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In/out referendum campaign

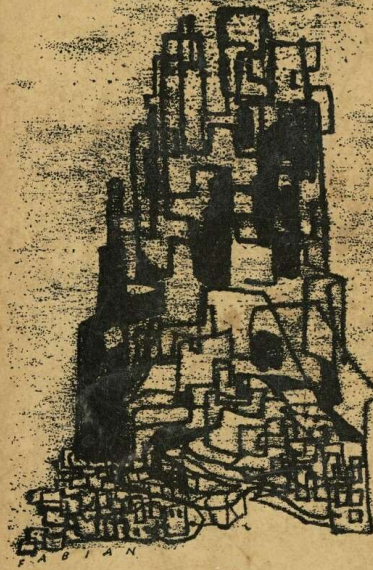
Dr Monika Brusenbauch Meislová
EVS465: Brexit: Politics, Policies and Processes

9 April 2019



PENGUIN BOOKS

Brexit



Franz Kafka

COMPLETE

ET BOOKS
PENG

UNABRIDGED

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Referendum campaign

- **unofficial beginning:** 20 February 2016 when PM announced that a referendum would be held)
- **official beginning:** 15 April 2016
- **duration:** 10 weeks



- Electoral Commission selected two official groups:
 - Designated official leading Remain campaigning group: Britain Stronger in Europe
 - Designated official leading Leave campaigning group: Vote Leave

Referendum campaign

Cabinet divisions

- Dilemma → suspension of **collective cabinet responsibility** by Cameron
- 6 of 24 cabinet ministers rejected the government position
- **importance of Boris Johnson's** decision to back Leave (DC wanted to avoid any sense of infighting/"blue on blue" attacks)
- **Tensions over the use of govt officials.**

Remain campaign

- **Focus on economic costs of brexit** (Treasury, IMF, Bank of England)
 - the one issue the Remain campaign could unite around
 - conglomerate of campaigners
 - focus was on the transactional, business-like partnership
- Intervention by **Obama**
- **Project Fear**
- Pro-Remain campaign **no illustration history** in UK politics
- The leadership of the campaign rested with the PM
- **Corbyn** hesitant in his support for Remain
- **Lib Dem** recovering from a heavy 2015 defeat
- Other Remain-backing parties (SNP, Greens, Lib Dem) **uneasy at sharing a campaign** with Cameron

**BRITAIN
STRONGER
IN
EUROPE**

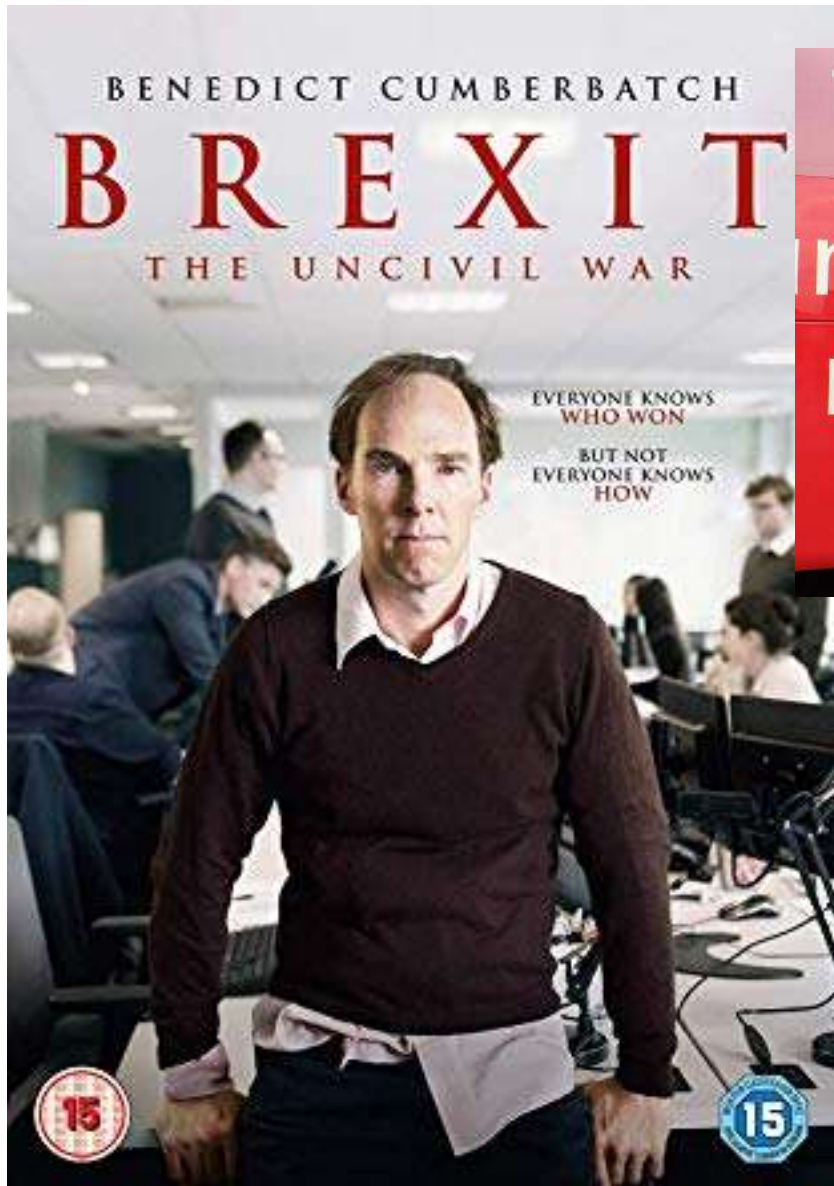
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Leave Campaign

- **Many Leave campaign groups**
- **Vote Leave: official campaign**, a cross-party campaign run by Matthew Elliot and Dominic Cummings
- Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Labour MP Gisela Stuart
- **Leave.EU** – a group connected to UKIP and funded by Aaron Banks
 - Tensions between the two groups (but allowed for a series of messages to be communicated to different groups of voters instead just one single message)
- **Initial focus** on the economic and sovereignty argument → quickly moved to an **immigration territory**
- **UKIP connections**

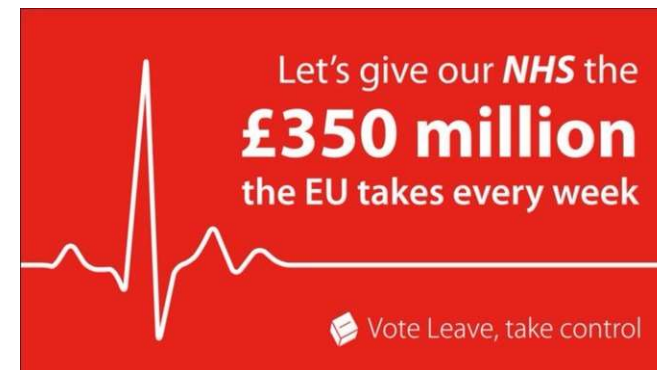


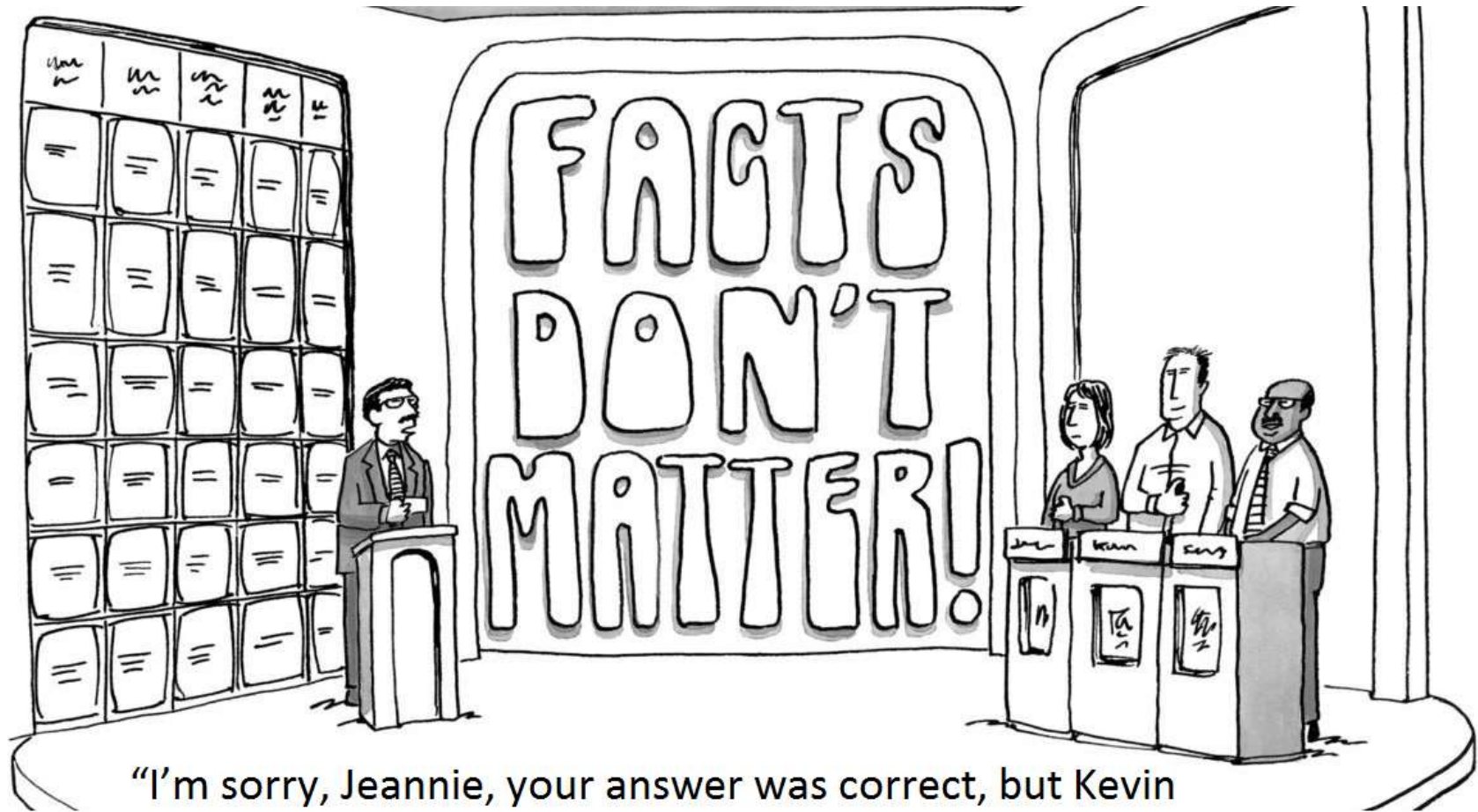


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Leave Campaign

- Immigration as the predominant issue in the debate
- Leave campaign able to draw on people's concerns about immigration with regard to security, identity, welfare, cost, border control + repeated failures of govt.
- **A post-truth political campaign/fact-free campaign**
- unlike general elections, there is no set date for another vote
- Both sides made much disputed claims!
- Most notorious (Vote Leave): we send 350 million the EU a week – let's fund our NHS instead.





“I’m sorry, Jeannie, your answer was correct, but Kevin shouted his incorrect answer over yours, so he gets the points.”

Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

Cameron's negotiations failed to convince

- Three important groups in particular:
 - Conservative parliamentary party (138 out of 330 backed Leave)
 - Conservative-backing media
 - Public and Conservative voters
- Renegotiation = **time wasted?**
- Exposed **tensions** within the Remain camp
- The Leave campaign had **stronger messages**
- Cameron not a **leading asset** for Remain (unlike 2011 AV referendum)
 - 2016: damaged reputation (austerity, govt cuts, Panama papers affair)



Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

- **Lib Dem** electorally tarnished
- **Labour/Corbyn**: lack of enthusiasm, poor portrayal in the press
- Leave campaign: **mix of messengers** at the UK level
 - **Boris Johnson**: strong, charismatic figurehead
 - Backing of other members of the Cabinet (govt in waiting)

Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

The Leave campaign better organised and run

- Leave campaign:
 - **more professional**
 - long history of Eurosceptic groups
 - advantage of the **many factions** (different messages targeted at different groups of voters)
 - not without tensions, of course (Cummings versus Farage)
 - **ruthless campaigning**

Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

Economic arguments proved insufficient to win the referendum

- Remain: too much focus on **economic costs** (reliability of the figures questioned)
- **Business divided** (contrast with 1975)
- *“That’s your bloody GDP. Not ours“.*

Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

Remain had no answer to arguments about immigration

- Immigration took over economy as a **number-one concern**.
- Remain hobbled by Cameron's 2010 commitment to bring down net immigration to under 100,000 a year (UK never came close to achieving this).
- Problems of Labour with focusing on immigration.

Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

The media campaign was won by Leave

- British printed press traditionally Eurosceptic.
- Cameron surprised by the campaigning might of British Right-leaning press.
- Broadcast media **more impartial** (by law)
- **Online and social media dominated** by Leave.
- **Take back control**: great slogan





Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

The EU was difficult to sell

- 2016 EU = faced with a series of **crises** (Eurozone, migration, Russia, Euroscepticism)
- Not helped by the UK's **low level of knowledge about the EU** (ill-prepared to assess the claims made by either side)
- Cameron & Co: **reaping what they had sown** (inconsistency appeared patronising)
- Intervention by Obama

Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

The electoral franchise benefited Leave

- 16- and 17-year olds, EU nationals residents in the UK and British citizens who had lived abroad for longer than 15 years unable to vote
- **Inaccurate polling**

Why did the UK vote to leave the EU?

Campaign connected to matters not directly about EU-UK relations

- Diverse matters
- **Anti-politics and anti-austerity**
- Ill-defined targets such as **distant and elitist London**
- **Challenges of globalisation**



International New York Times

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