Four apologies and a statement

The apologies
1. For the whole ghastly mess...
2. This is a review of others’ research, and does not include any original data – and I am skating superficially over some complex and subtle arguments in the papers I rely on
3. A certain amount of personal witness is involved; unavoidably, I am a participant
4. It’s all words – no pictures or conversations

The statement
I was and am profoundly opposed both to the idea of the UK leaving the EU, and to most of the people who have led the campaign for Leave

Dual causation in economic psychology
Lea, Tarpy & Webley (1987)

More realistically...

Sources of data
- The 2016 referendum results are available by local government districts, dividing the UK into up to 380 geographical areas with marked social and economic variations, identifiable from Census data
- Surveys, focus groups etc carried out before and after the referendum
- Economic analysis predicting national and subnational impacts of Brexit
Background to Brexit: 1

• World-wide rise in right-wing populism and rejection of "experts"
• British (really, English) exceptionalism
  – “This scept’rd isle” / Our Island Story (see Wellings, 2016)
  – World War II mythology
  – Post-imperial angst
  – weakened UK unity due to NI Troubles and Scottish nationalism and devolution
• Historic Euroscepticism in the UK
  – in the UK public compared with (most) other EU countries (George, 2000)
  – In the UK media (Hawkins, 2012); much of it foreign or Europhobic owned
  – in the Conservative party (MacLeod & Jones, 2018)
  – perceived net financial flow to the EU
  – all regulation blamed on “Brussels” (note media mischief)

Background to Brexit: 2

• Economic decline
  – secular trend since mid-late 19th century
  – collapse of manufacturing since 1979
  – recession of 2007 onwards, and resulting government austerity policies
• Resentment at immigration
  – historically, at Commonwealth (Black & Asian) immigrants
  – more recently at high levels of immigration from the EU especially after 2004 & 2007 enlargements (more media mischief)
• Perceived EU failures
  – The Eurozone crisis (Greece, Ireland, Cyprus)
  – The Syrian refugee crisis

The question for economic psychologists

How, if at all, were economic conditions influencing people in how they voted?
The question is made more acute because:
• Economic analysis overwhelmingly suggests that Britain will suffer economically through leaving the EU
• On some measures, regions that voted most strongly for Leave seem likely to suffer most: the “What’s the matter with Kansas?” issue

Data in support of these two points follow...

The economic consensus

• The overall long-term impact of any Brexit on the UK was and is predicted to be negative, with a “hard” Brexit being the most damaging (Sampson, 2017, literature review)
• There were no immediate ill effects on the referendum result except for a fall in the value of the £ (Johnson and Mitchell, 2017)
• At the macroeconomic level, long term ill effects are anticipated:
  – Through tariff-induced inflation and loss of productivity due to reduced trade, reduced foreign investment and knowledge transfer, and restrictions on migration (Hosoe 2018, Erken et al. 2018, macroeconomic modelling; Van Reenen, 2017, literature review and structural modelling)
  – Through reduced foreign direct investment (Driffield & Karaglou 2019, Dhingra et al., 2018, econometric modelling)
  – Through reduced migration, which tends to enhance GDP (Noja et al., 2018; Portes & Forte, 2017, retrospective econometric analysis) and departure of EU citizens (Hosoe, 2018)
• Furthermore, at the policy level, the measures required to deal with economic disruption are likely to exacerbate the discontents thought to underlie the Leave vote (Morgan, 2017)
• And there will also be a negative effect on Ireland (Bergin et al., 2017, structural modelling of the Irish economy)…
• …and the EU generally (Samitas et al., 2018, agent-based modelling)

Regional variations in support for leaving the EU

Support for Leave was higher in
• England more than the rest of the UK
• People in post-industrial towns especially in the north
• Rural/small town communities more than cities
• The rest of England more than London
• Many regions that had benefited from EU funding (Becker et al. 2016; Johnston et al. 2018)

Demographic variations in support for leaving the EU

Support for Leave was higher in
• The old rather than the young
• Less rather than more educated people, but particularly those of intermediate levels of education
• Men more than women
• Welfare claimants more than others
• The “squeezed middle”, suffering economic threat and identifying as middle class
• Certain occupational categories, e.g. drivers, corporate managers, office workers
  (Alabrese et al., 2019, Antonucci et al., 2017, survey data; Gordon, 2018, Matti & Zhou 2017, vote breakdown)
Variations in economic impact

- UK shows exceptional regional inequality (McCann, in press)
- Across the 37 UK NUTS-2 regions, dependence on EU trade is positively correlated with Leave vote share (Los et al., 2017, using World Input-Output Database)
- However, Dhingra et al. (2017), taking sectoral exposure into account predict that regions with the highest Remain vote will be hardest hit. The City (the finance industry), the dominant force in the UK economy, is obviously at risk though mitigating steps have been taken.
- Brexit is likely to exacerbate regional disparities (McCombie & Spreafico, 2018)
- SMEs are particularly vulnerable (Brown et al., 2019), as are rural areas (Shucksmith, 2019)
- The effect of Northern Ireland is most acute in every way (Brownlow & Budd, 2019), and has become the political crux
- Feminist critiques suggest a disproportionate impact on women (Htziec & True 2017; Macleavey 2018)
- Young people are also disproportionately at risk (Ellison, 2017)

Is anything the matter with Kansas?

“...the era of simply arguing the rational or functional basis of support for the EU on grounds of objective self-interest is over... the Brexit debate has not only been framed in emotional and affective terms, it has clearly relied on reinvented memories of the past and contested imaginary futures that work to construct subjectivity, actions, and rationales.” (Manners, 2018, p. 1214)

“many who voted “leave” acted rationally on their own terms... [they] made the best judgement they could, based upon their experience... and in accord with [what they took to be] facts to which they had been exposed over many years (Cromby, 2019, pp. 64-65)

But issues remain

- Still, predictable economic disadvantage did play some role in persuading people to vote Remain
- But many people and regions that stood to lose economically from Brexit still voted Leave. Why?
- Four possibilities stand out:
  - The general rise in right-wing populism
  - Issues of national vs supranational identity
  - Impacts of (EU) immigration
  - Impacts of the economic past (globalisation since the 1970s, the recession of the 2000s)

The limits of solidarity

- A factor in the referendum debate was the EU’s failure, and harshness towards countries like Ireland and Greece, in the Eurozone crisis, and its perceived failure to cope with the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015. These failures can be seen in terms of a lack of European identity and solidarity (Alkopher, 2018; Witt 2013)
- UK media represented these as EU failings (Capelos et al., 2018)
- The UK especially has long sought to differentiate from the rest of the EU (Gifford 2016)
- Can Europe ever be a “homespace”? (Mitzen 2018). Some people do see themselves as “European citizens” (Mahendran, 2018)

Identity: local, national, supranational

- Supranationalism predicts support for the EU, but is not identical with it, nor is it orthogonal to national identification (Sindik et al. 2019, psychometrics)
- In England especially, issues of national identity were a key dimension of how people talked about the referendum, before and after (Andreouli & Nicholson, 2018, focus groups), and those who saw Englishness as more central were more likely to vote Leave (Chen and Urryman, 2019, survey)
- Crescenzii et al. (2018) reanalysed the Los et al. data but took into account average "cultural openness" -- knowledge of foreign languages, expenditure on foreign travel -- and find that Leave voting is in places of high internationalisation of the local economy but low cultural openness in the local population, creating tension.
- High “leave” macroregions (NUTS-1) are characterized by higher relevance of cultural forms that are related to local identity/belongingness (Yehliu et al. 2019 representative survey)
- Cognitive inflexibility predicts both authoritarianism, attachment to the UK, and also support for Leave (Zmigrod et al. 2018)
- However Clarke et al. (2017, panel survey) find that national identity operated further back in the causal chain of leave voting: proximate factors were individual cost-benefit calculations on economic and immigration factors

Immigration

- From WWI on (and indeed before), fear of immigration has been a powerful force in UK politics (Portice & Reicher 2018)
- In the past decade, anti-immigration and Eurosceptic discourse have become increasingly intertwined in the UK media (Balch and Balabanova 2017)
- Rapid increase in negative attitudes to Polish immigrants since 2008 (Rozpinikowska 2019) – probably true of other A8 countries too
- A substantial minority of white Britons have the potential to be mobilised in racist directions (Flemmen & Savage, 2017, using panel data of those born in 1958)
- In April 2016, intention to vote Leave was correlated with Islamophobia (Swami et al., 2018)
- In the referendum, across 380 local authority areas, those with higher levels of EU immigrants, and non-white population, were less likely to vote Leave, though those with recent rises in overall or specifically EU immigration were more likely to do so (Goodwin & Heath 2016, Colantone & Stanig 2018, Essletzbichler et al. 2018, Alaimo & Solvetti 2019, Matti & Zhou 2017)

The general rise of right-wing Populism
 Are there psychological roots of the world-wide (and Europe-wide) rise of right-wing populism?
 • “the resentful reaction towards the present and the motivation to change it backward” (Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018)
 • discontent with neoliberalism and its effects (Bettache & Chiu, 2019)
 • anti-intellectualism (Motta, 2018)
 • discourse of anger with neoliberal economics, social liberalism and political mistrust (Schmidt, 2017)
 • a growing “Cosmopolitan-Parochial” divide over open borders (De Vries, 2018)

Questions about the populism explanation
 • Is such populism necessarily right-wing?
   — “a failed policy consensus, a rise in inequality and a decline in the representativeness of political elites, rather than a resurgence of intolerance or xenophobia, are the principal causes of the Brexit vote” (Hopkin, 2017)
   — but support for supranational institutions is generally low in Right Wing Authoritarians (Peitz et al. 2018)
 • Is Brexit only the UK manifestation of a world-wide (or Europe-wide trend), or are there special factors? e.g. Imperial decline: Bachmann & Sidaway (2016)

Geographic & demographic variation in current economic conditions
 • A popular analysis:
   – The “left behind” (e.g. Goodwin & Heath, 2016)
   – “Revenge of the places that don’t matter” (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018)
   – ‘the chickens’ of regional inequality (eventually) ‘coming home to roost’ (Gordon, 2018, but as an Aunt Sally)
 • Reality, however, is more complicated
   – Regional patterns are somewhat predicted by current economic conditions (Essletzbichler et al 2018)
   – but not all analyses find much effect
   – very long term industrial decline does predict high Leave voting (Gordon 2018; Matti & Zhou, 2017; MacLeod & Jones, 2018)

More sophisticated geo/demographic analyses
 • Sectors matter!
   — In some industries, individuals are particularly directly affected by EU regulation – e.g. agriculture and fisheries – the latter may explain strong Leave support in Cornwall, for example
 • Interactions, e.g. Locally-rooted individuals were more likely to vote Leave – but only in areas suffering economic decline (Lee et al, 2018)
 • Across NUTS-3 districts, those with greatest economic decline since 1995 have highest Leave vote, and this can be attributed to “Chinese impact shock”, measured by the regional sector-specific rise in imports (Colantone and Stanig, 2018)

Other psychology
 • Psychoanalytic, e.g. Kolvraa (2018), Parker (2016)
 • Feelings organized by myths (and the media and political campaigns): Cromby (2019), Manners (2018)
 • Personality traits: Fear and neuroticism (Obschonka et al. 2018); lack of openness (Garretsen et al. 2018). Openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability all mediate attitudes to the EU transnationally (Curtis & Nielsen 2017)
 • Meadian social psychology, e.g. Andreouli et al (2019)
 • Cognitive psychology, e.g. Extremists are poor at metacognition (Rollwage et al. 2018), and those with more rigid categorization tendencies have more nationalistic attitudes and were more likely to support Brexit (Zmigrod et al 2018)

Some tentative conclusions: Towards an economic psychology of the Brexit vote
 • There were significant elements of rational, economic-interest voting, which have been somewhat neglected
 • Some people saw reduction in immigration as in their interest, and voted rationally in that light
 • A bundle of Cosmopolitan vs Parochial attitudes mediate the effects of immigrant numbers – but high immigration from recent EU members predicts Leave voting
 • Local economic decline, due to globalization and austerity, played a significant part. There may be no gratitude in politics – but there may be resentment
And the economic psychology of Brexit?

Economic decline

The media

Politics

Voting Leave

References (not for projection)