively low pay and high unemployment” were likely to vote ‘leave’ (32). In other words, there is a strong relationship between economic insecurity and Brexit. Goodwin and Heath (2016) stressed the same point when they argued that support for the ‘leave’ vote was stronger in areas of poverty, unemployment, and low skills. As the atmosphere of paranoia and xenophobia swept through the UK, many voters were driven by social expediency rather than by ample evidence. Their appeal was to shameless self-interest rather than national prosperity. Beneath the platitudes of nationalism and Britishness lay selfishness and disunity.

The Brexit results stunned the ‘remain’ voters who saw Britain’s future lay with the empire of trade and globalization. While pandemonium reigned among ‘Leavers’ who congratulated themselves on the referendum results, ‘remain’ voters saw Brexit as the worst abyss facing the UK. The post-Brexit economic consequences came to the fore, considering the UK’s robust trade link to Europe. UK exports to the EU rose from 240 billion pounds in 2016 to 251 billion pounds in 2020. Yet, the share fell from 44% of all UK exports to 42%. Similarly, UK imports rose from 300 billion pounds in 2016 to 301 billion pounds in 2020. Yet, the share fell from 53% in 2016 to 50% in 2020 (Ward, 2021). These figures mean that the UK economic trading links with the EU did not deteriorate. Brexit proved that there is no relationship between the political decision to leave the EU and the economic consequences that followed.

After the Brexit results, the most serious trouble came from across the English border. In Scotland and Northern Ireland that voted overwhelmingly for European membership, a rising wave of revulsion crept in. In Scotland, the pro-European Scottish National Party that dominated the political scene preferred the EU while the referendum results shriveled hopes for unity in the UK. Northern Ireland’s vote to remain part of the EU is, constitutionally, not important at all as the UK’s relationship with the EU is solely determined by the UK government (Tonge, 2017, p. 2). For the Northern Irish people, the referendum outcome was an unpleasant surprise because the probable introduction of a hard border with the Republic of Ireland became a matter of real concern. The most serious casualty of Brexit was the union itself because it was clear that the English decided the future of the nation regardless of the will of the Scots and the Northern Irish.

1. **Endless waves of immigrants**

Another decisive Brexit-related issue that determined the outcome of the referendum was immigration. More than a million refugees and other migrants flooded into the EU in 2015 (Clayton and Holland, 2015). Hungary, which is at the edge of the EU, suffered from migration, and the authorities were not welcoming. Hungarians believed that the refugees threatened the religious, cultural and ethnic make- up of Europe. In a clear defiance to European rules, Hungary closed its borders with a wire fence because it wanted to have full control on its border. Other EU countries like Greece and Bulgaria soon followed, putting fences to close their countries against immigrants (John, 2015). The immigrants’ crisis became the biggest crisis of unity the EU has ever faced. As discord crept into relations between European countries, the EU dream for borderless Europe was shattered.

The EU called its member states to give asylum to some refugees, yet there was no common response to the crisis as some countries stubbornly refused to take immigrants in. Out of a million, Hungary has been asked to take only 1,300 (Szigeti, 2018). Hungary has teamed up with Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic to form a controversial alliance known as the Visegrad Group (Klein, 2019). These Eastern European countries did not want to be oppressed by the West of Europe after being liberated from the USSR. The controversy is that the Visegrad group closed its borders to stop the migrants from entering Europe, yet Western Europe was already flooded with migrants from Poland and Hungary. The largest European group of immigrants living in the UK is from Poland with nearly 900,000 Poles (Davies, 2019). Logically, the migrant crisis in Europe did not start in 2015 with refugees from the Middle East. It had its roots with the expansion of the EU in 2004 when people of the former Soviet bloc began to travel to Western Europe in search of better conditions.

In the UK, it was the Labor government under the leadership of Tony Blair that opened the doors to immigration in 2004. Need reduced xenophobia and nationalism. The motive behind such a welcoming policy was brazenly economic. Blair (2004) said: “there are half a million vacancies in our job market and our strong and growing economy needs migration to fill these vacancies.” At that time, when the UK economy was in dire need of workers, immigration became very high on the agenda. However, the endless numbers of migrants travelling to Britain caused the UK citizens to look at immigration with fright. Undoubtedly, they did not want their country to receive waves of immigrants. Frankly, it is an iniquitous system that welcomes immigrants in times of need and abandons them in times of economic affluence.

Therefore, the argument of leavers was that disintegration from Europe would allow the UK to control immigration and lower its possible disastrous effects. Importantly, the largest numbers of immigrants living in the UK by the time of the Brexit referendum were EU citizens who figured around 2.9 million (“UK Perspectives: 2016,” 2016). It is worth pointing that immigration was not a national debate when immigrants were mainly from Europe. White European immigrants were always welcomed despite their relatively large numbers compared to non-Europeans. Immigration became a real concern to the UK citizens when migrants travelled to Britain from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean islands. As a matter of fact, there is clear discrimination in favor of White Europeans but against immigrants from non-EU countries. By treating Europeans better than non-Europeans, the whole issue is frankly based on race.

Additionally, wars in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen triggered waves of thousands of immigrants. The issue would not be problematic if immigrants were small in number because there were many jobs that they could fill in the construction industry, transportation, cleaning, etc. Leavers, nonetheless, claimed that the scale of immigration horrified them. However, immigrants in the UK made up an estimated 8% of the UK population compared to 12% in Germany, 11% in France, and 14% in Spain (Abboushi, 2017, p. 191). Furthermore, nagging cultural questions aroused from the nature of immigration. 53% of asylum seekers to the EU were young adults aged between 18 and 34. Moreover, men comprised 73% of asylum seekers in 2015 (“Number of Refugees to Europe Surges,” 2016). European citizens were galled that their girls would have relationships with refugees. According to them, Europe was at war with the creeping probable results of male immigration.

In the UK, the assimilation of Muslims and black immigrants into the UK society was quite futile. Different communities had an imperishable affection toward their countries of origin, and they were not ready to embrace British liberal values. Above all, most immigrants were from Muslim countries. By mid-2016, the Muslim population in Europe was estimated at 25.8 million (“Europe’s Growing Muslim Population,” 2017). The 2011 census showed that Muslims in the UK made up 5% of the overall population, but they were growing faster in numbers than the overall UK population (p. 22). It is true that Muslims had pride in their culture and religion, yet obstinate UK citizens also wanted to foist their liberal values on minorities. Leavers’ obsession with Britishness guaranteed nothing but distinctiveness among Muslims. The continuing influx of immigrants has fueled debate about security-related issues, especially after the French capital Paris was shaken by a series of deadly attacks in 2015. The bloodiest attack took place on November 13, 2015, killing 130 people and wounding hundreds (Reuters Staff, 2021). UK citizens were convulsed with horror. They, accordingly, changed their attitudes towards immigrants from hospitality to hostility and from inclusion to exclusion. Due to the events in neighboring France, some UK citizens were smoldering with rage.

Leavers perceived themselves the keepers of British liberal values, and they chose to act in fear. As anti-immigrant rhetoric swept the UK, Leavers jeered at the government for allowing immigrants to enter the UK. Their grinding accusations spiraled out of control when Jo Cox, a pro-immigration British MP, was murdered by a white supremacist named Thomas Mair in the week before the referendum (Cobain, Parveen, and Taylor, 2016). Besides, according to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Brexit campaign was marked by “anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric” (qtd in Kroet, 2016). In such a worrisome atmosphere, the UK became a jittery nation. Leavers berated immigrants as pests and vipers whereas immigrants felt unprotected against supremacist reprisals.

The startling results of the Brexit referendum stirred strong arguments that the ‘leave’ vote was overwhelmingly driven by fear (Morgan, 2017, p. 153). ‘Remain’ voters argued that the decision to leave the EU was based on xenophobia, nostalgia, and racism. This is a matter of the utmost importance. While Leavers presumed the mantle of resistance against immigration, foreigners felt deprived of the consoling possibility of being adherent British citizens. Post-Brexit UK began auspiciously for Leavers. Immigrants, on the other hand, were pelted and abused, yet they were too infirm to ask for their rights (Guilbert, 2019). They faltered in their belief in a multicultural UK.

1. **Preserving national identity**

Nationalism in the United Kingdom played a key part in the Brexit referendum results. In its essence, the European Union has always been a supranational political project that aimed to suppress national identities for the sake of a single European identity. The project also wanted to make Germany recover from the Second World War without being a threat to Europe. Surprisingly, Germany became the most powerful member in the EU “Germany is Doomed to Lead Europe,” 2020). In the United Kingdom, the UK Independence Party was already on the rise since the 1990s struggling for disintegration from Europe. Nigel Farage, the leader of this far-right political party, is seen as the cardinal backer of the Brexit referendum and even the Father of Brexit. Doubting Europeanism, Farage (2014) said that the British needed “to have a national debate on… the most important issue [Britain] has faced for hundreds of years” (qtd in “Nigel Farage ‘Can Hardly Wait’ to Debate EU.”

According to the UK nationalists, it is true that Europe became a prosperous continent, yet continental stability was not guaranteed because the member states did not find common responses to the crises of the 21st century. While southern European countries likes Spain, Greece, and Italy plunged into an economic crisis in 2008, the German economy was continuously booming (Muro and Vidal, 2014). This gap created bitter divisions among European people and showed that there was less of a European identity. Consequently, there was an anti-establishment nationalist-minded movement on the rise. Leavers claimed that they could no longer feel their unique identity. They lost their sense of community. The reason behind such a feeling was immigration. Due to immigrants, the mood in Britain became volatile. Leavers argued that immigrants were not interested in the idea of Britishness. They only wanted to make money and support their families. It was all about money. Logically, 60% of older people aged over 65 voted ‘leave’ whereas 70% of 18 to 24-year-olds backed ‘Remain’ (Curtice, 2018). Leavers were not interested in being reasonable. They were busy being righteous, and the young voters disappointedly felt that the old were stealing their future.

According to Leavers, the notion of identity is stable. However, it is very difficult to agree on the shared features of Britishness as an identity since Britain is a multicultural society. It is important to remember that the same British citizen can be of Somalian origin, a Muslim, a vegetarian, a doctor, etc. In this regard, two persons from different races and different religions can share more in common than two others who belong to the same race and religion. Byram (1997) reminds us that the date of birth is probably one of the only stable identity markers that people have (p.15). In other words, there is almost no stable feature in identity. The nationalists’ view on identity is narrow and divisive.

Additionally, the use of the word ‘community’ is very vague. It is assumed that people who belong to the same community share “a language, culture, values, religion, race, and a common land” (Fielder, 2018, pp. 221+). According to the 2011 census data, 13% of people in the UK belonged to a Black, Asian, or other ethnic group. Muslims were the second largest religious group after Christians with 4.8% of the population. Besides, though English is the language used in the UK, the Office for National Statistics published an article in March 2013 highlighting that 7.7% of the UK population reported other languages that included Welsh, Panjabi, Bengali, Arabic, and French (pp. 2-18). In a multicultural society like the UK, it is ingenuous to claim that the UK citizens share the same linguistic, religious, racial, and historical heritage. One must also remember that throughout the UK history, citizens of this nation tore themselves apart in murderous wars of annihilation.

Geographically, two nations in the UK voted to leave (England 53.4 percent; Wales 52.5 percent), and two other nations voted to remain (Scotland 62 percent; Northern Ireland 55.8 percent) (“EU Referendum,” 2021). It is fair to claim that due to the large population of England compared with Scotland and Wales, it was English nationalists who voted to leave the European Union while the Scottish and the Northern Irish citizens voted overwhelmingly to remain. Sadly, the will of two UK countries to remain part of the EU was exterminated by the will of the big numbers of English voters. The Ashcroft data (2016) indicated a strong link between referendum voting and nationalism. Data showed that 79 percent of English nationalists voted to leave. They asserted their will despite opposition from Scottish and Northern Irish voters. In this case, the struggle in Brexit was not between UK nationalism and Europeanism, but it was rather between English nationalism and Europeanism.

Probably, the countdown to disunity has already started after the Brexit results. The clear division among people of the United Kingdom may threaten in the near future the very structure of the union as Scotland is likely to ask for another independence referendum from Britain (Reuters Staff, 2016). Scotland’s First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, is willing to hold a second referendum to leave the United Kingdom and rejoin Europe, and the probability of Scotland’s independence poses a serious concern as it represents over a third of Britain’s territory (Wither, 2018, pp. 73+). The question of another Scottish referendum will certainly put the unity of the UK at stake. Besides, the emergence of such domestic challenges inside the United Kingdom would divert the attention of the UK government from international events and press her to deal with the outcomes of the Brexit vote.

The other Leavers’ argument is that Europe is a Christian continent which is now invaded by black refugees and Muslims. Nationalism in the UK centered on hatred toward Muslims and Blacks who were demonized as terrorists and backward (Fielder, 2018, pp. 221+). The vote to leave the European Union is then driven by nostalgia for a UK that was a Christian country for the Whites. These are the views of narrow-minded bigots and English supremacists. Ardent English nationalists thought they were striking a blow against un-Britishness and simultaneously reviving the glorious past; however, what they fatally wounded was the modern idea of Britishness itself: a homogeneous cultural society which was at ease with its different social components. Their vote was, hence, for Englishness over Britishness.

Astonishingly, nationalists in the United Kingdom were not alone in their trepidation with Muslim and black refugees. In France, Marine Le Pen, from the Front National Party, always excluded Muslims and Blacks from her vision of a peaceful and prosperous Europe. The anti-immigrant worrisome atmosphere in Europe was a golden opportunity to press her goals. In 2017, Le Pen made significant gains in the presidential elections. Though she lost the election to Emmanuel Macron, she received one-third of the vote (33.94%), which was approximately 11 million votes (Malkin, 2017). Muslims in France suffered the indignity of being treated like terrorists. They were terribly horrified in furtive silence as many nagging questions were stirred by the increasing support of the far right. This shows that in addition to the UK, nationalism is also powerful in other EU founding members.

However, nationalists’ nostalgia for the glorious past is shameful and outraging because the UK was an empire that was built on greed and the lust for power, at the expense of colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean islands. Besides, it is not proved that a Muslim British citizen does not have allegiance and affection for his country. It is very absurd that Muslims are seen as a threat to Britishness while people of the other faiths are regarded as staunch British citizens. British leavers can be seen as racist and supremacist because they believe that Britain is a society for the white Christians. As the tide of nationalism rose in the United Kingdom, Leavers seized the opportunity of Brexit and vented their anger and frustration on their government, putting an end to the UK membership in the EU. Again in history, nationalism stubbornly turnedagainst Europeanism.

**Conclusion**

Though the European Union is an economic leviathan whose cardinal mission is to guarantee economic abundance and prosperity, many of the recent crises were caused by this institution itself. This project is facing an unprecedented challenge by Eurosceptic critics, and division still persists between the member states. It is in the United Kingdom that the worst political crisis in the European Union’s history took place. After many years of continuous enlargements, the UK appalled the other member states by her decision to leave the European Union. What led the UK citizens to vote for disintegration from the European Union included a ravenous desire to regain national sovereignty, the view that controlling borders and deserting immigration would offer them more jobs, better wages, and decent services. As leavers passionately believed that the UK is tainted with many races, disintegration from the European Union became part of a massive wave of nationalism that took place in England and some other European countries. All these factors were ultimately yoked with the recent economic and refugee crises and resulted in Brexit. Despite the existence of vehementopposition from the ‘remain' campaign, leavers believed that their ample arguments for leaving the EU outweighed the benefits of remaining part of it. Leavers simply seized the opportunity and laid their key agenda of leaving Europe.

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