

**Harold D. Clarke, Matthew Goodwin, Paul Whiteley.** *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 272 pp \$19.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-316-60504-2.

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Just as Brexit is dominating British politics and society, so too will it increasingly dominate the academic study of European and UK politics. Harold Clarke et al.'s *Brexit* is part of the first wave of books on the subject to enter what is likely to become an (over)crowded marketplace. What distinguishes this volume is its emphasis on empirical data and statistical analysis, the coherence of the authors' argument and the narrative they offer of the campaign, and the sheer breadth of questions tackled in the volume. After the subject has been introduced in the first chapter, chapter 2 discusses the build-up to the referendum campaign, discussing prime minister David Cameron's ill-fated renegotiation effort and the politics beneath the distinct campaigns that emerged on both sides of the debate. Chapter 3 discusses—in great detail, it must be said—how the campaigns unfolded, which messages were chosen by “leave” and “remain,” respectively, and how these arguments resonated with the electorate as a whole. Chapter 4 offers a more historical account of Euroskepticism, in which the authors outline their “valence politics” theory of public opinion on the EU. Chapters 5 and 6 assess the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) as a political force, examining the views of those who voted for the party and charting its rise to prominence in the years immediately pre-

ceding the vote. Chapter 7 examines why individuals and certain communities voted the way they did in the referendum, while chapter 8 examines the consequences of Brexit for some key issue areas (economy, migration, democracy). Chapter 9, finally, ties the narrative together and restates the authors' principal claims, while discussing such additional lines of inquiry as how representative the UK case is and whether things could have worked out differently.

The text is at its strongest, and most on-message, when it is narrating the referendum campaign and utilizing the wealth of empirical data to fact-check important or contentious claims. Indeed, it is this blend of detailed description and careful statistical analysis that marks the volume out as both a helpful reference guide to Brexit and a substantial contribution to Brexit scholarship in its own right. Among the numerous claims the authors' extensive data allow for are: that “Project Fear” was an effective, if ultimately unsuccessful, strategy by the remain campaign; that Boris Johnson's decision to support leave was ultimately decisive for that campaign (if not “sufficient” in social science parlance); that the level of anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK is broadly representative of the European average; and that UKIP's supporters are, contrary to their reputation as affluent Tories, not that well off. This is only a snap-

shot of the numerous Brexit-linked claims analyzed by the authors, whose aim is nothing less than to offer a comprehensive, neutral analysis of what lay behind the vote itself—no easy task, given the complexity of factors involved, coupled with the nature of these debates as ongoing objects of political concern in the UK. By going into the level of detail that they do, and by carefully specifying appropriate statistical tests, the authors are thus able to take contemporary debates underway in British politics and society and offer an impartial and unbiased reading of the likely answer.

The only real weakness of the volume is that at times one gets the feeling the authors have taken on too much, with the coverage of the whole gamut of Brexit-related questions leading to a slight sacrifice in the volume's cohesion and the extent to which the relevant literature can be discussed in depth. Chapter 4, in which the authors outline their valence politics theory of public opinion on the EU, is a case in point, since it fits somewhat uneasily within the hitherto chronological structure of the volume, and since it features an in-depth theoretical discussion that is not present in many of the other chapters. Moreover, the volume is also notably stronger on the causes of Brexit than it is on the *consequences* of the decision, although in chapter 8 the authors do consider some of the potential effects of Brexit, specifying a series of models designed to test key claims from both sides concerning the anticipated effects on the economy, control of migration, and the quality of democratic governance. While the addition of a section on consequences is further testament to the authors' ambition and their laudable desire to leave no stone unturned, there is simply not enough space in a single chapter to do justice to the complexities of Brexit's anticipated effects. This is perhaps most noticeable when it comes to the topic of democracy and governance, where the authors' three-page discussion fails (predictably) to do justice the complexities of the "democratic deficit" debate and cannot engage

with the nuances of the voluminous literature on governance "beyond the nation-state."

A further, related concern in this section is the authors' claims to have successfully challenged many of the conventional wisdoms concerning the consequences of Brexit, not least that the EU has not stimulated economic growth in the UK (p. 190) and that EU migration can be controlled better by leaving the Union (p. 194). To begin with, these claims somewhat misrepresent what is at stake in the debates they ostensibly claim to solve. Whether the EU contributed to the growth of the UK economy, for instance, is a very different question to whether withdrawal will presage long-term economic effects. And serious debate on immigration has never really been about whether intra-EU migration could be controlled outside the EU (a point on which both sides agree), but rather on the desirability of migration from various economic and social perspectives. These claims are also undermined, moreover, by the failure to consider how the direction of British politics after Brexit (1950s-style social democracy, Singapore in Europe, etc.) would affect the consequences of British withdrawal. For governance, economic performance and the extent and desirability of immigration, this is a key consideration.

Ultimately, of course, the authors are right to contend that "Brexit will not necessarily have the grave consequences for the British economy and society that many politicians and pundits have predicted" (p. 203). And this cautionary note is reflective of the broader contribution of the volume, namely that it offers a (rare) analysis of Brexit that is careful, analytical, rigorous, and above all, politically neutral, even when this means overturning Brexit myths supported by the academy at large. In a fast-growing "Brexit industry," the authors will not have the last word on the questions they have identified or the conclusions they have reached, although they have ensured that the "first word" is as rigorous and empirically

grounded as students of Brexit could hope for. The volume is meticulously researched, covers a *lot* of ground for a small volume, and still manages to offer a coherent narrative, based on the use of empirical data and statistical modeling to “fact-check” existing claims and assumptions on both sides of the debate. While the structure could, at times, better serve the flow of this narrative (especially in relation to chapters 4 and 6, which are out of chronological order), overall the volume succeeds in blending history and analysis, resulting in an insightful, convincing—and, yes, sometimes depressing—narrative of Brexit. Indeed, *Brexit* looks to be the standard reference point for scholars and students wishing to understand the complex politics of British withdrawal from the EU, and deserves a place on reading lists covering British and European politics alike.

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