

June in; the united
kingdom voted in
majority



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June 29, 2016—the day Britain shocked the world. The results of the British referendum were in; the United Kingdom voted in majority to exit the European Union. “ The results were termed ‘ shocking’ and ‘ unexpected’ and the resulting uncertainty terrified investors, causing stocks to plummet and sending global markets into chaos (Woron).” While the majority of world was in shock, however, one group of political theorists expected this outcome since the inception of the EU: Realists.

60 years ago in the post World War II era, many European Nations were war-torn and distraught. They were exhausted and disinterested in the idea of conflict between their neighbor states. Many of these European Nations who desired peace admired the success of the world’s most successful Federal Republic—the United States. In an attempt to mirror the US’s security and strength, several European countries decided that they would be better off joining together to form a supra-national organization that focused on the notions of collective security and free trade, rather than to continue to live disconnected and alone. Today, this well established and extremely accredited organization is called the the European Union (EU). The European Union —initially called the European Economic Community—was founded in 1958 in the wake of World War II.

This supra-national organization was founded on four principles; to guarantee the free movement of people, goods, services and capital throughout Europe (Foster). Many people with liberal views argue that joining supra-national organizations like the EU is extremely beneficial for a state; however many countries were initially reluctant to join. For example, the United Kingdom was extremely hesitant and did not join the organization

until 1973 due to trust issues between the UK and EU power houses like France. Today, the European Union consists of 28 member states that share several defining characteristics. The first is that the EU operates under a single currency, the Euro, and functions as a single market for goods. Second, citizens of the member states are allowed to live and work in any of the other countries within the EU.

Although most member states are fond of these ideas and policies, countries like the United Kingdom have expressed several doubts. These doubts were spurred by the increase of immigration, safety concerns, job security and a general feeling that their sovereignty was being infringed on—largely due to increased legislative pressure from the EU to have the UK conform to its wants and needs. Because of this, in 2015 British Prime Minister David Cameron announced a referendum to British citizens focusing on whether the UK should remain in the European Union (Chang). Shockingly, out of the 71% of citizens that voted, 51.8% voted in favor of Britain exiting the Union.

Although Britain has not officially left the European Union, they are set to leave the EU in March of 2019; this departure has come to be known as “Brexit”. Currently, deliberations are occurring between delegates of the United Kingdom and the European Union to discuss the new trading relations as well as immigration between Europe post Brexit (Weaver). While the European Union may demonstrate a real-world example of liberalism working, the United Kingdom’s nationalistic tendencies has lead to voters and lawmakers choosing to resort back to its realist views of focusing on national identity and sovereignty. The European Union was founded on the basic principles of liberalism. Early liberalism was founded by political

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philosophers like John Locke in the late 1600s, but many versions of the political ideology have emerged since. Locke's version of liberalism argues that humans have certain unalienable natural rights: life, health, liberty and possessions (Miller).

Liberalism as pertaining to international relations is a perspective that revolves around the importance of the state, international law, international organizations and nongovernment organizations as important factors in world politics (Jackson). Proponents of liberalism also typically view international relations as a system of interactions with the potential of mutual gain through cooperation. " Liberals see a global society that functions alongside states and sets an important part of the content for state action. Liberals believe " that they need government in order to protect individuals from being harmed by one another (Minogue)." Trade crosses borders, people have contacts with one another, and international institutions such as the European Union mitigate some of the harsher aspects of anarchy (Nye)." There are three main sects of Liberalism — economic, social and neoliberalism (Nye).

Economic liberalism, focusing heavily on trade. Trading between states is essential because it leads states to define their interests in a way that makes war less important to them (Nye). " Economic liberals also stress the importance of a free market and free trade, and seek to limit government intervention in both the domestic economy and foreign trade (Miller).

" Social liberalism argues that person-to-person contact reduces conflict by promoting understanding. Finally, Neoliberalism focuses on the importance

of institutions in reducing global conflict (Nye). Robert Keohane, an American academic, has stated that international organizations are essential because they provide information and a framework that shapes expectations (Nye). Institutions stabilize expectations by providing a sense of continuity, an opportunity for reciprocity, a flow of information, and ways to resolve conflict and mitigate the negative effects of anarchy (Nye).

“ The impact of liberalism on the modern world is profound. The ideas of individual liberty, person dignity, free expression, religious tolerance, private property, universal human rights, transparency of government, limitations on government power, popular sovereignty, national self-determination, and privacy can be seen throughout most democracies in the world today” (Miller). The European Union as a whole (as well as the nations that decided to join it) can be considered as examples and supporters of the political theory of liberalism because of their desire for liberal qualities. First, the theory of economic liberalism and the importance of a laissez-faire economy can be seen through the European Union’s single market economy. Although the European Union does not participate in a “ free market”, their market contains very similar qualities, and is referred to as a single market economy. According to the European Commission, a single market economy is more than just a free trade zone.

It means that goods, services, investments and people can move freely between any member country. “ There is no immigration restrictions nor is there any tariffs (European Economic Commission).” Economic liberals argue that “ trade is important because it may lead states to define their interests in a way that makes war less important to them (Nye).” This very notion

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reflects the intent of the European Union when they agreed on the single market economy. Because European nations had been going to war with each other so frequently, they wanted to create mutual interests for all members that would not only make war less likely, but actively promote peace. Secondly, the idea of social liberalism can be reflected through the EU's immigration policies.

Aside from being an asylum zone for many refugees, immigration within EU nations is an enormous asset of the Union. "The member states of the European Union agree that EU citizens and their families have freedom of movement within the EU and the European Economic Area—these citizens are privileged migrants because they don't require individual permission from officials as other migrants do (Magyar)." This reflects social liberalism because social liberals believe that person-to-person interaction is at an advantage because such contacts make others seem less foreign and less hateful than they once seemed. The European Union even has a program entitled the Erasmus Program that encourages students to study in the universities of other European Countries (Nye). The EU practices social liberalism because it encourages citizens from member states to interact with others from other nations and live abroad. Having a transnational society affects what people in a democracy want from their foreign policy and in this case the European Union's citizens are telling their nations that they support immigration and free trade. Lastly, the third form of liberalism often referred to as neoliberalism, is the idea of the importance of international/supra-national organizations.

Neoliberalists stress that supra-national organizations are essential because they cultivate trust and cooperation between nations (Nye). The European Union has been around for over 60 years, and it has been an organization that provides a sense of continuity for its members states. The reason the EU exists and the reason that member states want to continue to be apart of the EU rather than “ exit” themselves like the UK is attempting to do, is because they prefer to view world politics with the lense of liberalism. They believe that by having this transnational organization that unites them all they can focus on collective security, free trade, and transparency. The Union is also seen as beneficial for liberal states because it is an organization that that can help solve problems between members before issues are blown out of proportion. The United Kingdom’s desire to exit the European Union as a whole can be seen as the UK’s desire to revert back to its politically realistic origins.

Classical realism can date back to the writings of Thomas Hobbes, Hans Morgenthau, and Nicolo Machiavelli, but can also be seen in more recent realist writings such as the policies of President Richard Nixon and his secretary of state Henry Kissinger (Nye). According to realists, international politics is first and foremost about protecting the state from other states meaning that security and power is their main priority. Realists view international relations as a system defined by the distribution of power around the globe. Because of the ongoing relevance of realism throughout history, many sects of Realism have evolved, including Neoclassical-Realism. “ Neoclassical realism includes an appreciation of the role decision-makers – and therefore their state – act in calculated, rational ways to maximise the

national interest (Oliver).” As mentioned before, the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union should not come as a surprise, especially to realists. “ Britain has always been ambiguous, and Brexit may be built on that notion” (Manson ?).

There are two main notions in realism that point to the UK’s decision to leave the EU as having a politically realistic reasoning. The first is that in a realist world, “ the State is absolutely sovereign, i. e. has no institution over it which may be able to limit its freedom of action or make it take into consideration anything, except the national interests (Kathon).” Clearly, being apart of the European Union means that the state is not sovereign because they are forced to conform to many of the wants and needs of the EU, and national interest and the freedom of actions are limited. For example, in 1972, a year before the UK decided to join the EU, the EU passed the European Communities Act of 1972. This Act implicitly stated that EU law was supreme over the members states laws.

This included UK law, and in turn many of the United Kingdom’s legislation have been made abroad (Foster). In a recent study by the House of Commons, researchers estimated that 14-17% of the United Kingdom’s laws derive from the EU (Foster). “ In the same study, the UK government estimated that about 50 per cent of UK legislation with “ significant economic impact” originates from EU legislation (Foster).” Now it is no secret that the British parliament is no longer sovereign. Nor is it a secret that the “ majority of Britain’s laws are made overseas by dictates passed down from Brussels and rulings upheld by the European Court of Justice (Foster).

” But now because of Brexit, the United Kingdom can make their own laws on their homeland and restore their sovereignty. Another major aspect of realism is the importance of state power and the strength of military power in world politics (Bell). Currently, the UK’s national security considerations conflict with EU laws—for this reason the UK government’s security has not been as effective as the UK desires. Although Britain is not apart of the Schengen borderless travel area, EU citizens still have the right to free movement, which makes it very seamless for people to immigrate (BBC).

In turn, because of this freedom of travel, being apart of the EU makes it easier for potential terrorists to slip in and out of member states. As a nation looking through a realist lense, it makes sense why the United Kingdom decided to leave the EU. As a realist nation, their military power and security is their main priority, and by being apart of the EU, both of those aspects were being hindered. By leaving the EU, Britain would have “ more influence on the world stage as an independent power (BBC).” Secondly, a major driving factor that encouraged Brexit was the EU’s immigration policies.

While the EU supports immigration, the United Kingdom has felt that immigration has been abused by EU citizens as well as foreigners for many years. Currently, “ European nationals do not need a visa to enter Britain under the EU’s fundamental right of free movement, which is the price for access to the single market. Britain could seek to opt out of free movement and seek a “ free trade agreement”, but it could still have to pay some tariffs and face barriers (Foster).

” Clearly, there was no easy way for the United Kingdom to avoid the immigration regulations that come with being a member state of the EU, and there only choice to mitigate the immigration crisis was to leave the EU altogether. This was in part because the immigration crisis in all of Europe, but particularly in the UK, has left its citizens disheartened. One theory that drove British citizens to vote to leave the EU was they they believe, “ that migrants compete with the local population for jobs, driving down wages and pushing up unemployment for British people (Tetlow).” “ In 2015, there were approximately 3.

3 million EU immigrants living in Britain. About a third live in London. EU migrants tend to be younger and better educated than the UK-born population. They are also more likely to be employed — indeed, work is the main draw for them to come to Britain (Tetlow).” Since Britain decided to leave the EU they can now control immigration laws, and by doing so it will greatly decrease the immigration population in the UK. Aside from the fear of immigrants taking jobs away from UK born citizens, the British people were worried that their identity was being altered. Although nationalism is not a key component of the realist theory, many realists argue that nationalism is an extremely powerful force in international politics.

Realists think this because “ Nationalism reinforces the inclination that states have to balance against their adversaries, not bandwagon with them. Nationalism and realism act together as powerful antidotes to contagion (Mearsheimer).” The citizens of the United Kingdom felt like that by being apart of the EU a part of their national identity was being altered because of

the mass amounts of immigrants were moving into their homeland and changing British social society.

Applying a realist and a liberalist lense to the current international issue of Brexit explains why states that are in the EU want to continue to be, and why Britain decided to leave. Personally, I believe that Brexit is best understood through a realist perspective. For realists, Brexit is not surprising; it is a clear example of realists' main criticism of liberalism, that "institutions like the EU are actually quite fragile, while other forces, such as nationalism and the desire for autonomy, are ultimately more influential in state affairs (Woron)." Brexit is an example of realists' suspicion that international organizations are ultimately not sustainable. Many liberals would never have pictured Britain wanting a referendum to exit the EU because they didn't actively look at the organization through the critical lense of a realist. As mentioned before, for centuries Neoliberal theorists have argued that institutions ensure cooperation between states through their commitment to each other (Woron). But as seen in the international issue of Brexit, as soon as a state feels that their sovereignty, power and military strength are being hindered, they chose to leave the liberalist world and resort back to a realist world advocating for their own dominance.

In summary, "Brexit has demonstrated that the power of nationalism must not be underestimated while the power of international institutions must not be overestimated (Woron)."