

Ingrid Skjølset Ustad

How Vote Leave's ideas of identity influenced the Brexit referendum outcome

Bachelor's project in European Studies with Foreign Languages

Supervisor: Dr Michael J. Geary

May 2020

Ingrid Skjølset Ustad

How Vote Leave's ideas of identity influenced the Brexit referendum outcome

Bachelor's project in European Studies with Foreign Languages
Supervisor: Dr Michael J. Geary
May 2020

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Historical Studies



Abstract

This thesis has aimed to answer the research question "*In what way did Vote Leave's ideas of identity shape the outcome of the Brexit referendum campaign?*". The research question has been answered through the lens of ideas of identity. Ideas of identity entails national identity, sovereignty and otherness understood as immigration. The methodological tool this thesis relies on, is the theoretical framework of causality. The key argument made in the thesis is that Vote Leave successfully exploited ideas of identity during the 2016 referendum campaign, and that ideas of identity resonated well with those who voted for the UK to leave the EU. The thesis concludes that even though other factors such as the complicated relationship between the UK and the EU cannot be ignored, Vote Leave did succeed in exploiting their ideas of identity during the 2016 referendum campaign.

Sammendrag

Denne avhandlingen har hatt som mål å svare på forskningsspørsmålet «*På hvilken måte formet Vote Leave sine ideer om identitet utfallet av Brexit-folkeavstemningskampanjen?*». Forskningsspørsmålet blir besvart gjennom perspektivet til oppfatninger av identitet. Oppfatninger om identitet i avhandlingen innebærer nasjonal identitet, suverenitet og «annenhet», forstått som innvandring. Det metodologiske verktøyet denne avhandlingen er basert på, er det teoretiske rammeverket for kausalitet. Det viktigste argumentet i oppgaven er at Vote Leave lyktes med å utnytte oppfatninger om identitet under folkeavstemningskampanjen i 2016, og at oppfatninger om identitet resonerte godt med dem som stemte for at Storbritannia skulle forlate EU. Avhandlingen konkluderer med at selv om andre faktorer slik som det kompliserte forholdet mellom Storbritannia og EU ikke kan ignoreres, lyktes Vote Leave med å utnytte oppfatningene sine om identitet under folkeavstemningen i 2016.

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction.....3
- 2. Identity5
- 3. Sovereignty7
- 4. Otherness.....9
- 5. "Take Back Control" and the NHS 12
- 6. Vote Leave's influence on the referendum 15
- 7. Conclusions 18
- 8. Bibliography 19

1. Introduction

In June 2016, the referendum of whether the United Kingdom (UK) should stay or leave the European Union (EU) was held. The outcome of the referendum revealed that Brexit indeed was a fact, and that the UK would be leaving the EU. The shocking results of the ballot rippled through Britain and other European countries, leaving not only Britain and the European countries in disbelief, but also the political and economic union which is the EU in disbelief. The immediate consequences of the result were dramatic, with among other things the resignation of British Prime Minister David Cameron (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1259). The outcome of Britain's referendum on EU membership was not surprising due to several factors such as a growing dismay in political and social matters. Among other things the nation was divided in matters such as immigration. In the Brexit referendum campaign there were two official campaign organizations, "Britain Stronger in Europe" and "Vote Leave" (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1262). In this thesis we seek to answer and defend the following research question: *In what way did Vote Leave's ideas of identity shape the outcome of the Brexit referendum campaign?* This question is going to be answered through the lens of ideas of identity.

To address how Vote Leave's exploitation of ideas of identity shaped the outcome of the Brexit referendum campaign, this thesis will through the lens of national identity explore the concepts of identity, sovereignty and otherness. Through these concepts, the thesis aims to explain how Vote Leave exploited the ideas of identity in order to achieve a successful campaign in terms of influencing the public to support their view of the EU. In order to delimit the thesis, a clarification of the term national identity will be necessary. It is a known fact that the United Kingdom consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, while Great Britain consists of England, Scotland and Wales. All of these countries each have their own national identity, and because of this a clarification of the term will be necessary. When referring to Britain or the UK in this thesis, we will be talking about people who identify as having a British identity as either their single identity or as part of their dual identity. Furthermore, this thesis will only focus on the Vote Leave campaign in order to delimit the thesis. Lastly, the thesis will rely on polls and data in order to support our research question.

In this thesis the aim is to explain the outcome of the Brexit referendum through the lens of identity used by the Vote Leave campaign. This thesis is a contribution of an already established line of theory and empirical research, and will therefore rely on data collected from other scholars. Additionally, through the data collection from these scholars, an analysis will be conducted in order to shed new light on ideas of identity in correlation to the Vote Leave campaigns success in the Brexit 2016 referendum. When discussing the concept of identity, Lindsey Richards and Anthony Heath (2019) provides us with the knowledge of the possibility of British identity being both singular or dual. This research is in many ways simple, yet effective when narrowing down the concept of British identity in this thesis. Additionally, Brown (2018) offers the thesis's understanding of sovereignty. By rooting the understanding of sovereignty from the understanding of sovereignty in social science and political theory, the concept of sovereignty is being understood in the desired context in this thesis. Lastly, the concept of otherness will draw from definitions provided by Ashcroft and Bevir (2016) as well as Risse (2010). Through Risse the understanding of a separation between a "self" and a "other" in a community is presented. With the addition of Ashcroft and Bevir's contextualisation of the "other" seen in the context of the backlash against multiculturalism and immigration in European countries, the thesis gains a better understanding of the link between

immigration and identity. Additionally, the thesis will rely on data sampled by polling companies and research centres such as Ipsos MORI, Lord Ashcroft and the British Social Attitudes Survey conducted by the National Centre of Social Research. The thesis relies on these sources given their high credibility.

The methodological tool in which this thesis will be relying on, is the theoretical framework of causality. Causality “[...] assumes that the value of an interdependent variable is the reason for the value of a dependent variable” (Warner, 2018, p. 2). In other words, if Y is the outcome – what is X? In this thesis the Y will be the referendum outcome. It is widely known that Britain voted to leave the EU, but what we do not know is X – which is the *why* to our outcome. This thesis will use identity and concepts closely related to identity as the X in order to answer the Y. Meaning, that we will use the effect of Vote Leave’s exploitation of ideas of identity to explain the outcome of the referendum campaign. This thesis has chosen the methodological tool of causality because the outcome is already known. By using causality as our methodological tool, this thesis is enabled to further research ideas of identity in order to explain the outcome.

The outline of the thesis will be the following: the thesis will consist of six chapters. Chapter one will be about the concept of identity, and how the role of identity was exploited by the Vote Leave campaign. The main arguments in this chapter will be that the Vote Leave campaign purposely exploited the concept and ideas of national identity in order to successfully influence the public to Vote Leave in the 2016 Brexit referendum. In chapter two the concept of sovereignty will be discussed. The main arguments in this chapter will be that the Vote Leave campaign used the concept of sovereignty and its associations with democracy to influence the public to Vote Leave. In chapter three the concept of otherness will be explored. The main arguments in this chapter is that the Vote Leave campaign used the association of otherness linked to scepticism towards immigration in order to win votes and make Brexit happen. In chapter four the thesis will look at the Vote Leave campaigns slogan “Take Back Control” and the issue of the NHS. The argument this chapter makes is that the ideas of identity presented in chapter one, two and three were prominent in both the slogan and in the issue of the NHS, and therefore being a decisive factor for those of the public who voted for the UK to leave the EU. In chapter five the UK’s relationship and attitudes towards the EU since the 1970s and up until the referendum in 2016 will be briefly outlined, as well as providing an analysis of how far Vote Leave successfully exploited ideas of identity in the referendum campaign and the impact this had on the referendum outcome. The chapter makes the argument that even though the troubled past of the EU-UK relationship cannot be ignored, the decisive factor in the referendum outcome was Vote Leave’s exploitation of ideas of identity. Lastly, chapter six will provide the thesis’s conclusions, followed by the bibliography.

2. Identity

Chapter one is going to be about the concept of identity, and how the role of identity was exploited by the Vote Leave campaign. The thesis will argue that through ideas of national identity, Vote Leave aimed to influence the public to Vote Leave in the 2016 Brexit referendum. Furthermore, the link between collective identities and national identity will be discussed in order to reflect upon how the concept of British identity and national identity influenced the referendum. The main arguments in this chapter will be that the Vote Leave campaign purposely exploited the concept and ideas of national identity in order to successfully influence the public to Vote Leave in the 2016 Brexit referendum.

Through Risse's definition of collective identities, we know that this thesis will be based on research which refers to collective identities and social identity as "[...] that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Risse, 2010, p. 22). With this definition, the opportunity of people having multiple identities also unfolds itself. Research done by Lindsay Richards and Anthony Heath, tells us that "people with a British identity (either as a single or dual identity) represent a substantial majority of the population, and can perhaps be regarded as expressing the voice of the 'British people'" (Richards & Heath, 2019). Through their research the overall identities found in the UK and their preference regarding Brexit is uncovered. Richards & Heath's study tells us that those who voted for the UK to leave the EU, were likely to identify strictly as only English and not as British. Of those who identified as having a strictly English identity, about 50 per cent voted for the UK to leave the EU. The group which identified as having either a single British identity or a dual British identity, were quite evenly split in their preference of either Vote Leave or to Remain. These numbers tell us that the tipping point in favour of Vote Leave in the UK referendum may have been the strong sense of national identity of those who strictly identify as English.

With the notion of national identity, Tilley, Exley & Heath explains the origin of national identity through the notion of nations, with nations being an imagined political community which is imagined as inherently limited and sovereign (Tilley, Exley & Heath, 2004, p. 2). Furthermore, social and political scientist Karl Deutsch terms nationality as "[...] an alignment of large numbers of individuals from the lower and middle classes linked to regional centres and leading social groups by channels of social communication and economic discourse" (Fligstein, Polyakova & Sandholtz, 2012, p. 109). In other words, through these definitions this thesis is based on the notion of a national identity which entails that the people of each constituent territory of Britain is tied together through a common sense of national border, having sovereignty, and having a common regional centre as well as a common language and common economic discourse. With this in mind, a survey from the 2015 British Social Attitudes in May and early June of 2016, found that "[...] no less than 49 per cent agreed that 'being a member of the European Union is undermining Britain's distinctive identity', while just 31 per cent disagreed" (Curtice, 2016, p. 6). Of those who answered the survey and agreed in the statement of British identity getting undermined by the UK's membership to the EU, as much as four in five indicated that they would Vote Leave in the upcoming referendum. On the other side, of those who disagreed with the statement, 89 per cent of them were Remain supporters (Curtice, 2016, p. 6).

On the 23rd of June 2016 Lord Ashcroft surveyed over 12 000 people who had just voted in the EU referendum. When confronted about national identity, the people participating in the poll data got the option of describing themselves as either 1) English not British, 2) More English than British, 3) Equally English and British, 4) More British than English, or as 5) British not English (Ashcroft, 2016). The results of Ashcroft's poll tell us that those who identified strongly as only English were the most likely to vote for the UK to leave the EU. Leavers who identified as solely English made up 79 per cent of the "English not British" group. Of those who identified as "more English than British", 66 per cent voted for the UK to leave the EU during the referendum. Additionally, those who identified as more British than English and as strictly British were the most likely to vote for the UK to remain in the EU. Finally, those who felt equally British and English, were close to evenly split in whether to vote for the UK to leave the EU or for the UK to remain in the EU.

3. Sovereignty

Chapter two is about sovereignty. The chapter makes the argument that the Vote Leave campaign used the concept of sovereignty and its associations with national boundaries and democracy to influence the public to Vote Leave. This will be done through a conceptualisation of the term sovereignty, through linking the term sovereignty to the Vote Leave campaign and through exploring polls and data in order to support our claims.

The term sovereignty is rather elusive. However, in this thesis our understanding of sovereignty will stem from the understanding of sovereignty in social science and political theory, being that "[...] 'sovereignty' is variously understood as a power inherent and exclusive to states; as a theory of internal political authority and external independence; and as a more general discourse of claims states make about themselves and their relations to other states" (Brown, 2018, p. 1). The reason as to why the term sovereignty is important in discussing the Vote Leave campaign, is because of the link sovereignty has to identity. Through Tilley, Exley & Heath's explanation of national identity being originated from the notion of a political community being inherently limited and sovereign (Tilley, Exley & Heath, 2004, p. 2), the link between the two concepts in this thesis is made.

In the Vote Leave campaign the term sovereignty was one of the most important issues when confronted with the UK's membership in the EU. Data sampled from the British Election Study show that those most concerned about sovereignty related issues overall, were those likely to vote for the UK to leave the EU (British Election Study, 2016). The issue of sovereignty was also prominent in the Vote Leave campaigners speeches, opinion pieces and interviews. One of the most prominent actors in the Vote Leave campaign was the then Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. On the 21st of February Boris Johnson set out his case for why to Vote Leave in *The Telegraph*. Johnson's reasoning as to why he backed Vote Leave was that he felt like the EU threatened the UK's democracy and sovereignty by no longer being a pure political project, but by being "in danger of getting out of proper democratic control" (Wilkinson, 2016). Furthermore, he stated that "Sovereignty is people's ability – the ability of the public – to control lives and to make sure that the people they elect are able to pass the laws that matter to them. The trouble is, with Europe that is being very greatly eroded" (Wilkinson, 2016). In addition, Johnson stated that the amount of judicial activism and legislation coming from the EU have been getting out of control. Finally, he stated that he would be encouraging people to vote for Leave because it would mean "[...] a better deal for the people of this country to save them money and take back control" (Wilkinson, 2016).

Additionally, with only a few months until the EU referendum, Boris Johnson made his first major speech on the 9th of May. One of the main subjects of Johnson is that the EU decreases Britain's sovereignty, which is very well demonstrated through this short but precise statement: "The independence of this country is being seriously compromised. It is this fundamental democratic problem – this erosion of democracy – that brings me into this fight" (Johnson, 2016). The prominent Vote Leave campaigner refers to the Lisbon Treaty to demonstrate the ever-growing expansion of power of the EU. Brussels have "[...] exclusive or explicit competence for trade, customs, competition, agriculture, fisheries, environment, consumer protection, transport, trans-European networks, energy, the areas of freedom, security and justice, and new powers over culture, tourism, education and youth" (Johnson, 2016). Additionally, EU legislation affects the

British public without the British government being able to stop any of it. Numbers from the House of Commons Library confirms that EU legislation generates 60 per cent of laws passing through the British parliament. Another problem caused by the EU according to Johnson, is the increasing number of immigrants in the UK. The UK has no power to control how many immigrants that enter from the different EU countries, because that power now resides in Brussels. According to Johnson, the EU weakens the UK's democracy by slowly stripping the British people of their right to "[...] decide their priorities, and to remove, at elections, those who take the decisions" (Johnson, 2016). When referring to the idea of a European identity, Johnson chooses to quote Jean-Claude Juncker by stating that "too many Europeans are returning to a national or regional mindset", and criticises the EU for choosing to centralize instead of devolving power in light of this. This mindset of implementing more legislation and federal control when met with resistance, is delusional according to Boris Johnson. By forcefully creating a political cohesion through the means of economic integration, the EU has destroyed democracies such as Greece (Johnson, 2016). It is because of this Boris Johnson supports the Vote Leave campaign. If the UK were to remain in the EU the UK's democracy, sovereignty, and national identity would slowly cease to exist, and the only way to stop this is to Vote Leave on the 23rd of June and take back control of UK's democracy.

One could argue that Johnson's arguments resonated well with those supporting Vote Leave on the basis of data sampled by Lord Ashcroft. Lord Ashcroft's survey found that the number one reason for people who voted for the UK to leave the EU was the issue of sovereignty. In his survey "How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday ... and why", Ashcroft conducted a survey of how over 12 000 people voted on the 23rd of June. In his survey, the people who voted Leave got asked to rank three different reasons as to how important they were in their decisive vote. The three options were "The principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK", "Voting to leave offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders", and "Remaining meant little or no choice about how the EU expanded its membership or power" (Ashcroft, 2016). His survey revealed that nearly half those who voted for Leave, "[...] said the biggest single reason for wanting to leave the EU was "the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK" (Ashcroft, 2016). This tells us that Vote Leave's focus on the issue of sovereignty, as demonstrated through the speech and opinion piece made by prominent Vote Leave campaigner Boris Johnson, resonated well with those likely to Vote Leave.

4. Otherness

Chapter three is about otherness. This chapter makes the argument that the perception of "the others" and otherness, which is used synonymously with the term immigration in this thesis, were used by the Vote Leave campaign as a means to influence the public to Vote Leave in the 2016 referendum. This will be done through linking otherness to the idea of identity and through a conceptualisation of the term otherness. Lastly the argument of that immigration was one of the most talked about issues in the Vote Leave campaign, with a numerous of opinion pieces, news articles and speeches made about the subject will be made. In this chapter two literary pieces from prominent Vote Leave campaigners Priti Patel, Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart will be examined, and then discussed in the context of polls and data regarding the issue of immigration. By doing this the argument will be made that immigration was an important part of the Vote Leave campaign and therefore in the Brexit referendum outcome.

With this thesis's discussion of collective identities, we must note that the notion of collective identity also entails that there is a group of "others", and that the creation of a collective identity is a response to the "other" group (Fligstein et al., 2012, p. 108). In an imagined community, such as nation-states, the concern of defending and retaining the community's boundaries plays a big part. The more you differentiate yourself as a community from others, the stronger the perspective of being a "we" comes into existence in the community's citizens' minds. Through this differentiation the community creates a perception of a "self" and a "other" (Risse, 2010, p. 26). As previously stated, this thesis will draw on the definition of others through the work of Ashcroft & Bevir (2016), which argues that because of the likes of "[the] race riots in 2001, the atrocities of 9/11 and 7/7, and the broader consequences of 'the war on terror'", governments have experienced a backlash against multiculturalism (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2016, p. 1). The correlation between otherness and identity in Britain, specifically British Muslims have been under heavy suspicious eyes from both the public and the government. In particular UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) was very vocal about their discontent about the current British immigration policy during the referendum. One of the biggest concerns expressed by UKIP in their 'Breaking Point' campaign poster was Britain's immigration policy (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2016, p. 1).

In the month of April, Employment Minister Priti Patel made a public statement about how uncontrolled immigration from the EU has put unsustainable pressure on British schools. The *Daily Mail* piece which got published on the 18th of April deals with Patel's view of migration pushing the British education system to the breaking point (Doyle, 2016). Because of the European Union's free movement of persons and expanding policy the UK public services gets put under what Patel views as an unstainable pressure. If the UK were to carry out Brexit, the UK would according to Patel take back control over their borders and be able to use the money that previously went to the EU on the UK's public services. When speaking directly on the issue of schools, Patel argues that the shortage of primary school places is a result of the uncontrolled number of migrants from EU member states (Doyle, 2016). The *Daily Mail* piece referrers to a YouGov poll commissioned by Channel 5, which shows that most British people is displeased with the amount of immigration and wish for tougher controls on new arrivals, additionally "[...] 71 per cent said immigration levels have been too high over the past decade, with only 14 per cent believing the current level of immigration is about right" and that "tighter

controls were called for by 63 per cent, while one in three people – 31 per cent – felt immigration levels had a negative impact on their lives” (Doyle, 2016). With Priti Patel being one of the leaders of the Vote Leave campaign, the narrative of taking back control is clearly important for the Vote Leave campaign. The issue of the British people competing for UK public services against immigrants, can be seen as an issue of identity through the fear of the “other”. Additionally, Patel indirectly expresses concerns about the UK’s sovereignty with the agenda of “taking back control” over the UK’s borders.

The theme of immigration was regularly discussed throughout the month of May. On the 29th of May Members of Parliament Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart submitted a public letter to David Cameron where they challenged the Prime Minister to set out the facts on EU immigration. In the letter, the MP’s publicly asked the PM if voting for the UK staying in the EU would be synonymous with voting for unlimited EU immigration permanently. Additionally, they argued that there was a “basic lack of democratic consent for what is taking place. Voters were promised repeatedly at elections that net immigration could be cut to the tens of thousands. This promise is plainly not achievable as long as the UK is a member of the EU and the failure to keep it is corrosive of public trust in politics” (Gove, Johnson & Stuart, 2016). Although the MP’s agreed with the Prime Minister on several points about immigration, they expressed a particular concern about the impact immigration would have on public services in the upcoming years if the UK did not leave the EU. With a continuation of free movement, the UK would not only put a strain on the public services, but would also for jobseekers “[...] place considerable pressure on the wages of low paid British workers in the event of a vote to remain in the EU” (Gove et al., 2016). The main theme of the letter is the democratic issue the EU’s immigration policy have had on the UK’s democracy.

In data sampled by Lord Ashcroft in his survey “How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday ... and why”, we have established that the number one reason for those who voted for the UK to leave the EU on the day of the referendum, was the issue of sovereignty. The same data also tells us that the second most popular reason of those who voted leave, were the option of that “voting to leave offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders” (Ashcroft, 2016). This option got rated as the most important issue by 33 per cent of those who voted for the UK to leave the EU. Additionally, Ipsos MORI’s Political Monitor for June 2016 provide this thesis with information about what issues the public considered as crucial in their decision as to vote for Leave or to vote for Remain with a chart comparing the public’s opinion on the importance of various issues in May 2016 and in June 2016 (Ipsos MORI, 2016). The chart tells us that the issue of immigration was seen as more important in June of 2016 than it was in May 2016, with an increase from 28 points to 33 points from May to June. Articles, interviews and opinion pieces from the period of May and throughout June, clearly show us that the Vote Leave campaigners got more outspoken on the issue of immigration during this period. In the seventh wave of their Internet Panel survey, the British Election Study conducted a survey prior to the formal Brexit referendum campaign. The British Election Study asked the open-end question of “What matters most to you when deciding how to vote in the EU referendum?” (British Election Study, 2016). The answers of Leave voters got sampled in a word cloud, where the most prominent word of concern was immigration, followed closely by the word sovereignty and words connected to sovereignty. By coding the answers in the open-ended question, the British Election Study gathered the answers into categories covering the key responses. The graph displaying the results show that the single largest word used by leavers was immigration. However, the graph also reveals that leavers were more likely

to mention sovereignty issues overall and that many mentioned both sovereignty and immigration together (British Election Study, 2016). This supports this chapter's claim of immigration being a crucial part of the Vote Leave campaign and the claim of it influencing the voters.

5. "Take Back Control" and the NHS

In chapter four the thesis will look at the Vote Leave campaigns slogan "Take Back Control" and the issue of the NHS. The argument this chapter makes is that the ideas of identity presented earlier in the thesis were prominent in both the slogan and in the issue of the NHS, and therefore being a decisive factor for those of the public who voted for the UK to leave the EU. The Vote Leave campaign slogan "Take Back Control" will be discussed first by linking the slogan to the campaign through selected news articles and speeches, and then by looking at how the slogan affected those who voted for Vote Leave through data and polls. The same procedure will be done regarding the NHS.

Vote Leave's slogan "Take Back Control" entails that the UK have been stripped from their sovereignty. Central Vote Leave campaigners mentioned the idea of taking back control throughout their campaign, with Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Priti Patel as some of the more outspoken campaigners. On the 19th of April, Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Michael Gove made a speech addressing the UK's future outside the EU. In his speech he argues that Britain's best days are yet to come, and that by leaving the EU Britain would use its independence to unleash its untapped potential (Gove, 2016, p. 1). Lord Gove called for Britain to go back to its democratic self-government, which have provided Britain with "[...] the world's strongest economy, its most respected political institutions, its most tolerant approach towards refugees, its best publicly funded health service and its most respected public broadcaster" (Gove, 2016, p. 1). Gove argued that by staying in the EU, British interests would keep getting overruled because of the QMV and be forced to accept more legislation from the EU (Gove, 2016, p. 4-6). Furthermore, by leaving the EU the UK could take back control. There would be no more free movement of people, and the UK could adopt an Australian points-based migration policy. This policy would for the UK mean "[...] control over new trade deals, control over how we can help developing nations, control over economic rules, control over how billions currently spent by others could be spent, control over our borders, control over who uses the NHS and control over who can make their home here" (Gove, 2016, p. 16).

On the 14th of May Employment Minister Priti Patel claimed that during the last 15 years the British people have been displaced, with the increase of immigration in Britain overtaking British schools, health services and communities. Furthermore, Patel claimed that "[...] the Remain camp has lost touch with voters who feel betrayed by successive governments for having exposed Britain to uncontrolled migration", and referred to numbers stating that 2.4 million EU migrants have entered the UK since David Cameron became Prime Minister (Wooding, 2016). Additionally, Minister Priti Patel stated that the only way to reduce the big number of immigrants, is to take back control over British immigration policy by leaving the EU. In other words, Vote Leave campaigner Priti Patel drew on the issue of immigration as a way to take back control.

Additionally, Boris Johnson was part of the BBC EU Debate on the 21st of June. In his closing remarks on the 21st of June, Johnson claims that the "Britain Stronger In Europe" campaigners only spoke about the fears and consequences of leaving the EU, while the Vote Leave campaigners represented those who believed in Britain and that Vote Leave offered hope for the British people (Vote Leave, 2016). Those who wish for the UK to stay in the EU underestimated the UK and its potential. Johnson stated in his closing remarks that:

"If we Vote Leave we can take back control of our borders, of huge sums of money – 10 billion pounds a year net, of our tax rising powers, of our trade policy and of our whole law-making system; the democracy that is the foundation of our prosperity and if we stand up for our democracy we will be speaking up for hundreds of millions of people around Europe who agree with us but currently have no voice" (Vote Leave, 2016).

Through his closing statements Boris Johnson spoke of the opportunities of taking back control entailed.

By sampling data from Lord Ashcroft's survey held on the referendum day, we know that the two options of "voting to leave offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders" and "the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK" were the ones who resonated the best with those who voted for the UK to leave the EU (Ashcroft, 2016). This data tells us that the Vote Leave campaigns slogan of taking back control clearly affected voters, be it either through the issue of immigration, sovereignty or identity. This statement is being backed by Ipsos MORI's study published on the 10th of May 2016. The survey was conducted between 14.-25 April 2016, consisted of about 4000 British adults, and measured how people's views on immigration changed over time. The survey reveals that 95 per cent of leave voters believe that the Government should have total control over immigration, and that 72 per cent of those who said that they'd vote leave stated that the number of EU immigrants coming into the UK would be crucial when casting their vote. As much as 69 per cent of leavers believed that if a Brexit were to happen, EU immigration to the UK would decrease (Ipsos MORI, 2016).

Regarding the Vote Leave campaigns view of the NHS, several key actors chose to speak about the consequences the NHS would face if the UK remained a member of the EU. Prominent Vote Leave campaigner Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart made a statement regarding the National Health Service (NHS) funding on the 3rd of June. They argued that the NHS is for the British people something to be profoundly proud of, as a great British institution where its core values of solidarity, fairness and inclusivity is something that needs to be protected. Additionally, the NHS secures all people of the UK security, regardless of whether you are wealthy or poor (Gove, Johnson & Stuart, 2016). In order for the NHS to continue to provide its much-needed services, it will need a bigger budget. The UK will experience a continuous population growth, which in turn will increase the pressure on the NHS. Gove, Johnson and Stuart argue that in order to maintain and increase the capability of the NHS, the solution will be to use some of the money that goes to the EU because of the UK's membership (Gove et al., 2016). Furthermore, they argued that one of the main causes of the higher demand the NHS have experienced during the last years, is the uncontrolled migration the UK have experienced from the EU. By leaving the EU, the UK would once again have control over their migration policy, and through it have more resources to invest in the NHS and other public services (Gove et al., 2016). In other words, by leaving the EU the UK would get its independence and democracy back. The British people would once again be prioritised, and would benefit from it not only socially but also economically.

Ipsos MORI's Political Monitor for June 2016 tells us that the impact on public services and housing was seen as one of the more important issues for the voters. Those asked to take the survey got asked the question "[...] which, if any, issues do you think will be very important to you in helping you to decide which way to vote? And which of these

issues, if any, that you mentioned is the most important to you in helping you decide which way to vote?" (Ipsos MORI, 2016). The polling body consisted of 1257 British adults, and was conducted from the 11th to the 14th of June 2016. Through the study we learn that the degree of importance of the issue of public services and housing got higher from May to June (Ipsos MORI, 2016). Another survey done by Ipsos MORI between the 14th and 25th of April 2016, with a pooling body of 4000 British adults, reveals the link between immigration and Britain's welfare system (including the NHS). In a questionnaire where the pooling body got asked "Looking ahead to the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union on 23 June, which, if any, issues do you think will be very important to you in helping you decide which way to vote?", 47 per cent answered the cost of immigration has on Britain's welfare system (Ipsos MORI, 2016). In the same questionnaire, the participants got asked "And which of these issues, if any, do you think will be the most important for the British public overall on how they will vote in the EU referendum on 23 June?", 8 per cent answered the cost of immigration has on Britain's welfare system (Ipsos MORI, 2016).

6. Vote Leave's influence on the referendum

In chapter five the UK's relationship and attitudes towards the EU since the 1970s and up until the referendum in 2016 will be briefly outlined, as well as providing an analysis of how far Vote Leave successfully exploited ideas of identity in the referendum campaign and the impact this had on the referendum outcome. The aim of this chapter is to cast light on the troubled history of the relationship between the UK and the EU as a means to discuss the role of other factors which may have influenced the referendum outcome as well as arguing how important Vote Leave's exploitation of ideas of identity were. The chapter makes the argument that even though the troubled past of the EU-UK relationship cannot be ignored, the decisive factor in the referendum outcome was Vote Leave's exploitation of ideas of identity.

Britain is special in terms of them being the only member state of the European Union who have ever left the union. Britain's relationship to the EU have been complicated even before their decision of joining the EU through the European Communities Act in 1972 (Morphet, 2017, p. 7-8). In fact, the British public "[...] has consistently been the most Eurosceptic electorate in the EU ever since the UK joined in 1973" (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1259-1260). When speaking of political parties, the Conservative Party have been in the forefront of a split from the EU ever since the mid-1980s, with the membership in 1972 meaning "[a] loss of some parliamentary sovereignty as laws were made by the UK with the other member states in the EU" (Morphet, 2017, p. 8). With the shift from Margaret Thatcher to John Major as Prime Minister in the UK, the UK got even more tied to the EU through the single market deal in 1992. Through this deal, the European Union changed nature into a more economic community. It was also during Major's period as PM that the Maastricht Treaty got ratified, which represent the EU we know today. The problem with these arrangements with the EU, was that they were "[...] largely hidden from view in the UK where the anti-EU faction in the Conservative Party began to grow" (Morphet, 2017, p. 9-10). Another prominent anti-EU party is the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). UKIP has since its founding in 1991 been deeply Eurosceptic and very right-wing oriented politically. With the rise of UKIP in the 90s, the Conservative Party also took a shift to the right politically in fear of losing electors. This was also reflected in the 2015 election, where the Conservative Party manifesto "[...] included a pledge of a 'straight in-out referendum of the European Union by the end of 2017'" (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1261). This was done to please the Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative Party and to "[...] avoid a flight of voters to the populist right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)" (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1261). This led to that when former Prime Minister David Cameron and the Conservative Party returned to power in 2015, he promised to hold a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU (Morphet, 2017, p. 10).

Ipsos MORI provides us with data that entails how the UK public have viewed their membership in the EU since late 1977 (Ipsos MORI, 2016). Ranging from October 1977 to October, the people who got asked ranged from about 500 to 2000 British adults aged 18 years and above, with the exception of the year of 1981 where the base consisted of 1990 British adults aged 15 years and above. The question the participants received was "if there were a referendum now on whether Britain should stay in or get out of the European Union, how would you vote?". Following a couple of years after the European Communities Act in 1972, the data from Ipsos MORI shows that 47 per cent were in favour of the UK remaining in the EU, that 42 per cent would have voted for the UK to leave the EU, while 11 per cent were not sure. With the growing scepticism displayed

from the Conservative Party since the mid-80s, the study entails that the scepticism got reflected in the public opinion. In March 1980 65 per cent would have voted for the UK to leave the EU, while only 26 per cent would have voted for the UK to stay. However, by November 1990 62 per cent believed that the UK remaining a member of the EU would be the best option, while only 28 per cent would have voted for the UK to leave the EU. With the rise of UKIP in the beginning of the 1990s, these numbers started to flatten out. By April 1997 40 per cent would have voted for the UK to remain, and 40 per cent would have voted for the UK to leave, while 19 per cent weren't sure. In the year leading up to the 2015 election, remain seemingly got viewed as the most popular option for the public. 54 per cent of those asked in May 2014 and 56 per cent of those asked in October 2014 stated that they would vote for the UK to remain in the EU during a possible referendum (Ipsos MORI, 2016). The survey also reveals that in 2015 the option of the UK to remain in the EU were the most popular, but that in the months leading up to the referendum in 2016 voters got more indecisive and that the option of the UK leaving the EU picked up momentum. On the 11-14th of June 2016 979 British adults participated in a study where they all were registered to vote and nine out of ten were certain they were going to vote. The participants were asked "should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?", which was the official referendum question. Out of this base 43 per cent said they would vote for the UK to remain in the EU, while 49 per cent said that they would vote for the UK to leave the EU. 8 per cent were unsure of what they would vote, or refused to answer the question (Ipsos MORI, 2016). As seen through the data provided by Ipsos MORI, the UK's relationship to the EU have been fluctuating ever since the European Communities Act in 1972. However, there is also evidence of the public opinion shifting towards favouring the UK leaving the EU in the month of the 2016 referendum.

This thesis has focused on Vote Leave's exploitation of ideas of identity during their referendum campaign. However, other factors such as the strained relationship between the UK and the EU and financial factors cannot be ignored when discussing the outcome. As seen in the previous section, the UK's relationship to the EU has always been fluctuating. However, when analysing data provided from the British Election Study, Ipsos MORI, and Lord Ashcroft we have found that ideas of identity such as immigration have dominated the Vote Leave campaign's agenda. As stated by Sara Hobolt in her article about Brexit, "the media analysis of the campaign reveal that both camps were successful in setting the agenda, since the economy [for Britain Stronger In Europe] and immigration [for Vote Leave] clearly dominated the news coverage. In the first three weeks of the campaign economic issues received considerably more attention than immigration, to the benefit of the Remain camp. There was, however, a shift towards immigration as the dominant issue in the latter weeks of the campaign, which may have benefitted the Leave campaign" (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1262). By referring back to the study conducted between the 14th of April and 4th of May in 2016 by the British Election Study, their word cloud confirms that leave voters greatest concerns evolved around ideas of identity. The words which were the most prominent in the leave voters' cloud were "immigration", "sovereignty", "control", "country" and "law" (British Election Study, 2016). This makes the argument that Vote Leave's exploitation of ideas of identity did indeed play a crucial role in the outcome of the 2016 referendum in the UK. Additionally, we can refer back to the Vote Leave campaign slogan "Take Back Control" and the issue of the NHS. Through these cases we have found evidence in Lord Ashcroft's survey "How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday ... and why" that the options of "voting to leave offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own

borders” and “that the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK” were the ones who resonated the best with those who voted for the UK to leave the EU (Ashcroft, 2016). This supports the thesis’s statement of ideas of identity, be it either through immigration, sovereignty or national identity, did in fact affect those who voted for the UK to leave the EU.

7. Conclusions

The background of this thesis has been the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum, and whether or not Vote Leave's campaign with its focus on ideas of identity were the main decisive factor of their victory over the remain campaign. The thesis has been rooted in the theoretical framework of causality, and the definition and ideas of identity. Through linking the different concepts of ideas of identity together and placing them in the context of the Vote Leave campaign slogan "Take Back Control" and the issue of NHS, the thesis has aimed to analyse in what degree Vote Leave's ideas of identity shaped the outcome of the Brexit referendum campaign. Through the exploration of ideas of identity in the two cases, the thesis has argued that the concepts of identity, otherness and sovereignty were both prominent in the Vote Leave campaign and played a decisive role in the outcome of the referendum. With data sampled from Ipsos MORI, the British Election Study and Lord Ashcroft's Polls the thesis have found that ideas of identity dominated not only the thoughts of Vote Leave voters' minds during the referendum, but also when they decided to cast their vote.

Furthermore, the thesis has made the argument of ideas of identity being a decisive factor in the referendum outcome based on the campaigning done by Vote Leave. Interestingly enough, the direct wording of "national identity" has not been the most significant issue to voters located in this thesis, but through data sampled from polls and surveys the thesis have found data supporting the claim of immigration and words connected to sovereignty being the primary concern of leave voters. However, sovereignty and immigration are seen under the category of ideas of identity in this thesis, and is therefore representative of answering the research question.

The closing remarks of this thesis will be dedicated to the consequences of only focusing on Vote Leave's campaign and the votes of those in favour of the UK leaving the EU. It must be called attention to the fact that this thesis only focuses on the Vote Leave campaign and its supporters. This thesis does not comment on the "Britain Stronger in Europe" campaign, which also would have an effect on how voters choose to cast their ballot. Additionally, it must be stated that the intention of this thesis has not been to undermine any other statements made about why the referendum campaign ended in Vote Leave's favour, but that the aim of this thesis has been to argue that the main decisive factor was the exploitation of ideas of identity from Vote Leave. The thesis recognises that there are other possible explanations to the referendum outcome, such as the UK's relationship and attitudes towards the EU since the 1970s. Additionally, without the formal constraints of the thesis, it would have been interesting to further research the outcome of the referendum through the campaign of "Britain Stronger In Europe". This would have enabled the thesis to gain a better understanding of the referendum outcome as a whole. Furthermore, it would have enabled the thesis to look at other possible reasons as to why the public casted their ballot the way they did. By exploring the remain campaign, the possibility of exploring decisive factors such as the economy would have presented itself.

8. Bibliography

- Allen, M. (2017). *The sage encyclopedia of communication research methods* (Vols. 1-4). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. Sourced from <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n51>
- Ashcroft, M. (2016, 14th of June). How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday ... and why. Sourced from <https://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>
- Ashcroft, R. & Bevir, M. (2016). Pluralism, National Identity and Citizenship: Britain after Brexit. *Political Quarterly*, 87(3). Sourced from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/76q941f4>
- Brown, K. (2018). "Sovereignty". *Western American Literature* 53(1), 81-89. Sourced from <https://doi.org/10.1353/wal.2018.0029>
- Curtice, J. (2016). Brexit: Behind the Referendum. *Political Insight*, 7(2), 4-7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905816666122>
- Doyle, J. (2016, 18th of April). Schools are at breaking point, says employment minister: As thousands of parents face disappointment over places for their children, Priti Patel says migration has put 'unsustainable pressure' on system. Sourced from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3544949/Schools-breaking-point-says-employment-minister-Priti-Patel-says-migration-EU-unsustainable-pressure-education-system.html>
- Fligstein, N., Polyakova, A. & Sandholtz, W. (2012). European Integration, Nationalism and European Identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50(1), 106-122.
- Gifford, C. (2010). The UK and the European Union: Dimensions of Sovereignty and the Problem of Eurosceptic Britishness, *Parliamentary Affairs* 63(2), 321-338. Sourced from <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsp031>
- Gove, M. (2016, 19th of April). *The facts of life say leave: Why Britain and Europe will be better off after we vote leave* [Oration]. Sourced from <http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/assets-d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/voteleave/pages/271/attachments/original/1461057270/MGspeech194VERSION2.pdf>
- Gove, M., Johnson, B. & Stuart, G. (2016, 29th of May). PM challenged to set out the facts on EU immigration. Sourced from http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/pm_challenged_to_set_out_the_facts_on_eu_immigration.html
- Gove, M., Johnson, B. & Stuart, G. (2016, 3rd of June). Statement by Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart on NHS funding. Sourced from http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/statement_by_michael_gove_boris_johnson_and_gisela_stuart_on_nhs_funding.html
- Hobolt, S. B. (2016). The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23(9), 1259-1277. Sourced from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1225785>

Ipsos MORI. (2016, 10th of May). Immigration one of the biggest issues for wavering EU referendum voters. Sourced from <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/immigration-one-biggest-issues-wavering-eu-referendum-voters>

Ipsos MORI. (2016, 15th of June). European Union membership-trends. Sourced from <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/european-union-membership-trends>

Ipsos MORI. (2016). June 2016 Political Monitor. Sourced from <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/migrations/en-uk/files/Assets/Docs/Polls/pm-16-june-2016-charts.pdf>

Johnson, B. (2016, 9th of May). *Boris Johnson: The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave* [Oration]. Sourced from http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/boris_johnson_the_liberal_cosmopolitan_case_to_vote_leave.html

Morphet, J. (2017). *Beyond Brexit?: How to assess the UK's future*. Bristol, UK; Chicago, IL, USA: Bristol University Press. Sourced from <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t894jx>

Richards, L & Heath, A. (2019, 31st of May). Brexit and public opinion: national identity and Brexit preferences. *The UK in a Changing Europe*. Sourced from <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/brexit-and-public-opinion-national-identity-and-brexit-preferences/>

The British Election Study. (2016), What mattered most to you when deciding how to vote in the EU referendum? By Chris Prosser, Jon Mellon, and Jane Green. Sourced from <https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/what-mattered-most-to-you-when-deciding-how-to-vote-in-the-eu-referendum/#.XsRAXhMzZQI>

Vote Leave. (2016, 21st of June). *Boris Johnson: 'Stand up for democracy and Vote Leave'* [Video clip]. Sourced from <https://youtu.be/wY3RznQSBfw>

Wilkinson, M. (2016, 21st of February). Boris Johnson backs Brexit as he hails 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity' to vote to leave EU. *The Telegraph*. Sourced from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/eureferendum/12167855/boris-announces-decision-on-eu-as-it-happened-21-february.html>

Wooding, D. (2016, 14th of May). Unwise monkeys: 'Sneering' David Cameron, Gordon Brown and John Major branded bananas by Brexit-backing Priti Patel. *The Sun*. Sourced from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/1177032/unwise-monkeys-sneering-david-cameron-gordon-brown-and-john-major-branded-bananas-by-brexit-backing-priti-patel/>

