

MUNI  
FSS

# Brexit and UK political institutions

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# 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.



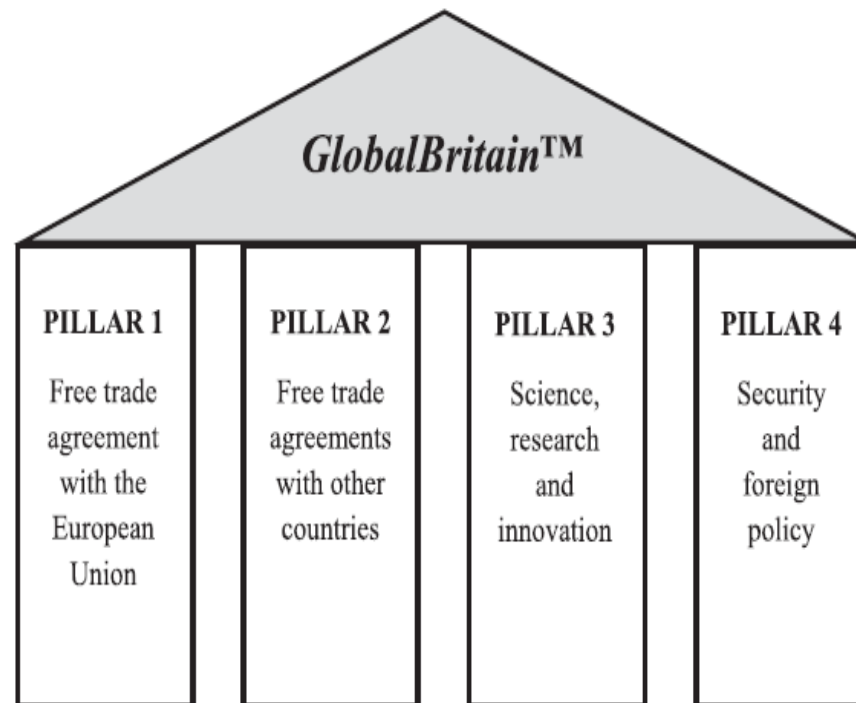
# Defining Brexit narrative

- 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?**

**Thank you for your attention!**