

British politics and the Brexit challenge

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Brexit challenge: basic timeline

- **June 24, 2016:** The referendum result is announced, David Cameron **resigns** as British prime minister, the pound plunges to a **three-decade low**. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, European Council President Donald Tusk, European Parliament President Martin Schulz and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte (representing the EU presidency), issue a joint statement on the outcome: “We regret this decision but respect it.”
- **June 28, 2016:** David Cameron’s last European Council summit.
- **June 30, 2016:** Home Secretary Theresa May formally declares her **candidacy for the Conservative Party leadership** “to unite the party and country.”

Brexit challenge: basic timeline

- **July 13, 2016: May becomes prime minister (the UK will “forge a bold new positive role for ourselves in the world.”)**
 - Boris Johnson as foreign secretary, David Davis as Brexit secretary, Liam Fox as international trade secretary and Philip Hammond as chancellor of the exchequer.
- **July 27, 2016:** Frenchman Michel Barnier nominated by the European Commission to lead the EU’s Brexit negotiations.
- **December 7, 2016:** The House of Commons votes 461 to 89 in favor of May’s plan to trigger Brexit by the end of March 2017 (David Davis: it will be “the most important and complex negotiations in modern times.”)
- **December 15, 2016:** EU leaders meet in Brussels without the UK at an informal summit and adopt guidelines for negotiating procedures during the talks.

Brexit challenge: basic timeline

- **24 January, 2017: Supreme Court rules in favour of campaigner Gina Miller**, that the Government must obtain the approval of Parliament before starting the Brexit process.
- **29 March, 2017: UK delivers formal notice of its intention** to leave the bloc under Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty, to European Council President Donald Tusk.
- **18 April, 2017: May calls a snap General Election.**
- **9 June, 2017: Election results show a hung Parliament** (Labour gains and the Tories lose their majority)
- **13 June, 2017: May secures a deal with the DUP to support her in Parliament**

Brexit challenge: basic timeline

- **19 June, 2017:** Then-Brexit Secretary David Davis and Michel Barnier meet to begin formal Brexit negotiations
- **22 September, 2017:** May gives landmark Brexit speech in Florence, where she outlined the UK's proposals to the EU
- **8 December, 2017:** Joint report published outlining early details of the Withdrawal Agreement
- **19 March, 2018:** Details of the Transitional Period agreed in principle
- **6 July, 2018:** May hosts Cabinet at her country retreat **Chequers** to launch her Brexit plan (named the Chequers deal) → several ministerial resignations

Brexit challenge: basic timeline

- **25 September, 2018:** Labour conference votes to consider option of a **second Brexit vote**
- **14 November, 2018:** Government publishes **585-page Draft Withdrawal Agreement** and Political Declaration
- **11 December, 2018:** ECJ rules that UK can unilaterally revoke Article 50, and thus reverse Brexit
- **10 December, 2018:** May delays a planned Meaningful Vote on the Brexit deal
- **12 December, 2018:** May survives a vote of no confidence from within her own party

Brexit challenge: basic timeline

- **15 January, 2019:** Theresa May loses **Meaningful Vote** (432 MPs voted against it while 202 voted for it - a majority of 230, making it the biggest government defeat since 1924).
- **16 January, 2019:** Theresa May wins second no confidence vote
- **7 February, 2019:** EU rejects changes To Withdrawal Agreement
- **18 February, 2019:** MPs split from Labour Party to form "The Independent Group"
- **12 March, 2019:** MPs reject **Theresa May's Withdrawal Agreement** for the second time

Brexit challenge: basic timeline

- **18 March, 2019:** Speaker John Bercow tells Theresa May **Meaningful Vote 3 must be different**
- **21 March, 2019:** EU accepts **Brexit delay to April 12** unless Theresa May's deal passes by MPs
- **29 March, 2019:** MPs reject Withdrawal Agreement in '**Meaningful Vote 2.5**'
- **10 April, 2019:** **Emergency EU summit (flexstation, flexible delay until 31 October)**



International New York Times

Defining Brexit narrative

- UK referendum triggered a **series of processes in the UK** (not just about handling the exit but also about defining what sort of country the UK wants to be).
- British politics defined by a fight to **define the Brexit narrative**
- Why has the process of defining Brexit narrative been so difficult?
 - Theresa May struggling to find unity within her govt over what Brexit should mean.
- Churchill: **history is written by the victors**. Is it really so in the case of Brexit?

Defining Brexit narrative

- **'Brexit means Brexit' motto** sounds self-explanatory but is meaningless unless Brexit itself is defined.



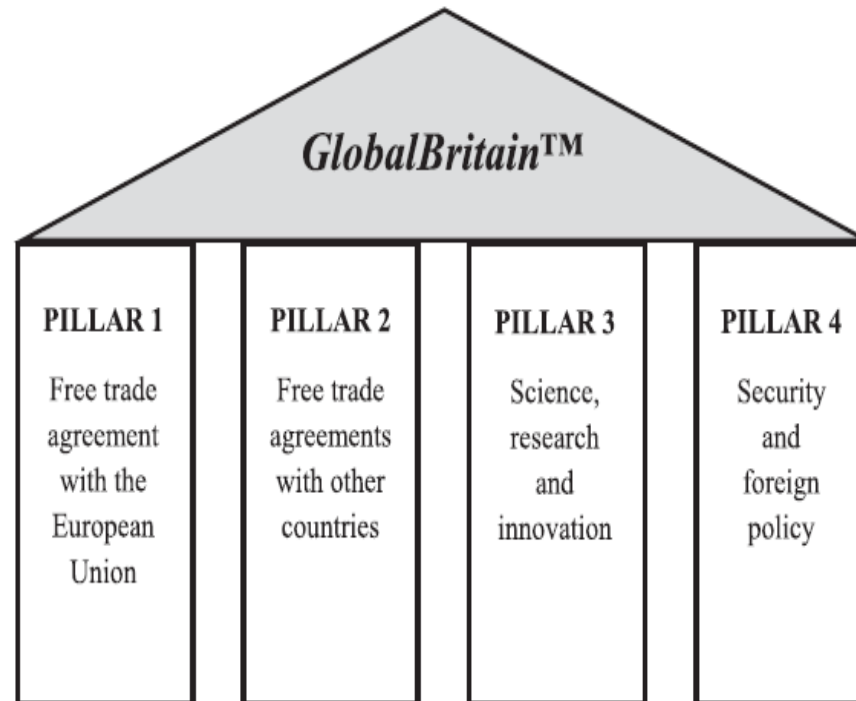
Defining Brexit narrative

- TM's Brexit narrative defined in “**big speeches on Brexit**” (Lancaster; Florence etc.)
 - Three most important aims:
 - Ending immigration from elsewhere in the EU
 - Ending the jurisdiction of the CJEU
 - Opting for free trade agreements with European markets
- Her Brexit narratives **challenged from many sides.**



Defining Brexit narrative

□ Global Britain narrative



HM Government and Brexit

- Brexit = for the government, it is an **unprecedented peacetime challenge in terms of political unity, administration and delivery**

Unity/collective responsibility

- TM's **premiership** struggled bc of **Conservative divisions over Europe** (something many of her predecessors faced)
- In appointing her first cabinet she tried to bring in some balance into this by **appointing leading pro-Leave campaigners**
- TM's leadership overshadowed by **doubts from the very beginning**
 - She won the leadership race without a vote.
- Her leadership has been a **sore point for many** – not least bc of the **centralisation of decision making in Downing Street 10** around her two closest advisors: Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill.

HM Government and Brexit

- Her decision to **call snap elections** (in part on the advice of some of her advisors) caught many in her cabinet by surprise.
 - Her weak campaigning skills and dire campaign – left her even more vulnerable post-election.

HM Government and Brexit

The administrative challenge

- Brexit = the biggest set of administrative, legal, negotiating and constitutional task since 1945
- Organising British govt for Brexit = a formidable task: i.a. because new departments had to be established:
 - Department for Exiting the EU (DexEU)
 - Department for International Trade

 - Some departments busier than others
- Enormous **stretch of UK-EU links**

HM Government and Brexit

The search for strategy

- The **inability** of British decision makers to know what they want and whether they can get it.
- **No clear ends and confused ways** (no surprise the UK has struggled to prepare)
- TM triggered Article 50 on 29 March 2017: by choosing this time she made time an ally of the EU
- Quick realization that the UK lacked the **ways and means to secure a 'quick victory'**.
- Repeated failures to analyse and understand the position of the rest of the EU

Parliament and Brexit

- Brexit and the **notion of parliamentary sovereignty in the UK**
 - Dilemma for Remain-backing MPs (nearly three quarters of MPs voted Remain in the 2016 referendum)
 - Impact of 2017 snap elections
- UK's legislative system – nothing more than an elected dictatorship?
- Brexit highlighted the **centralisation and high degree of power exercised by the UK government**
- Parl. = site of **intense arguments and differences** over what the UK's vote to leave **should mean**
- The deep **divisions in the Conservative and Labour parties** reflect **similar divisions in British society!**

Parliament and Brexit

- Parliament's role in **constant flux**, as demonstrated by the three roles it has played in the Brexit negotiations: **approving, scrutinising and instructing Brexit**.
- **EU Withdrawal Act 2018** gave parliament a defined role in approving any deal with the EU and in scrutinising and approving any course of action in the event of there being no agreement.

Approving Brexit

- Implementing withdrawal could not be done through **Royal Prerogatives** (powers government wields without much parliamentary oversight) → Britain's Supreme Court ruled in January 2017 against the British government.

Parliament and Brexit

- **Tensions between the executive and legislature** clearer when the Conservative Party lost its majority in the 2017 general election (confidence and supply arrangement with the ten MPs of Northern Ireland's **Democratic Unionist Party/DUP**).
- **Meaningful vote on Brexit** (one that is more than simply rejecting or accepting any agreement put forward)
 - So far **3 (2.5) meaningful votes** on the Withdrawal agreement.
- **Cross-party talks** (difficult bc of the **majoritarian nature of politics** in the House of Commons - a single party system of governing has long prevailed; **consensus politics** between parties does not come easy in the UK)

Parliament and Brexit

Scrutinising Brexit

- Parliament has succeeded in scrutinising the **handling of Brexit by the British government** (which has a long-standing reputation for being centralised and secretive).
- E.g. House of Commons successfully compelled the British government to reveal more than 58 internal government studies on the economic effects of Brexit.

Parliament and Brexit

Instructing Brexit

- Brexit has raised some **unique questions** about the **ability of parliament to instruct government** (traditionally the role of parliament, especially in international negotiations, has been to react to the executive instead of defining what policy should be).
- Late March 2019: MPs have finally taken control of the Brexit process (question for you: how successful was it?)

Judiciary and Brexit

- Brexit → series of legal challenges that eventually reached the UK's Supreme Court.
- **24 January, 2017:** Supreme Court rules in favour of campaigner Gina Miller, that the **Government must obtain the approval of Parliament before starting the Brexit process.**
- **Press attacks** on the judiciary
- Can a second referendum be called?



Party politics and Brexit

- **All parties (and their leader) have struggled to cope with the referendum result.**

Conservative Party

- Divided over Britain's EU membership more than ever
- Theresa Ma proved **incapable of bringing order to the party** (her agenda pushed to a **more traditional right wing** in British politics, incl. hard Brexit)
- TM: "If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere" (2016)
- 2017 elections – the result of hung parliament reignited **challenges to her leadership**

Party politics and Brexit

The Labour Party

- Conservative divisions over the EU have distracted attention from Labour's own problems with the issue
- Jeremy Corbyn's pathetic efforts (according to many) → **leadership challenges**
- **2017 elections changes the narrative on Corbyn's leadership** → Corbyn emerged a strengthened and popular leader (but still facing the issue about how to approach the EU)

Party politics and Brexit

Liberal Democrats

- Have **failed to benefit from the Brexit vote** (despite the surge in new members)
- Reasons for this failure?**
- Large number of members in the House of Lords = a pivotal position in votes over Brexit legislation in the upper house.

UKIP

- A party in search of both **unity and a cause**
- Is UKIP **doomed?**

The Union and Brexit

- **Brexit = a test to the constitutional, legal, political and social frameworks that hold the union together.**

A United Kingdom?

- Implementing Brexit requires the UK govt to make decisions on behalf of the whole UK (in some policy areas legally required to consult with devolved bodies).
- **Supreme Court ruling:** the UK govt did not have to consult devolved administrations over triggering Article 50 (setback for devolved administrations)
- UK govt holds meetings through the **Joint Ministerial Committee** + representatives of the devolved bodies have sought meetings with EU negotiators BUT the power to negotiate Brexit firmly in the hands of the UK govt.
 - Since 1973 **significant changes to the UK's constitutional set-up** (devolution has happened within a framework of UK membership of the EU).

The Union and Brexit

Scotland

- Possibility of the **second Scottish independence referendum** (dampened by 2017 election result)
- **Exiting the UK and rejoining the EU**= many political, economic, social, constitutional and legal questions

Northern Ireland

- Unique place within the UK; **unique politics**
- **The Irish border issue** (about much more than just trade)

London

England