The Electoral Determinants of "Brexit":

Politics of Fear and Hope

Master Thesis

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PREFACE

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Last but not least, I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who have more than anyone incessantly followed and supported me through all of this journey, waiting and longing for this day to arrive.

Wander Amorim

London, 27 July 2017

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Andrew Marr
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BREXIT	Britain's exit (from the European Union)
CON	Congruence analysis
COV	Co-variation analysis
CPT	Causal-process tracing
ED	Evan Davis
EEC	European Economic Community
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
G20	Group of Twenty (Major Economies)
GREXIT	Greece's exit (from the European Union)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JC	Jeremy Corbyn
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament (of the United Kingdom)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NC	Noam Chomsky
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UK	United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations
US	United States (of America)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.   Background

By the end of 2015, it's fair to say that the European Union had seen better days before. Still impacted by the shattering economic outcome of the global financial crisis of 2008, it also found itself under the shadows of a political (and potentially military) crisis with neighbouring Russia initiated in the previous year[1]. On top of that, "Grexit"[2], for example, had never seemed so close. Falling within the broader context of the chronically failing EU Mediterranean economies, the prospect of a Greek withdrawal from the Eurozone (and possibly from the European Union itself) due to the Greek government-debt crisis had been discussed since at least 2012, but reached its peak only in July 2015 after the referendum through which a majority of Greek voters refused the terms of a compromise with the country's international creditors, arguably putting the whole of the European project[3] on the verge of collapse (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou 2016 p. 1; Oliver 2015 pp. 410-411; Polychroniou 2012 p. 5).

In that same year, however, it would be the culmination of *another* crisis which would put perhaps even more pressure on the fundamental structures of the Union – and on its legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Carrera et al. 2015 p. 1). A crisis which, although already on course way before 2015, only reached undisputedly dramatic proportions in its summer; primarily by the shores of, ironically, also Greece. It was the so-called "European refugee crisis" – a still ongoing phenomenon which essentially refers to the unprecedented rise of irregular human arrivals from war-torn and/or economically underdeveloped regions in mostly Africa and Asia into Europe, along with the alarming immediate humanitarian consequences it brings to the incoming human beings, and the considerable social, cultural, economic and political consequences it brings to the European continent and the European Union.

With still the subsequent (and arguably interconnected[4]) November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks closing that year, the Union was, nevertheless, *yet* to be challenged by what came to be the utmost apex, up to this very moment, of all crises it had been enduring for, in effect and as outlined, several years past (Woods 2016 p. 160; eds Trenz, Ruzza & Guiraudon 2015 p. 189).

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[1] Following the first "Euromaidan" riots of November 2013, which culminated with the Russian annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea in 2014. More on this topic in MacFarlane and Menon (2014) and Pridham (2014).
[2] A popular portmanteau of *Greece* and *exit* (from the European Union).
[3] The term "European project", when used throughout this thesis, refers more specifically to the European Union.
[4] In fact, the attacks (in the context of Islamic terrorism) were often conjectured as a part and result of the ongoing refugee crisis. For more on this specific topic, see Nail (2016 p. 158) and Carrera et al. (2015 p. 16).

Following an already by all accounts pivotal year in the history of the EU, the year of 2016 arrived to delineate itself as the definitive crossroads in the decades-long path towards Europe's comprehensive institutional integration: it was in 2016 that "Brexit"[5] – for long a key existential threat to the European project (Ricketts 2016 p. 2) –, finally started to materialise[6], after a controversial, historic referendum on the subject took place on June 23 through which a majority of 51.9% of British voters chose for a *no* to continued EU membership.

The United Kingdom became, therefore, the first full member of the European Union to decide for withdrawal in the Union's then almost 60 years of history[7] [8], dealing a striking blow to the narrative of not only "ever closer"[9], but also of virtually *ever larger* union that has guided the European project since its early days (Auer 2017 p. 41; Krok-Paszkowska & Zielonka 2007 p. 367; Dinan 2005 p. 4), creating a dangerous precedent for other possible departures within the bloc and raising serious questions about the future viability of the Union's existence (Hoadley 2016 p. 7; Hobolt 2016 p. 1259; Oliver 2016a; MacShane 2015 p. 12).

Brexit has also attracted broad public attention naturally due to the vast implications it could have on the lives of many people, of all classes and nationalities, either residing in the United Kingdom or afar – and on globalisation in its own right (Morgan 2016 p. 7). In fact, given its magnitude and the evident relevance of its possible consequences[10], Brexit has arguably become the dominating issue of politics and the main topic within the field of international public management and public policy to grasp the attention of Europe, and possibly the whole world[11], in 2016 (Oliver 2016b p. 689).

As such, the topic, given its weight and complexity, presents to the researcher in the field of international public management and public policy a plethora of subtopics on which it

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[5] On its turn, a popular portmanteau of *Britain* (officially "the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland") and *exit* (also, manifestly, from the European Union).

[6] In effect, it's worth highlighting that 2016 wasn't the actual year of Brexit *per se*, but only of its very concrete beginnings, as the British government would still have to formally notify the European Council of the decision, in accordance with what Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon prescribes for the process of withdrawal to legally take place. Once Article 50 is triggered (in the British case, on 29 March 2017), the process then starts for a period of two years of exit negotiations, only after which withdrawal from a given member state is effectively concluded.

[7] It is widely accepted that what we know today as the EU was founded on 25 March 1957 through the "Treaty establishing the European Economic Community" (the then EEC), also known as the "Treaty of Rome", signed by Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (in their turn, also the founders of the "European Coal and Steel Community", established six years earlier through the Treaty of Paris). The European project only becomes the "European Union", as we call it today, through the Maastricht Treaty, signed on 1992 and effective from 1993 (McCormick 2011; Dinan 2005).

[8] It's important to specify the UK as the first "full member" to decide for withdrawal given that Greenland, formally part of the Danish Realm, also chose to leave the European project through a referendum on 23 February 1982.

[9] As stated in the preamble of the so-called Treaty of Rome (European Union 1957 p. 11).

[10] See more in 1.3.1..

[11] With the shocking election of Donald Trump in November being here a serious contender – though not entirely unrelated. In fact, both votes have been often categorised as being part of a possible common broader international "anti-liberal" political trend (Berenson 2016; Inglehart & Norris 2016 p. 9; Jacques 2016; Suiter 2016 p. 25).

is possible to focus on. Each subtopic offering plenty of specific scientifically researchable problems for a study like the present one. Such subtopics could include, to name but a few examples, the verifiable consequences that Brexit brings to the UK, the EU and the world political and economic order; the way in which the European Union has been exploited for political and/or electoral purposes within the context of the Brexit vote (as well as across Europe) or, of course, the factors that have shaped the – at times disconcerted and controversial – way the notably most tragic (to quote President of the European Commission, Mr. Juncker)[12] crisis in the history of the Union has been handled by both UK and EU institutions.

In this regard, Gschwend and Schimmelfennig (2007 p. 3) instruct that political science researchers should be able not only to decide, but also to justify, which of the numerous political problems out there they choose to focus on. Among all the issues related to the Brexit topic, such as some of the proposed in the previous paragraph, one can suggest that what has in fact captured public opinion and emotion on the matter the most at the very first moment of the unfolding of the Brexit soap opera was essentially the very *nature* of the vote to leave the European Union – what it actually represented (Green et al. 2016). Before practical or rational considerations of any kind on whether Brexit could present economic and/or social opportunities for the United Kingdom, or not, it was precisely the (broadly diffused and oftentimes taken-for-granted) idea that the Brexit vote was mainly a vote for xenophobia and intolerance taking place right in the heart of Western civilisation what led the topic to dominate people's emotional sensitivities (Beauchamp 2016; MacDonald 2016 pp. 280-281; Taylor 2016). Heightened disturbing news of verbal and, at times, also physical attacks on immigrants during the Brexit campaign and immediately following the Brexit vote plus several commentaries from mainstream opinion-makers made it very natural for a considerable portion of the public to associate the vote for Brexit with a vote for less immigration above all (Ridley 2016; Versi 2016; Tilford 2015).

This specific problem is in fact what majorly motivated the present study, laying the foundations for our *main research question*, which shall now be presented.

1.2. Research question

From the declared association between the Brexit vote and the desire for less immigration (or even plain xenophobia), pertinent questions could then arise. For instance: why

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[12] Woodcock, A 2017, 'Brexit 'a failure and a tragedy', warns Jean-Claude Juncker', *The Independent*, 24 March 2017.

would so-called "Brexiteers"[13] be so definitely against immigration? And, most essentially: *would they*? Or, to what extent is such a claim in fact supported by evidence? Mainstream opinion was fast in pointing out to immigration as the decisive factor on the vote for Brexit; which is, indeed, one of the plausible reasons for such a vote. This research identifies, however, that this association, which has been given broad intellectual endorsement, has been formulated and diffused to the public in a rather somewhat anecdotal or simplistic way, often without effectively concrete data to support it or a proper systematic analysis on the matter (Bennett 2016; Dal Santo 2016; Morgan 2016 p. 12).

One central research question lays the foundation of a study (Haverland 2013a). Given its limited scope, this master thesis leaves then for possible future research all other aforementioned problems suggested within the context of Brexit and is, as already hinted, mostly intrigued by and therefore choosing to focus on *the determinants of the Brexit vote*. In other words, this research, being motivated by mainstream explanations on the subject and identifying possible points of controversy, is mainly interested in discussing and understanding why British voters have in their overall majority voted to leave the European Union.

More succinctly, the main research question of this master thesis is:

What were the main determinants of the Brexit vote?

or more explanatorily: *what were the main factors that effectively determined the choice of voters in the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum of 2016?*

A clear research question must be relevant, feasible and *precise* (Haverland 2013a). In this sense, in order to answer our main research question with rigour in the conclusions of this thesis (7.1.), this study pre-identifies the need to explore three distinctive presumptions contained within the formulation above. Their further understanding shall provide for utmost unambiguity and clarity on what our question effectively refers to.

In the context of the British 2016 EU membership referendum, they relate to:

1. *The actual options that were posed to voters;*
2. *The actual criteria that identified individuals as voters;*
3. *The actual rules on what constituted a majority of voters.*

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[13] A popular term that refers to an individual who defends the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

The precise definition of the concepts (and *variables*) contained within the main research question will be further discussed and presented in the *literature review* (2.) and *theoretical framework* (3.) sections, while its feasibility will be further demonstrated in the *research design and methods* section (4.). Its relevance is outlined in the following sub-section (1.3.).

1.3. Relevance

1.3.1. *Social relevance*

The concept of "relevance" in political science encompasses, for most purposes, *two* dimensions: a *social* dimension and a *scientific* dimension (Lehnert, Miller & Wonka 2007 p. 23). 'Research is socially relevant if it addresses social problems, improves citizens' and policymakers' understanding of the problem and, possibly, offers solutions' (Gschwend & Schimmelfennig 2007 p. 3). In this sense, systematic studies that allow us to better comprehend the determinants and implications of the Brexit phenomenon – as defined in 1.1., one of the main social, political and institutional problems currently faced by the European continent –, are of considerable relevance not only to European society, but to the world as a whole, as it relates not only to the core social dynamics of the European Union, but also to the social dimension of globalisation itself (Morgan 2016 p. 7). This dimension, in the United Kingdom, Europe and beyond, comprises a broad spectrum of important social issues that range from employment, working conditions, income and social protection, to security, migration, culture and identity, the cohesiveness of families and communities and, in its turn, the inclusion or exclusion from society; to name but a few (Gunter & Hoeven 2004 p. 8).

More specifically, by analysing in a systematic manner what factors determined the Brexit vote – that is to say, *why*[14] voters in their majority opted for Brexit – policymakers are better equipped to accurately comprehend and effectively tackle the social problem at hand. That means, for instance, being better able to either prevent a presumably undesirable new exit from yet again another EU member state, or, alternatively, reinterpret initial possibly controversial explanations of the event[15], which could eventually allow for reconciling British and European public opinion once again towards solidarity and common ground – something undisputedly in the interests of all sides.

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[14] See 3.1..
[15] These are presented in more detail in 2.2..

It is yet valid to underline that, according to King, Keohane and Verba (1994 p. 15), a socially relevant topic 'should be consequential for political, social, or economic life, for understanding something that significantly affects many people's lives', while Lehnert, Miller and Wonka (2007 p. 29) also state that 'a linear relationship exists between the number of people affected and the social relevance of the research question'. In this sense, Britain's exit from the European Union after more than four decades in the bloc massively affects the political landscapes of the UK[16], the EU and the established world order (Webber 2014 p. 343). In the words of European Commission's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier himself, it 'will have important human, economic, social, judicial and political consequences'[17]. It affects economic life in obvious ways, since especially a so-called *hard* Brexit (as pursued by British Prime Minister Theresa May)[18] means the United Kingdom parts with its largest export and import market, while the Single Market loses one of its major economies and largest export market in goods (Sippitt 2017) – with, as declared by IMF's Managing Director Christine Lagarde, possible consequences for the whole of the global economy[19]. Last but not least, the citizenship rights of not only Britons but of every other European citizen (living in the United Kingdom or not) are also affected. These citizens may be directly affected not only by a limitation on their rights to live in, work at or travel to the United Kingdom in special, but also by considerable possible future changes ultimately brought about by the event to the whole set of freedoms that European citizenship currently encompasses (Foster 2017). Given the undeniably large number of people ultimately affected, to a greater or lesser degree, by our main research topic, the social relevance of our research question, as already demonstrated in the previous paragraph, can therefore be hardly unattested.

Lehnert, Miller and Wonka (2007 p. 22) still point out to the fact that 'socially relevant research furthers the understanding of social and political phenomena which affect people and make a difference with regard to an explicitly specified evaluative standard'. By *an explicitly*

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[16] In the case of the internal British political landscape, it's worth highlighting the tensions brought about by the referendum between Westminster and the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland and, in special, Scotland, whose First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has, after a long row with the Prime Minister over Scotland's place in the EU, decided to call for the preparation of a new referendum on Scottish independence (the previous one having taken place less than three years prior).

[17] Crisp, J 2017, 'EU Brexit boss warns of 'serious repercussions' if divorce talks fail', *EurActiv*, 22 March 2017.

[18] The term "hard Brexit", as opposed to "soft Brexit", became increasingly popular in the aftermath of the referendum as referring to the version of Brexit which discards any future deal with the EU that could limit British sovereignty (e.g., that demands surrendering internal control over immigration policies or the ability to independently sign trade deals with other countries outside the bloc). Theresa May has made it clear in several occasions that she will favour that approach during Brexit negotiations by declaring that there should be 'no attempts to stay in the EU by the back door', and that, most notoriously – and controversially, 'Brexit means Brexit' (cited in Asthana 2016).

[19] Sedgwick, S & Ellyatt, H 2016, 'Brexit risk 'concerns the whole world': Lagarde', *CNBC*, 17 June 2016.

specified evaluative standard, the authors mean that different outcomes resulting from different answers to a given research question should either make somebody who is affected by a given social phenomenon *so to say* better or worse off, according to a given parameter (idem p. 26). This research, as underlined in 1.2., is motivated to ask what factors determined the Brexit vote by possible points of controversy to be found in mainstream explanations on the causes of the problem. This research does not make evaluative judgements on whether Brexit itself is either "good" or "bad". It does, however, following the authors' instructions, point out to some of the factors that led to the Brexit vote and analyses them in the light of whether they could be interpreted as potentially positive or negative in relation to the public affected[20].

Finally, Lehnert, Miller and Wonka (2007 p. 27) also underline the importance of "practical advice" to be able to be taken out from a given research in order for it to be effectively socially relevant. 'The researcher will increase the social relevance of her work by pointing out the practical implications of the research' (idem p. 31). These implications, along with practical recommendations, are outlined mainly in sub-section 7.2. of this research.

1.3.2. *Scientific relevance*

Scientific relevance 'refers to the analytical value a research question adds to the scientific discourse of the subdiscipline (…) it addresses' (Lehnert, Miller & Wonka 2007 pp. 21-22) – the discipline here being political science. Therefore, a scientifically relevant study 'increases the analytical leverage over a given topic and thus enhances political scientists' ability to describe or explain a political phenomenon' (idem p. 32). To put it in yet another way, as Gschwend & Schimmelfennig (2007, p. 3) tell us, 'research is relevant to the scientific community if it advances the collective dialogue between theory and data beyond the current state of the discipline'.

In this sense, as Blatter and Haverland (2012 p. 50) instruct us, 'irrespective of the research approach chosen', they proceed, 'researchers who seek to make a relevant contribution to the scientific literature should be aware of the state of the art of the scientific debate and explicitly relate their own study to this debate'. By presenting, therefore, the discussion on how the scientific discourse has been structured around our central problem in our literature review (2.2.) while addressing this debate throughout the research (3.2 and 5.), this thesis provides for

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[20] As a matter of example, a possible desire for more economic freedom as the main factor determining the choice for Brexit would be manifestly less threatening to liberal values than a vote based mostly on plain xenophobia. Alternatively, something similar could be said from a vote for Brexit which would have been mostly based, in effect, on social equality concerns. See more on that discussion in chapter 6.

solid scientific relevance. Still according to Blatter and Haverland (idem p. 169), all empirical studies aiming to contribute to the scientific debate include a section that fulfils the function of selecting the theories utilised by the researcher in a particular empirical study. This essential section can also be found within chapter 3, *theoretical framework*, of our thesis (3.2.).

In regards to the topic of Brexit *per se*, Oliver (2017 p. 1) classifies it as "the defining issue of British politics", while 'not an hour goes by without the emergence of some new speech, gossip, debate, statement or policy proposal' (idem p. 1) on the issue. In that sense, 'anyone seeking to understand Brexit can face an overwhelming challenge. Brexit is, therefore, a topic in urgent need of theoretical analysis' (idem p. 1). Furthermore, 'we need to find a way to sift through all the developments in order to focus on those that are the most important. This is where theory plays an important and necessary role' (idem p. 1). Finally, the author stresses that theory can in effect be applied in order to explain several different aspects of Brexit, such as, in special, the reasons why the British electorate voted the way they did.

Conclusively, regarding the scope of the master program this thesis is developed for, Britain's exit from the European Union emerges as a topic of extreme academic compatibility, and thus relevance, given its clear international dimension which, as already demonstrated in 1.3.1., ultimately relates heavily to the field of public management and public policy. The main research question proposes to discuss the main factors/policies (or the lack thereof) that eventually led the British public to define an important new national feature, with key ramifications that manifestly impact the state of affairs of the European Union and the international system.

In the following and final sub-section of this first chapter (1.4.), a brief guide condenses all references to different parts of the present research found along the full text of this thesis in a clear, concise manner for more effective reading.

1.4.   Reading guide

This initial introductory chapter (1.) starts with (1.1.) a brief presentation of the general topic of the thesis – *Brexit*, contextualising and justifying the choice for its main research question, which is delimitated in 1.2. and whose social and scientific relevance is attested in 1.3. (1.3.1. and 1.3.2.).

The second chapter (2.) presents a literature review, in which the state of the art on how the mainstream discourse has been structured around our central problem is discussed (2.2.) and some fundamental concepts are already precisely defined (2.1.1., 2.1.2. and 2.1.3). This

provides the basis on which chapter 3, *theoretical framework*, further specifies the variables related to the main research question (3.1. and 3.2.) and the scientific theories proposed by academia that this study considers to be relevant in order to explain how the variables of interest are connected to each other (3.2.1. and 3.2.2.). Chapter 3 still underlines the causal model evidenced by the theories specified (3.3.), providing testable hypotheses (3.3.1. and 3.3.2.) in order for a proper research design to be formulated (4.1.).

Chapter 4, *research design and methods*, further clarifies our methods (4.2.) of data collection (4.2.1.) and data analysis (4.2.2.), after which we are fully equipped to proceed to chapter 5, *empirical research*, where we analyse the material collected following our methodology which shall or shall not give support to our hypotheses (5.1., 5.2. and 5.3.). We then proceed to the evaluation of our hypotheses (6.1. and 6.2.) in our analysis of findings (6.), eventually coming to our conclusions (7.), answer to the main research question (7.1.), and discussion on the implications, limitations and recommendations for future research (7.2.).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Practical context of the British 2016 EU membership referendum

2.1.1. The actual options that were posed to voters

Before we continue towards the state of the art on how the mainstream discourse has been structured around our central problem (2.2.) as well as on the theoretical debate relevant to our main research question (3.), it is imperative, nevertheless, to start by reviewing and probing further some of the conditions under which the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum of 2016 (alternatively, the "Brexit referendum") effectively took place. Remembering Haverland (2013a), a clear research question must be *precise*; in this sense it is important to explore, as enunciated in 1.2., the (three distinctive) presumptions contained within the formulation of our main research question, clarifying its concepts and, consequently, further enhancing the validity[21] of our inferences to follow. This sub-section does not delve into the broader context of the referendum political campaigning nor discuss the historical context of British Euroscepticism itself. Such commentary could in effect provide additional contextual basis to our study, but it does not fall within the framework of this paper, and does not relate directly to the conceptual composition of our main research question.

In that clear regard, first of all, it could be presumed that, following the formulation of our question, voters have been presented with a classic *yes* or *no* question on the matter of British EU membership. That was not exactly the case, and the fact it wasn't brings relevant insight to the understanding of the phenomenon as well as to some of the criticism displayed towards the referendum process[22]. In effect, it is important to underline how the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum of 2016 was notably striking in the simplicity and frankness it asked voters to provide their say on a theme deemed of, as seen in 1.3.1., so much importance and interest by many. While other referenda would have outlined questions in a rather less clear-cut way, often due to poor qualitative design; seldom in order to deviate voters towards a desired bias/outcome (Rosůlek 2016)[23], even a classic *yes* or *no* to the matter of European Union membership couldn't have been more decisive than the way the

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[21] See more on the matter of validity in chapter 3.

[22] See Colignatus, T 2017, 'The Brexit referendum question was flawed in its design', *London School of Economics Brexit Blog*, 17 May 2017.

[23] An iconic recent case of skewed referendum framing can also be found in Hungary, through Viktor Orbán's controversial 2016 so-called "refugee referendum" (Bershidsky 2016).

question was posed to British voters in the 23rd of June 2016[24]. Also escaping from an ultimate bias towards perceived positivity (associated with *yes*) or negativity (associated with *no*) – the "Pollyanna Hypothesis", or from a possible disconnection between question and answer in the minds of voters: "is a *yes* campaign actually in favour of leaving or remaining in the EU?" (Boucher & Osgood 1969), the referendum eventually left little to no room for doubts on the reasoning of its questioning by presenting to voters the following ballot paper:

Figure 1 – 2016 EU referendum ballot paper

Referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union

Vote only once by putting a cross ✖ in the box next to your choice

Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?

Remain a member of the European Union ☐

Leave the European Union ☐

Source: Wikimedia Commons 2016.

Campaigning and actual ballot papers were both focused on the self-explanatory options: *remain* or *leave*. There it was, then – a clear-cut, straight-to-the-point question on whether the British voter would like to change, as seen in 1.3.1., arguably the whole course of globalisation (Morgan 2016 p. 7). Further criticism on the framing of the referendum could still be found, nevertheless. According to Susen (2017 p. 177), for example, 'the binary electoral choice between Remain and Leave was unjustifiably *simplistic*, taking into account both the magnitude and the complexity of the issues at stake'. Susen in this assertion, however, refers

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[24] See more in Electoral Commission 2015, *Referendum on membership of the European Union: assessment of the Electoral Commission on the proposed referendum question*, September 2015.

not to a possible bias on the framing of the question *per se*, but rather to how such a complex topic with several possible ramifications resulting from a "leave" vote *("soft" Brexit? "hard" Brexit?)* could have been condensed to just one singular choice. This research, in any case, as already hinted in 1.1., does not go into the merit of what possible outcomes, intrinsically, would eventually fall upon British voters according to their choices and the outcome of the referendum. It does, however, pay attention to how the options were effectively framed to the electorate in the referendum, and whether this specific framing could have affected the decision of voters. On that note, it is valid to stress that immediately after the vote and consistently ever since, many on mostly the "remain" camp, and also abroad, have claimed that a large portion of the electorate could have possibly taken its decision in a rather uninformed way (Martin & Escritt 2017). This could have been the case, in effect, due to a plethora of reasons, such as misleading political campaigns and a disproportionate influence of biased media, to name but a few. This research, nevertheless, given the way the questioning was framed to the electorate in the Brexit referendum, can affirm that such possible ill decision-making from the part of voters was, at least, hardly related to the actual framing of ballot papers.

Another important aspect of the options posed to voters in the Brexit referendum is that they did not have, in reality, a legally binding character. The result of the referendum, at least under British law, would not necessarily need to be translated into political action (McKinney 2016). That could have had a considerable effect in how the British electorate voted or, very reasonably, refrained from voting – even though in our case that seems improbable (idem). On an opposite note, the lack of legally binding character could just as well have exacerbated tendencies for a so-called "protest vote" (Goodwin & Heath 2016 p. 326); claimed as such by many in the "remain" camp also when questioning the legitimacy of the referendum to have been of supposedly considerable proportions. Nevertheless, these arguments seem to do not hold water, as it is today widely acknowledged that, even though after the referendum took place this important detail became a remarkable point of controversy[25], the government of the United Kingdom did not publicise that fact during the referendum campaign while at the same time fully and consistently proclaimed the vote to be decisive and final (McKinney 2016).

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[25] More famously through investment manager Gina Miller, who in light of such procedural flaw successfully brought the British government to court in its quest for Parliament to be given the final vote on withdrawal from the European Union. More on this topic in Kirton (2017).

Even though the term "British voters" has been used sporadically in this research up to this point, it is yet valid to underline that such a definition of the electorate within the context of the Brexit referendum can be potentially inaccurate (Davies 2016). Within the formulation of our main research question, one could also presume that eligible voters, in this sense, were potentially all adult British citizens. That, however, was not exactly the case. In fact, some British citizens were, controversially, *not* entitled to take part in the Brexit referendum, while on the other hand a number of non-British citizens were granted the right to do so (Tatham 2016). That is important to be highlighted because, essentially, if we are concerned with the precise definitions of the concepts discussed through our main research question, it is in effect licit to state that the vote for Brexit was not a decisive choice from the British *entirely*. Arguments following that line of reasoning could, therefore, keep being presented in somewhat misleading ways (Davies 2016; Tatham 2016).

Eventually, given the above, the criteria that identified individuals as voters was one potential deciding factor in the Brexit referendum, with some accounts claiming that specific sets of rules for qualifying as a voter in the occasion could have swung the results by more than 7.6 million votes in the opposite direction (Nardelli 2015). The best way to shed some light on this matter is to verify what the Electoral Commission of the United Kingdom itself determined for each case. In that sense, according to the Commission, those eligible to vote at British general elections must be first of all *registered to vote*, and also:

Figure 2 – Eligibility to vote at British general elections

- 18 years of age or over on polling day
- be a British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizen[26]
- be resident at an address in the UK (or a UK citizen living abroad who has been registered to vote in the UK in the last 15 years)
- not be legally excluded from voting

Source: Electoral Commission 2017b.

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[26] Citizens from the Commonwealth, including British Crown Dependencies and British Overseas Territories, who are lawfully resident in the UK (Electoral Commission 2017a).

Whereas the following, also according to the commission, are not allowed to vote:

Figure 3 – Ineligibility to vote at British general elections

- members of the House of Lords
- EU citizens (other than UK, Republic of Ireland, Cyprus and Malta) resident in the UK
- anyone other than British, Irish and qualifying Commonwealth citizens
- convicted persons detained in pursuance of their sentences, excluding contempt of court (though remand prisoners, unconvicted prisoners and civil prisoners can vote if they are on the electoral register)
- anyone found guilty within the previous five years of corrupt or illegal practices in connection with an election

Source: Electoral Commission 2017b.

As determined by the Electoral Commission, UK citizens living abroad can also register themselves as "overseas voters" – as long as they have been registered to vote in the United Kingdom within the previous 15 years and given the condition that they are eligible to vote in both UK parliamentary general elections and European parliamentary elections. That rule was applied in the same way for the Brexit referendum. It raised, nevertheless, a contentious point of discussion among British citizens who found themselves away from the United Kingdom for more than 15 years and living in one of the other countries within the European Union. These British citizens, who would be disproportionately affected in a potentially negative way by a *leave* outcome, could not have their say in the referendum (Tatham 2016).

On the other hand, Commonwealth citizens *in* Gibraltar, a British Overseas Territory, unlike in previous general elections, were granted a full say in the outcome of the vote. Commonwealth citizens, usually in need of lawful residence in the UK in order to be eligible for voting in general elections, were also given full electoral rights during the referendum if fulfilling that same condition. In that sense, even though EU citizens living in the UK did not have the right to vote, that means that not only Irish, but also Cypriot and Maltese EU citizens

living in the UK ended up having the right to do so. Members of the House of Lords, on a further note, otherwise not eligible for voting, were also granted such right (Sommers 2015).

2.1.3. *The actual rules on what constituted a majority of voters*

Finally, we arrive at the third presumption contained within the formulation of our main research question: that a "majority" of voters determined the outcome of the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum. What was, nevertheless, the definition of electoral majority in the context of the Brexit referendum?

Contrary to the traditional British general electoral system, that follows a classic "first-past-the-post" system in which each of the (hundreds of) national constituencies define their positions based on a closed internal electoral contest, subsequently composing the quantities in Parliament each with one mandate, the Brexit referendum was rather based on a system of "one person, one vote", with a simple majority of votes for one of the two options available (50%+) defining the result, and with the whole of the United Kingdom plus Gibraltar (which is otherwise not represented in Westminster) functioning as a single constituency (EU referendum 2016). That model, even though oftentimes supported by some as more inherently democratic than the traditional British electoral model (Bogdanor 1981), nevertheless also attracted considerable criticism in the context of the referendum. Objections were raised, for instance, on the matter of whether a "double majority" rule should have been applied (Sommers 2015), with the proposition therefore of not only a simple majority on UK level necessary for a conclusive victory of either side, but also of additional simple majority rules applying to each of the UK's constituting countries (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) individually, highlighting their rights for national self-determination. In fact, this is what has mainly provided the arguments for Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to bring about plans for a new referendum on Scottish independence in the aftermath of the EU referendum (Carrell 2016), as even though the UK as a whole voted for Brexit with an overall majority of 51.9%, Scotland, if taken aside, voted mostly for "remain", with 62% of valid votes in that direction (EU referendum results 2016).

Figure 4, which adds that the turnout in the referendum was of in effect 72.2%, is also able to put the Scottish problem in clear visual evidence by showing which of the two sides in the referendum won in each of the traditional British electoral constituencies:

Figure 4 – EU referendum: how the UK voted
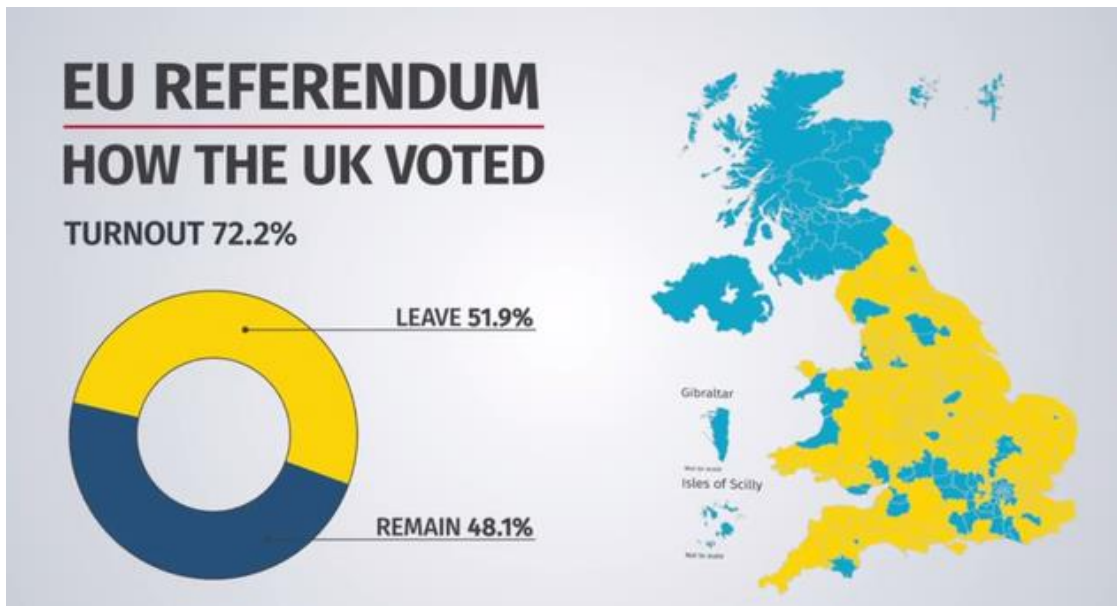
Source: Nelson 2016.

Criticism also spread on the rule of overall simple majority itself. Before the referendum took place, many mostly on the "leave" side – notably under the auspices of UKIP – admonished that a simple majority of relatively small margin should not be considered decisive in the case of a final vote to remain in the EU. Once the vote was counted, however, the argument was quickly bought also by the "remain" side, with allegations that the rule of simple majority, with such a small margin making victory for "leave" possible, was not a responsible choice for a referendum with such potentially important political and economic consequences (York 2016).

Still on the percentages: younger voters were more inclined to vote "remain", while older voters were more commonly in favour of "leave"; with a proportion of around 27% of those aged between 18 to 24 voting to leave the European Union, compared to a corresponding much higher 60% for those aged 65 or more. It is also important to stress that those with higher levels of education tended to vote most decisively against leaving the EU, while those with lower levels of education would more commonly vote "leave" – 72% of those with only primary education and 64% of those with only secondary education opted for "leave", while only a much lower 36% of those with a university degree voted the same way. Finally, it's also valid to point out that regional differences seem to have played a major part in the referendum, with the likelihood of voting for Brexit (along with voter turnout) having been higher in rural areas than in larger cities (Nikolka & Poutvaara 2017 p. 70). This information will be relevant for the construction of our case in chapters 3 (*theoretical framework*) and 5 (*empirical research*) of this thesis.

2.2.   Critical appraisals on the Brexit vote

In the previous sub-section we have been able to discuss in more depth the three distinctive presumptions contained within the formulation of our research question. Now that the concepts they propose have been defined in a more precise manner and further context has been given to our main research topic, we can then proceed with our study towards an answer satisfactorily. As seen in 1.3.2., Blatter and Haverland (2012 p. 50) tell us that 'irrespective of the research approach chosen, researchers who seek to make a relevant contribution to the scientific literature should be aware of the state of the art of the scientific debate and explicitly relate their own study to this debate'. In that sense, we start this sub-section by portraying more extensively some of the mainstream academic discourse on our central problem, with varied critical appraisals on what the Brexit vote in fact meant. We then put these interpretations under debate in section 5 of this thesis.

As mentioned in 1.1. and 1.2., it was precisely the broadly diffused idea that the Brexit vote was mainly a vote based on xenophobia and intolerance that led the topic to largely dominate the general public's emotional perceptions (Beauchamp 2016; Taylor 2016). The vote for Brexit, following that discourse, became then commonly understood as a vote for above all less immigration (Ridley 2016; Versi 2016; Tilford 2015). In line with the association between the Brexit vote and the desire for less immigration, Calhoun (2017 p. 59), for example, states that 'Brexit was manifestly a vote against multiculturalism and for English nationalism'. He goes on to suggest that 'arguably Brexit was a vote for some version of the past' and that 'the vote was grounded in nostalgia' (idem p. 60). More irreverently, he declares that 'Brexit is among other things a rejection of "Cool Britannia"[27]' (idem p. 60). The author, despite such interpretations, at some point also remarkably admits, though, that the results might have been due to economic transformation (globalisation, technological innovation, global finance and increasingly unequal prosperity). Citing the "cosmopolitan elites" (idem p. 60), or the "metropolitan elites" (Bhambra 2017 p. 92) – supposedly the primary beneficiaries of such transformation –, Calhoun eventually opposes so-called "cosmopolitanism" to "nationalism" – *perhaps the new political spectrum of the 21ˢᵗ century*? (Inglehart & Norris 2016 p. 3); while also according to Hobolt (2016 p. 1259), 'the divide between winners and losers of globalization was a key driver of the vote'.

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[27] 'The 1990s branding of a cosmopolitan, creative, and united Britain as a part of a happy vision of globalization' (Calhoun 2017 p. 60).

On that note, Outhwaite also states that 'the vote has revealed cleavages across the UK on a regional and class basis'. He however goes further to classify such cleavages still under the traditional spectrum of "left" and "right" politics, stating that the UK, with the Brexit vote, has seen the revival of a kind of "class politics", in which working-class voters swing to the right, rather than to the left (ed Outhwaite 2017 p. vii). Would that in fact be the case?[28] Under what exact assumptions? The author still suggests that those regional divisions were rather hard to explain in his perspective, as the most economically deprived areas of the United Kingdom (exactly the ones which have benefited the most from EU development funds), were often in fact the most hostile to membership of the EU (idem p. vii). In the matter of regional divide, it is yet valid to remark that, according to Nikolka and Poutvaara (2017 p. 73), in areas that saw an increase in immigration from new Eastern European EU countries after 2004 (when the UK decided unilaterally to open its labour market without discrimination), the number of "leave" votes ended up being higher. That, however, contrasts significantly with the findings of Bokányi, Szállási and Vattay (2017 p. 10), who show us that the more immigrants in general a given region of the UK had, the more likely it was to vote for "remain" in the referendum: what came to be called Britain's "immigration paradox".

Bhambra (2017 p. 91), in her turn, argues that the Brexit referendum 'was less a debate on the pros and cons of membership than a proxy for discussions about race and migration'. She also argues that one of the main propositions of Brexiteers was to have "our country back" and to "put Britain first" (idem p. 91); or as found in Qvortrup (2016 pp. 264), to "take back control", and equates that to a racial problem: a "racialized discourse" (Bhambra 2017 p. 91). According to her, during the Brexit campaign emphasis has been put on prioritising the so-called "poor white English people" against "poor white Poles", which would, in the author's view, point 'to an analysis of class that is deeply racialized and ethnicized and one that marked many of the debates on Brexit' (idem p. 91). Auer (2017 p. 47), nevertheless, on the other hand stresses that, with the exception of Nigel Farage[29], the leaders of the Brexit campaign were not in fact arguing against immigration *per se*, as much as rather in favour of regaining the ability to control it, making the point that the control of borders is not necessarily linked to a fear of immigration, or xenophobia, but also related to the matter of state sovereignty.

When trying to understand the main reasons that led to a victory of the "leave" vote, Susen (2017 p. 160) reminds us that "Project Fear" was in effect how many Brexiteers branded the "remain" campaign – a campaign in that sense mostly based on highlighting the possible

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[28] See 3.2.2. for further discussion on the issue.
[29] The then leader of far-right UKIP.

negative outlook for the UK's future under the uncertainty of possibly leaving the EU, rather than on an effectively positive case for continued membership. Positivity for what the future could bring out of the EU in the message of "leave", as Susen suggests, is what would have mainly led voters to buy the "leave" case, against a fairly negative outlook resorted by the "remain" campaign – what some have in the debate often in fact also called "scaremongering" (idem p. 160). On their hand, "remainers" (or "Bremainers", as the author prefers) showed a rather *passive* attitude, 'concerned with preserving the status quo in an uninspiring and pragmatic, if not technocratic, manner', while "leavers", on the other hand, displayed an *active* attitude, 'oriented towards the construction of a bright future in an aspirational and idealistic, if not utopian, fashion' (idem p. 160).

This chapter has provided deeper context to our main topic, clarified some of the concepts within our main research question, and brought about a summary of the interpretations of academia with which we can build our case further in chapter 5. We shall now proceed to our *theoretical framework*, which will give the additional support needed for a proper systematic analysis of our problem.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Dependent variable

The theoretical framework is the "backbone" of a scientific study, affecting every aspect of the research: from the way we frame our problem, to defining its concepts and discussing how they effectively interact with each other (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008). Starting this chapter with the framing of our problem, as specified in 1.2., it has been translated more succinctly to the following main research question:

What were the main determinants of the Brexit vote?

a *descriptive* (or "what") question, which, as we can recall from 1.3.1., might as well be turned into an *explanatory* ("why") question: *why did voters opt for Brexit?* As Haverland (2013a) points out, "why" questions are key to science. They indicate the proper path to go to all the way from description of factors, to explanation of phenomena and, finally, prescription of practical advice. They ensure, therefore, that by developing the right research design and methods (4.) we are able to offer such practical advice in our conclusions and recommendations (7.) being based on *empirical*, rather than normative statements.

In order to do so, we need to first think of our problem in terms of *variables*, whose possible correlation can be effectively corroborated or not through *empirical analysis*. Variables reflect our main concepts of interest (Kellstedt & Whitten 2007 p. 1). In our problem, the *dependent variable* (**y**) – or the phenomenon whose variation we seek to explain – is *the Brexit vote*, or what was essentially *the choice of voters*; which, as already seen in 2., was in its majority for "leave", but could as well have varied as to "remain". Consequently, not only a *categorical* but also *binary* variable (Fields 2009 p. 8); as already stressed by Susen (2017 p. 177) in 2.1.1.. Formulated in the way above, the main research question of this study is therefore a *y-oriented* (or outcome-centric) research question. This is because we start our questioning by looking at the (overall) causes/determinants for a given outcome or phenomenon (Haverland 2013a).

As Kellstedt and Whitten (2007 p. 27) instruct us, when specifying what our dependent variable in fact is within our theoretical framework, one of the first things we also need to identify are the *spatial* and *time* dimensions over which we would like to measure such variable.

These are already highlighted in our main research question within the full enunciation presented in 1.2.. There, the **(s)** space and **(t)** time our empirical analysis shall focus on can be obviously defined, respectively, as 1. *the United Kingdom* 2. *European Union membership referendum of 2016*. Consecutively, what we want to explain is the variation in *the choice of voters* **(y)** *in the United Kingdom* **(s)** *European Union membership referendum of 2016* **(t)**.

In order to explain this phenomenon through empirical analysis, though, we also need one or more *independent* variable(s) **(x)**, which shall or shall not be correlated to our dependent variable; to a greater or lesser degree. An independent variable is a factor that possibly leads to variation in the dependent variable (Kellstedt & Whitten 2007). In the way our question is formulated, however, there is no independent variable outlined. How do we find, then, an independent variable?

The independent variable is found through causal models provided by *theories*; whilst 'a theory is a conjecture that the independent variable is causally related to the dependent variable' (Kellstedt & Whitten 2007 p. 8). The following sub-section (3.2.) discusses the main theories within the relevant literature that try to explain, along with the critical appraisals reviewed, the specific problem of the vote to leave the European Union, so that two main independent variable(s) can be properly identified and put under empirical analysis in chapter 5 of this thesis.

3.2.   Independent variables

3.2.1.   *The theory of international relations institutionalism*

In order to properly explain a phenomenon of interest a political scientist needs to make use of causal theories (Kellstedt & Whitten 2007 p. 4). Still according to Blatter and Haverland (2012 p. 169), all empirical studies aiming to contribute to a theoretical debate include a section that fulfils the function of selecting the theories utilised by the researcher in a particular empirical study. Theories are developed in order to understand, explain, predict and, in many cases, also challenge and expand the existing body of knowledge beyond the limits of critical appraisals. The theoretical framework, in its turn, is the structure that presents and supports the theories that a given study chooses to make use of. In other words, the theoretical framework introduces and describes the theories that explain through which inferential mechanisms we can find the answer to our main research question (Swanson & Chermack 2013).

'Political science theories should be able to provide insight into the underlying causes and dynamics of the evolution of political formations such as the EU in a way that goes beyond the cursory speculations found in newspapers' (Vollaard 2014 pp. 1142-1143). In the development of the present study, it was observed that a reasonable amount of articles in the field of political science with a deeper theoretical perspective on the causes for Brexit itself are still not available for research; perhaps given how recent the phenomenon is. In that sense, however, Qvortrup (2016 pp. 260-261) brings us the idea that the theory of *public choice* could help us in understanding the Brexit vote, with the theory here defined as the application of economic principles to political science. In his reasoning, he argues that within microeconomic theory Brexit can be considered as an "inelastic political good", which means that regardless of the possible costs Brexit (or as the author specifies, "political sovereignty") could bring to economic stability, largely vaticinated by several traditional bodies of authority such as the IMF, the OECD and the Bank of England (the "experts", as Michael Gove famously branded them)[30], the "change in its price" did not affect the desire to "purchase" it, as voters would consider it "priceless" (idem p. 262). As Nikolka and Poutvaara (2017 p. 70) point out, though, this approach should be taken carefully, as the perceived distribution of gains from EU membership was apparently very different across the United Kingdom. As they highlight, 'the estimated average costs and benefits at the aggregate level alone do not enable us to understand voting behaviour. Instead, one must take into account the heterogeneity of (perceived) gains and losses within the society' (idem p. 70).

Still according to Qvortrup (2016 p. 261), and in slight contrast to what has been mostly brandished in 2.2., 'the main argument proposed by those who wanted to leave the EU was that a vote for Brexit was a vote for sovereignty' (Qvortrup 2016 p. 261). He recognises, though, that by the end of the referendum campaign 'immigration and sovereignty had emerged as the big issues' (idem p. 264). These are relevant remarks to our study and shall be further discussed. In any case, the author's overall theoretical approach seems however somewhat unsuited for this research: even though it proposes interesting reflections on the subject by characterising Brexit as an inelastic good, it does less to provide further insight on the actual determining factors of the vote.

Vollaard, from Universiteit Leiden, on the other hand, in his article of 2014 on how to find the most adequate theoretical starting point for explaining European *disintegration* in general, is able to offer us considerable insight. As he argues, 'scholarly literature on European

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[30] Mance, H 2016, 'Britain has had enough of experts, says Gove', *Financial Times*, 3 June 2016.

integration as well as on international co-operation and comparative politics can be a fruitful theoretical source for conceptualizing and explaining European disintegration' (Vollaard 2014 p. 1143). Oliver (2015 p. 410) and Vollaard (2014 p. 1143), when synthetizing the literature on the issue, point out that there were also rather few academic studies before the Brexit vote took place proposing an analysis on how the march towards "Europeanisation", or European integrationism, could be halted or reversed: 'the vast literature on Europeanisation includes only a few pieces that explore ideas and theories of European disintegration' (Oliver 2015 p. 410-411). 'So why is there no theory of disintegration?', remarkably asks Rosamond (2016 p. 865). As Oliver explains, that would be so in part because the matter would be considered a "taboo" in Europe, characterised as a potentially traumatic episode of unprecedented consequences. Until then the field would be dominated by the assumption that continuous integration was a given. The potential of a Britain's exit from the European Union would be then some sort of "distraction", to which the EU would have "little incentive to agonise over" (Oliver 2015 p. 411). In that sense, Vollaard (2014) defends that 'in addition to the few contributions addressing the topic, theories of European integration and international co-operation can be turned 'on their head' to define and explain disintegration' (idem p. 1143). As 'history is full of currency areas, federations, empires and states that disintegrated (…) comparative analyses could help trace the underlying causes and dynamics of European disintegration' (idem p. 1143). He shows us, though, that many of such theories and comparative approaches can nonetheless still offer controversial bases for that end.

According to Vollaard (2014 p. 1142), the rather common idea that continuous political integration is a natural given into the future is considerably misleading because, with the exception of, to cite his examples, the unification of Germany, Vietnam and Yemen, 'the formation of the European Union (EU) is the only instance of large-scale political integration in recent world history' (idem p. 1142). The author argues that disintegration is in effect a much more commonly verifiable phenomenon, with the examples of Scotland, Quebec, Flanders and Catalonia having recently secured more autonomy – not to mention the more extreme recent cases of independence of East Timor and South Sudan. According to the author, finally, even though the EU has in fact been undergoing a genuine process of integration until this day, 'the spectre of disintegration has also been haunting the EU in recent years' (idem p. 1142). Following that reasoning, 'a consistent and coherent set of testable statements should inform observers of the crucial factors and mechanisms that influence phenomena such as European disintegration' (idem p. 1143) in the same way they can inform us about the mechanisms that eventually led to the Brexit vote. On that note, Oliver (2017 p. 1) also defends that 'using

various theoretical approaches can help us better understand Brexit'. In his 2017 article, he proposes four theoretical approaches that can be used as a starting point in order to understand Britain's exit from the European Union: *neoclassical realism*, *constructivism*, *bureaucratic politics* and *cognitivism* (idem p. 1). These theories and the reasoning proposed by the author in the article, however, are more focused on explaining how Brexit negotiations shall unfold, rather than on why the British people voted the way they did.

Following then Vollaard's line of inquiry, Oliver (2015 p. 411) goes further into analysing the issue of European integration by making effective use of existing/competing theories of international relations and European integration in order to explain a possible context of European *dis*integration – and therefore the possible context of Brexit itself. He mostly bases his exposition on a comprehensive theoretical analysis formulated by Webber (2014 pp. 342-344; cited in Oliver 2015 p. 412), who says that, for example, an explanation for a member-state possibly leaving the EU based on the acclaimed *theory of realism* would be most probably based on the gradual retreat from American military influence in the continent due to, primarily, the end of a common Soviet threat after the Cold War, with an eventual collapse of NATO which would lead to European countries being more suspicious of each other. Webber bases this argument on the thoughts of John Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer 1990 p. 47; cited in Webber 2014 p. 343), who argues that the American military presence in Europe through NATO is in fact the main reason behind European peace. The theory of realism as a plausible explanation for European disintegration, however, is disregarded by Webber himself, as NATO has actually expanded since the Cold War, revealing a flaw in the argument. As that possible scenario hasn't materialised up to this day[31], that reasoning in fact cannot give further light to the mechanism behind the Brexit vote.

A *classical intergovernmentalism* explanation (Webber 2014 pp. 344-345) would be, among all others, the most similar to one based on the theory of international relations realism. Here, key roles are played by the nation-states, rather than by supranational institutions such as the European Commission. Integration is dependent on the degree of convergence of interests from the governments of the key member states – the "three big governments": France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Accordingly, a cohesive axe of only two of these, France and Germany, would be sufficient to maintain the integration process. The theory implies that disintegration of the Union should surely be caused by a fundamental breakup of relations

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[31] With the recent election of Donald Trump as US president, who has been consistently demonstrating an uncompromised rhetoric on NATO obligations in regards to the defence of Europe, though, that argument could in effect still apply in the future. See more in Shear, Landler and Kanter (2017).

between the main axis of the union, France and Germany. This breakup also failed to materialise up to this moment. On the contrary, with the euro crisis, for example, their cooperation has actually eventually strengthened (Pisani-Ferry 2014). The theory, therefore, also cannot fully explain the reality of the Brexit vote.

Historical institutionalism (Webber 2014 p. 347), with its criticism to intergovernmentalism, says that integration has in fact become "increasingly irreversible", as individual countries have less and less control over supranational institutions, eventually facing a "high and rising price of exit". 'While the governments of "sovereign" member-states remain free to tear up treaties and walk away at any time, the constantly increasing costs of exit in the densely integrated European polity have rendered this option virtually unthinkable' (Pierson 1998 p. 47; cited in Webber 2014 p. 347). Still, institutional change keeps theoretically possible under the approach. "Punctuated equilibrium", or the scenario in which sudden changes are possible in a context of continued stasis is in this sense recognised (idem p. 347). Historical institutionalism fails, however, to show how such changes could in fact occur/under which criteria or crisis scenario. They do admit the theoretical possibility of radical change; offering, however, no further understanding on why the United Kingdom would have taken, as stated above, such a high price of exit.

Neo-functionalism, *transactionalism* and *liberal intergovernmentalism* (Webber 2014 pp. 347-349), on their turn, focus on the transfer of more and more powers to the European level in the context of the EU. 'As transnational exchange rises, so does the societal demand for supranational rules and organizational capacity to regulate' (Stone Sweet & Sandholtz 1997 p. 306; cited in Webber 2014 p. 348). Webber here brings the argument that with further interdependence even severe economic crises wouldn't be enough to stop the process of integration. A similar argument highlighted by the author in this regard refers to the popular proposition that the needs generated by the EU should/would eventually be solved by more supranational governance – in other words, *more, not less* EU (Borges 2011). Through this perspective, crises then make the EU stronger by demanding more EU. This optimistic approach does in fact analyse the possibility/likelihood of disintegration. Nevertheless, it fails once again in explaining how or why an actual episode of disintegration such as Brexit would take place. If anything, this theoretical approach would stress the rather *unlikelihood* of a vote for Brexit, revealing what Vollaard (2014 p. 1144) classified as the "state bias" of European integration theories when scrutinised upside down.

Finally, according to *international relations institutionalism* (Webber 2014 pp. 345-346), the critical question is whether especially in an enlarged European Union common

interests still link member-states sufficiently 'and whether, much as for intergovernmentalists, the 'most powerful states'' or 'the 'big three' EU members — continue to support the integration process' (idem p. 346). This approach according to the author preaches for example that the successive enlargements of the Union might have created more heterogeneity in the bloc, therefore possibly diminishing the common interests among members: 'although (…) growing economic and other forms of interdependence may exert a countervailing effect, the post-Cold War enlargements have surely increased the EU's socio-economic, cultural and political heterogeneity and thus diminished the scope of common interests among the member states' (idem p. 346). This decline in common interests, followed by a relative disengagement from a given national government in fully committing to the European project, should therefore increase the risks of disintegration. Here – *yes*, we can in effect find clear parallels to the Brexit case and a plausible explanation for the mechanism behind our phenomenon of interest.

If, as according to Eaton (2017), reducing immigration has in fact been the supreme priority for most British voters, just as defended by most of our critical appraisals in the literature review, then the theory of international relations institutionalism as configured by Webber (2014 pp. 345-346) does hold water, in the sense that it explains the Brexit vote as a result of the post-2000 enlargements and the heterogeneity it brought about, diffusing the bloc's common interests. Such enlargements provided millions of Eastern Europeans with the right to live and work in the UK; that they otherwise wouldn't have. In parallel, fundamental assumptions for many in the United Kingdom (that free movement was acceptable in the context of the EU because only limited to other equally rich, more culturally similar Western European countries) were challenged (Vollaard 2014 p. 1150). Following that reasoning, once again, international relations institutionalism then offers a clear theoretical background for providing the basis on which the most common argument brought about by our critical appraisals on the Brexit vote (2.2.) stands: that voters chose in their overall majority to leave the European Union primarily due to particularly right-winged concerns over *high levels of immigration* (Bhambra 2017; Calhoun 2017; Nikolka & Poutvaara 2017; Ridley 2016; Versi 2016; Tilford 2015).

Based on all the above, and also following the footsteps of our critical appraisals in 2.2., we then set our first *independent* variable (x_1), or as seen in 3.1., the factor that possibly leads to variation in our dependent variable, as – *concerns over immigration*.

As Calhoun (2017) and Bhambra (2017) admit in our critical appraisals (2.2.) when defining concerns over immigration as the decisive factor behind the Brexit vote, though, it is important to remember that British society has also been divided recently by those who have primarily benefited from the economic model led by globalisation (the "cosmopolitan" or "metropolitan" elites) and the rest of the population – very often living further away from the bigger centres. In fact, that understanding very much helps in explaining the cleavages across the UK in the aftermath of the referendum based on region and class already pointed out by Nikolka and Poutvaara (2017), as well as Outhwaite (2017). Outhwaite, however, contrary to Inglehart and Norris (2016), in our critical appraisals categorises such divide still under the traditional "left" and "right" dimensions, assuming that working-class voters (or those less benefited by globalisation in general) – who showed a higher probability of opting for "leave", would have to have necessarily "swung to the right" by opting for Brexit: therefore classifying the "leave" vote as an utter expression of *right*-wing tendencies. He does so under the assumption, already condensed in our first independent variable (x_1), that a "vote" for leave was mostly based on an ultimate desire for less immigration. This assumption, nevertheless, fails to take into account the crucial argument of for example Harries (2016 p. 37), that tells us that the case against the EU has actually often been defended by both right- as well as *left*-wing parties in the UK. 'There has always been a Labour strain of euroscepticism', he says. 'It shares with its right-wing variant a concern for the EU's democratic deficit (…) but it is concerned less with such issues as immigration and cultural sovereignty than with the economic model the EU is supposed to represent' (idem p. 34).

That coming in clear contrast also to the sovereignty-centred arguments of Auer (2017) and Qvortrup (2016). In fact, if understood from that perspective, Outhwaite's problem as underlined in 2.2. in explaining why the most economically deprived areas of the United Kingdom were often the most hostile to the EU can promptly be solved by the argument, already defended by Hobolt (2016)[32], that their option was rather rooted in deeper economic dissatisfaction, of which the European Union has traditionally been perceived and portrayed[33] as a principal agent (Harries 2016). This argument, in fact, seems refined to the point that it can also, in some ways, be aligned with the logic behind the immigration argument itself (yet under

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[32] 'The divide between winners and losers of globalization was a key driver of the vote' (Hobolt 2016 p. 1259).
[33] Cathcart, B 2016, 'Don't forget the role of the press in Brexit', *openDemocracyUK*, 30 July 2016. On the matter of national political elites using the European Union as a "scapegoat" for domestic problems, see also Hobolt and De Vries (2016 p. 416).

a different reasoning): it seems consistent with the findings of Nikolka and Poutvaara (2017) highlighted in 2.2., which reveal that in areas of the UK where immigration from new Eastern European EU countries in particular increased after 2004, the number of "leave" votes ended up being higher. It can be argued, in that sense, that "immigration and cultural sovereignty" alone might not have triggered anti-EU feelings – as much as the perception that such EU-induced migratory movement was actually to blame for, in effect, real ever-poorer economic conditions. In this way, the conclusions of Nikolka and Poutvaara fit neatly with the findings of Bokányi, Szállási and Vattay (2017), also already underlined in 2.2., who show us that Britain's "immigration paradox"[34], if anything, means that immigration *per se* was not the main cause of British Euroscepticism in the Brexit referendum.

From a theoretical perspective, in 3.2.1. we have seen that, following the steps of Vollaard (2014), Oliver (2015) and, in special, Webber (2014), by making use of existing theories of international relations and regional/European integration it is possible to analyse – to a greater or lesser extent – also the matter of European *dis*integration and, derivatively, of Brexit itself. In face of the new arguments proposed in this sub-section, though, the theories reviewed and in special the theory of international relations institutionalism seem rather insufficient for explaining our main phenomenon of interest, and a new theoretical approach becomes necessary. In that sense, Webber (idem pp. 349-350) himself does remark that regional integration and international relations theories are fortunately not the only credible theoretical sources of explanation for the matter of possible exit from the EU. According to the author (idem p. 352), such theories of European integration in effect fail to sufficiently recognise the weight that *domestic politics*, and in special that Euroscepticism *within* countries, can have on the issue of possible disintegration.

The author highlights that, given that the EU can also be considered a sort of "federal state", theories that focus on the survival of such institutional structures could also, then, be utilised in order to try to understand the phenomenon, as 'one way of assessing its survival prospects is to analyse the extent to which it fulfils the preconditions of survival of federal systems' (Webber 2014 p 349). In this regard, he starts his case with the strong statement that 'most federations fail' (idem p. 349), and that '*multinational* federations, of which the EU is certainly an example, may be more prone to failure than others' (Kelemen 2007 p. 61; cited in Webber 2014 p. 349). 'The European Union's current crisis is symptomatic of a broader crisis or malaise of regional and international multilateralism', says Webber (2014 p. 341). One of

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[34] Once again, that the more immigrants in general a given region of the UK had, the more likely it was to vote for "remain" in the 2016 EU referendum.

the main arguments brought about by him in that reasoning relates to the fact that all political parties working on an EU level in the European Union are nonetheless – and despite eventual cross-party discipline within the EP – effectively regional (or national), rather than EU-wide in their presence. Given the lack of a broader universal appeal, as well as the (possibly frustrating) impossibility of the electorate's common interest to be mobilised in a unified way on a continental scale in MEP elections, he argues, common solutions for the proper functioning of the bloc could have a harder time in being found, thus leading to a crisis of popular disenfranchisement against the EU, while populist/nationalist sentiment and Eurosceptic parties across Europe could then find it easier to flourish and to eventually be given a voice in the European Parliament itself – and as a consequence, also back home in the national debate[35].

Vollaard (2014 p. 1153), on that point, also adds that those dissatisfied with the path at times taken by the European Union end up in fact lacking a voice on the EU level to raise their concerns effectively. In addition, though, he underlines as well that 'the European Parliament has no decisive say on the distribution of competences in the EU, while the Council represents governments – not groups' and that 'as a result, without the opportunity of opposition *within* the EU, they have had no other option than to express opposition *against* the EU' (idem p. 1153) – with Euroscepticism, then, inducing exit from the European Union. That rationale is what provides the basis on which the *theory of comparative federalism*, as proposed by Webber (2014 pp. 349-350), is able to explain our main phenomenon of interest.

Declaring that 'the EU is an uncertain union' (Vollaard 2014 p. 1155), Vollaard nevertheless defends that, in his perception, 'how (Eurosceptic) dissatisfaction is likely to play out would vary per actor' (idem p. 1154), and even though such Euroscepticism has been rising not only in the UK, the probability of any other country leaving the bloc but Britain is quite small, as the country presents a set of specific conditions that are able to make the idea of leaving seem considerably less costly than they otherwise would seem. That is so because, by having opted out from the Eurozone or the Schengen Area, for example, while at the same time having a more geographically diversified political and economic outlook (considerably geared also towards e.g. the US, the UN, the G20 and the Commonwealth) than many other countries in the bloc plus considerable military might, the idea of leaving the European Union seems less traumatic to the British electorate in ways that perhaps could be impossible for other smaller

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[35] Here the case of UKIP is iconic, as having become the largest British party in the European Parliament in 2014 while on the other hand only achieving relatively meagre results in successive national general elections (notwithstanding, with an arguably much louder voice in the national political debate than the number of its seats in Westminster could possibly suggest). See Kirkup and Swinford (2014).

members of the Union, which should be much more inclined to calculate that, by leaving, they in effect lose their seat at the decision-making table of the largest single market in the planet and a clear amplifying channel for their otherwise lower voice in the world. In that scenario, according to the author, any other EU country but Britain would then prefer to seek other forms of opt-outs or, even, low compliance instead, while remarkably predicting – in 2014 (so before the Brexit referendum took place), based on this theoretical framework, verbatim, that 'Eurosceptic dissatisfaction has not and will probably not lead to full exits from the EU because of a lack of credible, external alternatives and a low belief in national efficacy. The only exception here is the United Kingdom' (idem p. 1155).

As Vollaard (2014 p. 1154) hence points out, popular perception of reduced effective voice channels in the European Union in line with Webber's proposed theory of comparative federalism (Webber 2014 pp. 349-350) is clearly able to explain the dissatisfaction of the electorate in regards to the EU's perceived economic direction, as discussed, and henceforth the eventual vote for Brexit. In effect, Hobolt (2016 p. 1262) argues that issues such as sovereignty, security, devolution of powers and even the matter of democratic deficit in itself were quite marginally discussed in the run up to the referendum, and that in effect 'anti-élite sentiments appealed to many Leave voters' (idem p. 1264). It is then possible to affirm that "leave" voters in their majority felt dissatisfied with the European Union in reality due to a feeling of disenfranchisement and impotence in having their voice heard when trying to change the course of an economic model that was in their perception not working – at least for them[36].

Shedding further light on the matter, Hobolt (idem p. 1264) explains that trade liberalisation and integration across the continent made possible by the EU favours 'the young, well-educated professionals in urban centres' (idem p. 1265), and that it is then these who shall be more favourable to it; as opposed to 'the 'left behind'–the working class, less educated and the older' (idem p. 1265). Such liberalisation and integration allows companies to transfer their production bases to other countries offering lower labour and production costs, for example, thus increasing job insecurity for low-skilled workers domestically (Hobolt & De Vries 2016 p. 420). The "winners" and "losers" of globalisation, therefore, will most probably have considerably different attitudes towards the issue (Hobolt 2016 p. 1265). In effect, she stresses that 'there is consistent evidence to suggest that socioeconomic factors shape attitudes towards European integration' (idem p. 1265).

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[36] Yet, as Freedman (2016 p. 9) declares, 'the record on Britain's growth and international standing since the early 1970s strongly suggests that joining the EU did not hold the UK back, and helped it to recover lost ground'.

Still on that point, Hobolt clarifies that voters' choices will not only not be majorly driven by identitarian issues, such as claimed in 2.2., but also that the role of incumbent national governments do play a very important part in the views of citizens towards the European Union as well. 'Since citizens generally pay more attention to the national political arena than European politics, it makes sense that they employ domestic cues to form opinions about European integration' (idem p. 1266). In that sense, Euroscepticism as an anti-establishment feeling might not only be generated by the perception of disenfranchisement towards the EU itself as predicted by comparative federalism, but also by, in effect, deep dissatisfaction with national politics and a recognised popular tendency to equate the whole of the political establishment as a single entity, regardless of their different and separate levels of governance. Following that reasoning, the "second-order" theory of elections, as briefly commented on by Hobolt (idem 1264), it's yet valid to remark, does also offer some valuable insight to our study, as a predictor that the British electorate would have used their vote in the Brexit referendum in order to signal their dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and/or the broader domestic political class (idem p. 1264). Finally, left-wing Euroscepticism would then be mobilised primarily by economic anxieties over socioeconomically squeezing austerity programs – so common in the last decade – perceived to be directly associated with the European project; even when in fact they could be of complete responsibility of domestic governments alone (Hobolt & De Vries 2016 p. 422).

The theory of comparative federalism, allied to all the supporting arguments presented in this sub-section, offers then a clear theoretical background for providing the basis on which the remarks over x_1 raised in our critical appraisals (2.2.) stand: that voters chose in their overall majority to leave the European Union primarily due to essentially left-winged concerns over *squeezing economic austerity* (Vollaard 2014; Hobolt 2016; Hobolt & De Vries 2016). Based on all the above, we then set our second *independent* variable (x_2) as – *concerns over austerity*.

3.3. Hypotheses

3.3.1. Hypothesis 1

The first step in testing a particular theory is to restate it as one or more testable *hypotheses* (Kellstedt & Whitten 2007 p. 4). In this sense, based on the theoretical model proposed by the theory of international relations institutionalism discussed in 3.2.1., which

provides support to the most common argument exposed in the literature review (2.), this research formulates the following first hypothesis:

H1$_1$: If the choice of voters (y) is best explained by the theory of international relations institutionalism, the Brexit vote was mainly determined by *concerns over <u>immigration</u>* (x$_1$).

As Kellstedt and Whitten (2007 p. 202) also tell us, 'for every hypothesis there is a corresponding null hypothesis'. In this case, the corresponding null hypothesis is:

- H0$_1$: If the Brexit vote was *not* mainly determined by *concerns over* <u>immigration</u> **(x$_1$)**, the choice of voters **(y)** is *not* best explained by the theory of international relations institutionalism.

3.3.2. Hypothesis 2

On its hand, based on the theoretical model proposed by the theory of comparative federalism discussed in 3.2.2., which provides support to the counter-argument of Hobolt (2016) exposed in the literature review (2.), the following second hypothesis is formulated:

H1$_2$: If the choice of voters (y) is best explained by the theory of comparative federalism, the Brexit vote was mainly determined by *concerns over <u>austerity</u>* (x$_2$).

With the corresponding null hypothesis being:

- H0$_2$: If the Brexit vote was *not* mainly determined by *concerns over* <u>austerity</u> **(x$_2$)**, the choice of voters **(y)** is *not* best explained by the theory of comparative federalism.

Both hypotheses follow the criteria indicated by Johnson, Reynolds & Mycoff (2008, pp. 71-77) in that they are *empirical*, *plausible*, *specific*, *consistent* and *testable*[37].

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[37] One additional criterion proposed by the authors also refers to *generality*, or the possibility of expanding conclusions beyond the case(s) under investigation. Generality is (marginally) discussed in this study. Working with general hypotheses, however, is explicitly not considered as one of the requirements of this master program's final thesis and in that sense won't be sought after through the formulation of our research design.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

4.1. Research design

A research design is, according to Gschwend and Schimmelfennig (2007 p. 1), 'a plan that specifies how you plan to carry out your research project and, particularly, how you expect to use your evidence to answer your research question'. This chapter starts, therefore, by outlining the nature of this research project, proceeding with the exposition of how our main research problem should be approached and eventually defining what methods of data collection (4.2.1.) and data analysis (4.2.2.) we can and will make use of in order to gather the necessary evidence for answering our main research question.

Given that the present research focuses on a single spatial and temporal point of interest (our **s** and **t**, as defined in 3.1.), it is considered, according to Haverland (2013b), a "small-N" study. A small-N study focuses on just a few or, as in the present research, only one spatial/temporal dimension and is usually best suited for a *qualitative* research design under what is called an explanatory case study. One of the main advantages of small-N explanatory case studies is the ability to, due to the small number of cases by definition under analysis, perform an intensive, systematic reflection on the relationship between empirical evidence and abstract concepts (Blatter & Haverland 2012 p. 144). As already underlined also in 3.1., our main research question is *y-oriented* (or outcome-centric), because we start our questioning mostly interested in explaining what factors led to a specific outcome or phenomenon. We then look at possible causes/determinants for that specific outcome, rather than at the effects possibly brought about by one specific cause. This is precisely what defines the *causal-process tracing* (CPT) approach to explanatory case studies (Blatter & Haverland 2012), which in its turn, therefore, characterises the research design of this master thesis.

Contrary to the traditional *co-variational* (COV) approach, which focuses on whether a specific factor makes a difference in generating possible phenomena through the comparison of at least two given cases, the CPT approach is considered a true "within-case" analytical technique, as it is, just as our research, focused on one specific case. Nevertheless, as Blatter and Haverland (2012) point out, it is not the only one to be so. A third approach called *congruence analysis* (CON) can also have a within-case focus. It differentiates itself from the CPT approach, though, through the focus it gives to the *scientific relevance* of the research. A congruence analysis is less focused on the "causal pathways" that lead to the outcome of

interest, being more focused on the comparison of empirical observation with expectations derived from, above all, theories. In that sense, expectations based on theories become a referential against which the actual data can be compared in order to corroborate or refute a given theory (Haverland 2013b; Blatter & Haverland 2012). Even though the research design of this master thesis is characterised, as already outlined, by an essentially CPT approach, it does make use of theories (as presented in chapter 3) in order to construct its main argument(s), therefore also displaying elements of congruence analysis.

4.2. Research methods

4.2.1. *Methods of data collection*

Regardless of the differences between the approaches aforementioned, every case study presents one common feature: it is the collection of data, rather than its analysis, that demands most of the energy invested in the research (Blatter & Haverland 2012). While in large-N studies, for example, the quality of the research is mostly dependent on how adeptly statistical models are applied to the data collected in the data analysis, in case studies it is the method through which we select and collect our data that has the strongest impact in the robustness of our research. In this sense, this sub-chapter focuses on what sources of relevant data we can and will make use of in order to gather the necessary evidence for answering the main research question of this thesis.

According to Yin (2003 p. 83), there can be found *six* main possible sources of relevant data for case studies such as the present one: 1. *documentation*, 2. *archival records*, 3. *interviews*, 4. *direct observation*, 5. *participant observation* and 6. *physical artefacts*. As the author explains, a researcher should then be able to select which of these sources are best able to provide evidence for a given study. Each source variant has its own strengths and weaknesses, with distinctive methodological procedures, and are rather complementary to each other. In this sense, a truly robust research design should try to use, within reason, as many of such sources as possible (idem p. 85).

The first of our possible sources, *documentation*, as Yin (2003 p. 85) clearly explains, are almost always relevant to any case study. These, within the scope of our topic, could encompass for instance political announcements, reports of events, administrative documents and/or mass media newspaper articles; among others. Documentary sources can be repeatedly reviewed in the exact same form by any researcher, which adds to its strengths. Nevertheless,

if even only to a small extent, a reporting bias is virtually omnipresent, adding to its weaknesses. This means that even though documentation can be useful within a clearly defined research purpose, it should not be taken as a literal recording of events (idem p. 87). Is should, instead, be used as a means of giving additional context and support to evidence provided by other sources. This thesis makes use of plenty of such means throughout section 5..

Archival records, in their turn, can take a plethora of forms. In the context of Brexit and within the methods of data collection of this research, they are translated in chapter 5 as the results of surveys on the referendum vote and the corresponding geographical distribution of voters across the United Kingdom. Even though with a possibly more precise/quantitative structure than plain documentation, archival records can still suffer from bias, as their method of construction are seldom infallible and often driven by a specific purpose (Yin 2003 p. 89). Despite their more conclusive nature when compared to documentation, they should therefore also be analysed with certain caution.

'One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview' (Yin 2003 p. 89) – *interviews*, in effect, shall form the core of our analysis in the following chapter. As Yin underlines, interviews are especially interesting for case studies due to the fact that most case studies deal with *human* matters (idem p. 92). In that sense, as what we want to explain through this research is our **y** (as seen in 3.1., *the choice of voters*), or in other words what led certain humans to choose for a specific outcome at a certain moment in time **(t)**, these same humans are therefore naturally in a strategic position to provide deeper insight into our main research question. It is valid to stress, nevertheless, that interviews may also suffer from biased reporting. In order to be utilised as a proper method of data collection, they should be structured as much as possible so as to pose their questions in the most unbiased manner; which is to say, in such a way that the answers from interviewees are not influenced in any way by how the researcher asks (and essentially also selects) the questions within its own line of inquiry. Pointing out to the matter of possible bias in interviews, Blatter and Haverland (2012 p. 68), along with Yin (2003 p. 98), still defend the method of "data triangulation", or the use of multiple sources of evidence, as also a means of partly correcting this possible bias through the development of converging different lines of inquiry towards our main conclusions.

Direct observations and *participant observations*, on the other hand, are unfortunately excluded from our methods of data collection, given that the phenomenon under study, even though recent, is in essence an already *historical* one, and cannot, as such, be directly observed or experienced. It is, however, not that historical as well to the point of being analysed making use of *physical artefacts*, which are used more conventionally (even though not exclusively)

for long-past events and/or anthropological studies, and are in that sense also excluded from our sources of relevant research data.

Eventually, all sources of relevant research data selected (in our case: *documentation*, *archival records* and *interviews*) should then converge in the data analysis (5.) in order to provide stronger *validity* and *reliability* to the case presented by our study. In fact, as already instructed by Yin (2003) and outline above, utilising multiple sources of evidence in our data collection and then developing converging different lines of inquiry in our analysis not only diminishes possible bias but, as a direct consequence, also increases our *construct validity*. Kellstedt and Whitten (2007 p. 83), on their hand, instruct us that *internal validity* refers more specifically to the confidence in the conclusions we can draw from the causal mechanism(s) proposed. In other words, to whether our **x** in fact causes **y**, how, and why (Yin 2003). Internal validity here is secured by following a clear research methodology, following Yin's guidelines on providing for comprehensive explanation building, addressing rival explanations and using logical causal models. This also increases the reliability of our research; or as defined by Kellstedt and Whitten (2007 p. 83), the ability of future researchers to follow our steps as defined in our study's methodology and eventually reach the same conclusions we came to.

Still on the matter of validity, *external validity* – or the quality of generality (idem 2003), on the other hand, as already pointed out in 3.3., is not within the requirements of this master thesis nor, more importantly, is it particularly suited to our CPT, "within-case" approach, and in this sense won't be sought after in this research. Further analyses on whether our conclusions and supporting theoretical framework stand solid under other similar cases of European dismemberment, though, would of course be very welcome and shall be recommended further in sub-section 7.2. of our conclusions.

4.2.2. *Methods of data analysis*

The distinction between data collection and data analysis, even though less clear-cut within a CPT approach than through other types of explanatory case studies, nevertheless exists (Blatter & Haverland 2012). Our analysis is not based on the use of indicators and the operationalisation of variables; common features of for instance a COV approach, or on the application of statistical models to our data, often the case for quantitative research designs. Instead, it is based on the temporal exposition of our data in a comprehensive story line underlining and exploring the possible causal mechanisms for the phenomenon under study in

light of our theoretical framework. In this sense, data collection and data analysis are presented in the following chapter united, in symbiosis, under the title of *empirical research*.

In sum: making use of the sources of evidence presented by Yin (2003) selected in 4.2.1., while following the causal-process tracing (CPT) approach to explanatory case studies as found in Blatter and Haverland (2012), we start chapter 5 by analysing the evidence provided by *documentation* and *archival records* on our topic with the aim of obtaining a detailed picture of the case under study and a denser description of the unfolding of events. Subsequently, we dig deeper in the case by making use of *interviews* in order to collect primary sources of data about the perceptions and motivations of key actors within our main research problem; namely, of 10 (ten) politicians, influential thinkers and ordinary voters in the context of the Brexit referendum[38].

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[38] For a list of the respondents, please see *appendix 1*.

5. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

5.1. Documentation on the electoral determinants of Brexit

The final and arguably most important stage of the research process, before we can proceed to our analysis of findings (6.) and conclusions/recommendations (7.) is the empirical analysis of the evidence collected (Field 2009 p. 18), as it is from here that the core contribution of this thesis to academia can be established. As described in our research methods (4.2.), we start 5.1., then, by presenting *documentation* as our evidence to corroborate or refute our hypotheses on the electoral determinants of Brexit.

According to Hobolt and De Vries (2016 p. 420), given that the EU has gradually changed its primary focus over the years from free trade policies to actual comprehensive political union, academia has also followed with increasing studies focusing on more subjective, identitarian bases of support for the Union. Such studies more and more often came to the conclusion that the European Union was in fact not majorly focused on the completion of the single market as much as on rather the centralisation of political authority. This centralisation in its turn would increasingly dilute traditional ideas of separate nations existing within the bloc, in such a way that the less attached to the idea of national belonging and the less one perceived oneself as being part of a distinct culture, the more one would tend to declare support for the European project (idem p. 421). Alternatively, while the authors defend 'that people with strong national identity and pride are less supportive of European integration' (idem p. 421), they make it clear that there is also evidence in other studies that Euroscepticism 'is closely related to a general hostility toward other cultures, such as negative attitudes toward minority groups and immigrants' (idem p. 421). Still according to the authors, 'individuals who conceive of their national identity as exclusive of other territorial identities are likely to be considerably more Euroskeptic than those who have multiple nested identities' (idem p. 421); and in effect 'right-wing Euroskeptic parties rally opposition by highlighting national identity considerations and feelings of cultural threats' (idem p. 422).

In this sub-section, the review of academic as well as regular newspaper articles makes sense in our case, given that the episodes under study are relatively very recent. Following that line of inquiry, we can start by stating that, even though concerns over immigration do rank high among the reasons the electorate voted to leave the EU, it would be 'far too simplistic to see last summer's vote simply as an anti-immigration cry, and certainly inaccurate to interpret

it as the result of an anti-immigrant sentiment' (May should drop her immigration pledge 2017 p. 2). In fact, for many people who voted "leave" reducing immigration *per se* was not as fundamental as actually devolving full control over the issue to Westminster, with many Brexiteers in effect comfortable with the continuation of the current open immigration regime (idem p. 2).

According to O'Toole (2017), even though formally more than half of the electorate opted for Brexit, many among these were driven to do so actually only due to the promises that, in the forthcoming UK-EU negotiations for withdrawal, the British could well "have their cake and eat it" – such as famously declared by Boris Johnson. The uncomfortable truth would be that a large proportion of such voters chose for "leave" in effect because of their dissatisfaction with austerity measures imposed on the country by the Conservatives themselves. This became clear especially when police services were needed in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in London and Manchester earlier in the year. What would otherwise have swung public opinion towards supporting right-wing responses to the episodes in effect became one more hurdle on Theresa May's troubled 2017 general election campaign, as it was under her command as Home Secretary prior to becoming Prime Minister that policing in the United Kingdom was considerably reduced. In the middle of such dissatisfaction, the unequivocally left-wing, anti-austerity policies brought about by the Labour manifesto found then nothing but ever-increasing public acceptance. The then identitarian strategy incessantly used by May during the election campaign ended up not being a strong enough contender for Jeremy Corbyn's practical focus on the economic conditions of ordinary citizens, who were more interested in having good education and health, for example, than in fulfilling any sort of British "manifest destiny". As O'Toole (2007) affirms, 'phony populism came up against a more genuine brand of anti-establishment radicalism that convinced the young and the marginalized that they had something to come out and vote for'.

Jones (2017), on that matter, adds that given the course of the general election 'many Ukip voters flocked to the Labour party' instead, while Chakrabortty (2017) declares that 'after seven years, the public is exhausted with austerity', pointing out again to the fact that the terror attacks suffered by the UK eventually led to major discussions not on a perceived threat from Islam but rather on the effect of cuts to policing. What mattered, therefore, was essentially that 'after decades of being told they can't have the basics for secure livelihoods, the voters have decided they want them anyway' (idem 2017).

Corroborating all the above, the last British general election revealed a remarkable "U-turn" in British politics, with a decrease from 24 to as little as 5 percentage points within a

month in the difference between Labour and Conservative public voting intention since it was controversially called by Theresa May in 18 April, to take place in 8 June. Plenty suggests that the dissatisfaction with the consequences of austerity, as defended by the theory of comparative federalism in our theoretical framework, is the main determinant behind the Brexit vote, and the actual increase in Labour seats in the aftermath of this general election indeed does make a big case for it (Merrick 2017a; Pasha-Robinson 2017). Following the argument of Susen (2017 p. 160), exposed in 2.2., an explanation to the phenomenon could reside in the simplified principle that, at this age, British voters are more inclined to vote for *hope*, rather than "fear".

Freedman (2016 p. 8) suggests that the vote for Brexit could have been, in that sense, the result of at least some sort of "excitement" for "the unknown" in face of "the current crises". In other words, it is possible to argue that, regardless of their specific visions and of what they would concretely expect from leaving the European Union, the electorate wanted – change. The author highlights that in the context of a positive case for "leave" and a negative case for "remain", as once again discussed in 2.2. through Susen (2017), we would probably see 'more excitement in stepping out into the unknown than in sticking to the hard grind of institutional reform and working to mitigate the worst effects of the current crises, and those that might follow' (Freedman 2016 p. 8).

As Susen (2017 p. 160) remarks, the positive narrative was (and apparently keeps being) far more effective with the British electorate. During the election campaign Theresa May often claimed that not only the economy, but also social services and Brexit itself would be led to chaos should Jeremy Corbyn win a majority, in that way 'almost mirroring the Project Fear tactics of the Remain campaign during the Brexit referendum' (Merrick 2017b). While Theresa May ended up branding Labour's manifesto as "utopian" (May 2017) and the prospect of Jeremy Corbyn negotiating Brexit as "a risk not worth taking" (Conservatives 2017) – the type of argument British voters had already made clear they wouldn't fall for given the result of the Brexit referendum –, ironically exactly the argument Labour and remainers used during the referendum campaign (Gutteridge 2016), Labour has brought the fresh message that, for example, in regards to conservative austerity, "it doesn't have to be this way"; that "Labour will invest in a better Britain" (Labour 2017).

'Theresa May's gamble on a snap election has dramatically backfired after her quest for a "stronger mandate" to deliver Brexit ended up in the humiliation of a hung parliament, leaving her future as prime minister in doubt', says Parker (2017). The author highlights the collapse of UKIP in the process and the marked migration of its voters to the Labour – not Conservative – fringe. Theresa May's repeated efforts to come across as the one politician capable of "making

a success" of Brexit grew increasingly ineffective. Adding to the polemics on policing cuts brought about by the terrorist attacks, 'the U-turn over a Tory manifesto commitment to reform social care — dubbed a "dementia tax" — shook the faith of Conservative MPs in the party leader and prompted one minister to call it a "monstrous mistake"' (idem 2017).

In that context, McDonnel (2017) categorically affirms that 'Labour's politics of hope have overcome the politics of fear'. He goes on: 'it is absolutely clear that there is no majority for the race-to-the-bottom Brexit backed by May' (idem 2017); while declaring that British democracy 'has never been so scarred by the scale of vicious personal attacks, lies and smears that we witnessed in this election campaign'. In the author's view, finally, 'all were based upon terrifying people into voting against something or someone, rather than inspiring them with hope for a different future' (idem 2017).

Still according to Toynbee (2017), 'optimism trumped austerity'. The author also brings to attention the idea that the result of the election, contrary to mainstream belief, was actually far from unexpected: 'yes it was the economy, stupid' (idem 2017), she affirms. Revisiting the old assumption within political science that elections are decided mostly on the basis of economic performance, Toynbee (2017) reminds us that under the Conservative government real wages went down while social security deteriorated, with inflation and inequality on the rise. 'Yes, indeed, "enough is enough". That's partly what the Brexit vote was all about. Second lore of elections: hope beats fear. Optimism trumped May's grim finger-wagging warnings of "chaos"' (Toynbee 2017). In the author's view, Theresa May's manifesto 'offered austerity forever: that's no exaggeration', while 'her budget planned to shrink the state permanently to a size so small it would change the nature of Britain' (idem 2017).

According to Freedland (2017), the impact of the general election might have had an even stronger impact in world affairs than Brexit itself or the election of Donald Trump in the United States. That is so because it would be such vote which would, among the three, reveal the true nature of the current political unrest in the Western world. Further on the subject, the author argues that UKIP supporters, for example, were not naturally closer to the Conservatives than to Labour, as previously assumed by mainstream opinion. In fact, the general election showed that many UKIPers, as already pointed out, were in effect more attracted to Labour policies. The author then suggests 'that voting Ukip was never chiefly about Europe. It was, in part, a protest against the system, one that had let those voters down' (Freedland 2017).

On that matter, Harris (2017) adds that eventually it was Labour, with its ambitious social policies, that drove the agenda of the general election; and even though the Conservatives still achieved formal victory, it had been Labour which had achieved "moral victory", 'thanks

to a faintly miraculous coalition that included not just millions of remain voters but – as proved by a stream of Labour successes in the Midlands, Wales and the north – people who once voted Ukip and backed leave' (idem 2017). In the words of Behr (2017), that was after all the "Brexit election", with the author also stressing how previous "leave" supporters (especially in the North of England) had in large numbers unexpectedly chosen for Labour.

Bennet (2017), in his turn, comments that 'with poverty and inequality at shocking levels under the Tories, nobody should be surprised that the public backed Labour at the polls'. Making use of tough language, the author adds that 'the reason Corbyn-led Labour did so well is because poverty and inequality are now at levels that would embarrass even the most brazen kleptocracy of the most corrupt banana republic' (idem 2017).

Finally, in the view of The Guardian (2017) itself, the upsurge in support for Labour was also 'a vote against austerity', with Theresa May and the Conservatives not being able to see the increasing public dissatisfaction with the ongoing state of affairs. 'After seven years of fiscal austerity, with deep cuts in public services and a steady fall in real wages, millions of voters wanted a better and fairer way for Britain' (idem 2017), with Corbyn, rather than May, eventually bringing the long-awaited message of hope, which correlated with much of the expectations held by those who had previously voted to leave the European Union.

5.2. Archival records on the electoral determinants of Brexit

In this sub-section, following the plan set out in our research methods (2.2.), we then analyse also archival records on our main phenomenon of interest. In this sense, it is fair to start by highlighting that, according to one of the renowned Lord Ashcroft polls, published on 24 June 2016 (right after the Brexit referendum took place), 49% of "leave" voters declared that political sovereignty was the main reason for them to opt for Brexit, while only 33% defined a possibly stronger internal control over immigration as the principal issue. The findings seem to corroborate the evidence discussed so far. In addition, it is yet valid to highlight that 13% revealed strong concerns over impotence in defining the EU path in the case of remaining, while only 6% stressed the possibility of further international trade liberalisation as their main reason for voting for Brexit.

Kaur-Ballagan and Mortimore (2017) also cite an Ipsos MORI/King's College London survey which was focused on getting to understand how many more or less (and what type of) immigrants the British people would like to see in the United Kingdom. According to the survey, 52% of respondents agree that more highly-skilled migrants should be allowed in the

country, against 12% who disagree. On the other hand, 18% defend more lower-skilled migrants should be able to stay, while 44% disagree. On the matter of students in specific, as well as of refugees, the survey finds that overall the British public is supportive of their arrival. When asking about whether immigration has been good or bad for the country, 48% believe it has been something positive, while 34% believe it has been negative. Interestingly, 'Leave voters would support the entry of more rather than fewer skilled workers by two-to-one, 43% to 20%' (Kaur-Ballagan & Mortimore 2017). For this survey, Ipsos MORI worked with a sample of 998 British adults by applying questionnaires over the phone on 10-14 February 2017 (Kaur-Ballagan & Mortimore 2017).

Taking the above into consideration, Chu (2016) declares that 'the immigration story is complicated': is was exactly in those areas where most residents were born outside the UK (such as London) that "remain" got the highest shares of votes, while for example Clacton, the constituency that had elected the only UKIP MP in the whole of the United Kingdom, presents in its turn a very small foreign population (idem 2016). In effect, 'polling also shows that while the British electorate are not overly enthusiastic about the EU, their views are more complex and less harsh than is often assumed' (Oliver 2015 p. 416).

5.3. Interviews on the electoral determinants of Brexit

In this sub-section we use interviews and declarations of key actors within our main research problem – namely, as defined in 4.2.2., of 10 (ten) politicians, influential thinkers and ordinary voters in the context of the Brexit referendum[39], in order to dig deeper on the perceptions and motivations that primarily led to the victory of the "leave" vote.

On the contrast between our two independent variables, x_1 and x_2, as set out in 3.2.1. and 3.2.2. – *concerns over immigration* and *concern over austerity* –, as such primary determinant, Leanne Wood, for example, Leader of Plaid Cymru, Wales' main localist political party, when addressing Paul Nuttall, then Leader of UKIP, in the 2017's BBC Election Debate, makes the important initial remark:

> 'UKIP has just claimed that people voted to leave the European Union and in so doing they also voted to curb immigration – I don't think we can read that into the result. Some people may well have voted to curb immigration, but there was only one question on the ballot paper, and immigration wasn't on it, and I'm afraid that UKIP keep using this issue, they want to whip up

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[39] For a list of the respondents, once again, please see *appendix 1*.

people's hatred, division and fear, and that's why they talk about immigration all the time' (Wood 2017).

Mr. Malcolm Baker (65, ordinary voter) seems to corroborate that interpretation. When facing Tim Farron, then Leader of the Liberal Democrats, during a campaign stop for the 2017 general election in his village of Kidlington, North of Oxford, he declared:

'Don't tell people who voted Leave that they didn't know what they were voting for (…) I'm angry that we're all being tarred as racists (…) Everybody thinks that Leavers voted purely over immigration and we didn't (…) Uncontrolled immigration and the impact it's having on this country was a factor for some, I'm sure, but it was not the only reason... for me, and many others, the chief reason was the fact that our laws are being made in Europe by an unelected, unaccountable bureaucracy (…) We can't predict the future, but in years to come I'll be able to tell my nine-month-old grandson, Alfie, that I voted to give Britain a chance to govern itself' (in Sawer 2017).

While Tim Farron, in his turn, it is yet valid to remark, in the aftermath of the episode claimed himself he didn't think leave voters were "racists" (Horton 2017).

Paul Mokuolu (2016), another ordinary "leave" voter, in his piece for *The Guardian* (arguably the principal mainstream left-wing and pro-remain newspaper in the United Kingdom)[40], says in this regard:

'Sadly, many remain voters care little for the reasoning or rationale behind the decision of Brexit voters. I've seen Brexiters being grouped together and called "idiot", "racist", and other derogatory terms, simply by virtue of being Brexit voters. Their rationale is redundant, and their motives irrelevant. The only thing being placed on trial is the positioning of their X on the ballot paper' (Mokuolu 2016).

While Jon Rowe (2017), an ordinary voter from Maidenhead, in a letter referring to the 2017 general election addressed this time to *The Independent*, which also often follows the Guardian's editorial, says:

'People voted Leave to bring about change. The economic and social hardships of our time have not been led from Brussels. They've not been led by any particular ethnic or religious group. They've been led by the political and financial elite, who have influenced the media narrative to strengthen their current status. Vote for whoever has the best chance to disrupt the

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[40] Mokuolu, P 2016, 'I voted to leave the EU. That doesn't make me an idiot or a xenophobe', *The Guardian*, 30 June 2016.

outcome where you live. Vote for real change. We can change the future' (Rowe 2017).

In an iconic interview given to Andrew Marr at the BBC in November 2016, Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labour Party (and of the so-called "Her Majesty's Official Opposition")[41], in his turn, explains his vision over the causal mechanisms proposed between our dependent variable and our exact two independent variables in our theoretical framework. In the interview, Marr starts by making a clear parallel between the Brexit vote and the already mentioned shocking election of Donald Trump in that same month. As pointed out in 1.1., and following the core argument of Hobolt (2016 p. 1259) and O'Toole (2017), in fact both votes have been often categorised as being part of a possible common broader international "anti-globalisation" political trend (Berenson 2016; Inglehart & Norris 2016 p. 9; Jacques 2016; Suiter 2016 p. 25):

'AM: *Now we're talking in the context of course of the aftermath of Donald Trump's election victory. You said this week that you could understand the anger of many of those people who voted for Trump. What do you think it's based on? Is it based on anti-immigrant feeling, or is it based on economic failure?*

JC: *It's anger and left behind America. Michael Moore has portrayed this very well in his films. He talks about left behind America in Ohio and all the rust belt states of the United States where corporate America had de-industrialised, made huge profits out of it and as Bernie Sanders pointed out, put those profits in tax havens elsewhere and left those communities to rot. Trump decided to use the populist agenda. He blamed Muslims, he blamed Mexicans, he blamed women, he blamed anybody he could think of except the very corporate America that in many ways he actually represents. The same arguments actually happen all across Europe.*

AM: *I was going to ask you because it's very interesting. We go through this period of economic dislocation where lots of communities feel left behind and angry and the protests everywhere you look are going to parties of the right. They're not going to parties of the left. Why is that? Why has the left failed to channel that anger?*

JC: *It's time to move on from the third way, from the New Labour agenda. For the agenda which was essentially an incorporation of that free market liberal economic thinking which actually processed de-industrialisation in Britain and to a lesser extent in Germany, but to a greater extent in France.*

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[41] Traditionally the political party with the second largest number of seats elected for the House of Commons.

AM: *So the left was associated with globalisation?*

JC: *Indeed I think it was and I think what's now happening is a much stronger left movement across the United States and across Europe. Bernie Sanders garnered a very large number of votes because of his attack on corporate America.*

AM: *Do you think he would have won by the way? Sorry to interrupt.*

JC: *Could he have won? Yes, I think he probably could have won.*

AM: *Now I guess the other aspect of this and it's something that Donald Trump has talked a lot about and Marine le Pen talks about in my interview with her as well, is protectionism. They're people who say you have lost your industries because of globalism, therefore we need to put up barriers, we need to put more tariffs on foreign cars, foreign goods coming in. Do you basically agree with that?*

JC: *I think we have to invest in new industries. We have to have an investment strategy and that I'm putting forward of a national investment bank to promote good quality manufacturing industry. We also have to have fair trade agreements. So when we import goods they should be produced to the same environmental standards as we would respect. We will want human rights agendas to be on that trade agenda, so it's not about closing down trade it's about fair trade.*

AM: *Is there a silver lining for you in Brexit in this in the sense that we can now do our own new trade agreements with India, China and so forth and put in human rights, put in environmental protection in a new way into those deals?*

JC: *I'm already working on potential trade agreements that we could make with other countries. The human rights agenda, the environmental agenda, the sustainability agenda, those things are very important, but I'm also working very hard on an investment strategy for industry and working with many left parties across Europe who are themselves also opposed to the austerity agenda that's been put forward. Look at it this way: over the past six years average wages in Britain have stagnated or fallen, most families are three and a half thousand pounds a year worse off than they were five years, six years ago. Public services have been cut, where is the achievement of six years of austerity other than cut public services, hospital waiting lists, overcrowding in so many places? We need an investment agenda. We need to go forward on the idea that the public intervention actually can grow our economy not stagnate it.*

AM: *Now you've talked about Donald Trump demonising foreigners, including of course South Americans and Hispanics. Your own wife is Mexican, so this must feel fairly personal to you and yet, as a possible future Prime Minister you may well have to deal with Donald Trump. Wonder how you feel about that.*

JC: *I'm looking forward to the conversation between my wife and Donald Trump. She is a proud Mexican and she's proud to live here as well and all of us want to live in a world where you actually tolerate and deal with each other.*

AM: *Can I just ask you how she and her family feel about the possibility of a well going up between Mexico and the United States?*

JC: *Absolute anger and outrage. Donald Trump should grow up and recognise the American economy actually depends on migrant labour. Last year they had a day without Mexicans, they certainly noticed it and I think the treatment of Mexico by the United States just as much as his absurd and abusive language towards Muslims is something that has to be challenged and should be challenged.*

AM: *Now, he has been highly successful obviously in channelling this anger and it is partly directed against immigration and what you have said suggests that you think that voters who go along with that have been conned or fooled or a victim of false consciousness or something. Is that not slightly patronising?*

JC: *No, it's not patronising at all. I just think that the blame should be put where it belongs and that is the corporate investment decisions that have done so much damage to industry all over Europe, including obviously in Britain but particularly in France and other countries in Europe. But we also have to be aware that we have to deal with undercutting, Len McCluskey made some very good points about this last week, that companies that bring in wholesale migrant labour to destroy local working agreements, destroy trade union recognition, undercut wages, that's got to end. That's why I've supported the Agency Workers' Directive and why in the referendum campaign I made a great deal of emphasis on the question of posting of workers which is where you bring a group of workers from here, put them here in order to destroy local working arrangements. And also where there's been a big impact on communities it's local government that needs to be properly funded in order to deal with the needs.*

AM: *Do you think your message is going to cut through to those said – I don't know how people get these figures – it's said that 9 million Labour voters voted for Brexit and a lot of them were concerned about immigration and they may simply hear what you're saying as a voice of the metropolitan, liberal elite or establishment. That doesn't really understand how radically communities have been changed by immigration up and down the north coast for instance.*

JC: *Communities have been hit by de-industrialisation. Hit by deregulation. Hit by the Thatcherite Reagan model of economics in the 1980s that still plays out in former mining*

communities and many other places where there's systemic unemployment or underemployment, low wages, low levels of investment and poor industrial development. So we need a government that is prepared to invest regionally, that does have a regionally based investment bank that does deal with those social issues. Communities coming together to improve education and health and housing work better together. Blaming minorities doesn't build houses' (Corbyn 2016).

Exploring further the parallel between the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump, Evan Davis then interviews the acclaimed philosopher Noam Chomsky, as early as in May of this year:

'ED: *There's a lot of anger in the world today. Are you sympathetic to that anger, or are you feeling this anger is the wrong kind of anger?*

NC: *I'm sympathetic to the roots of the anger. I think anger is not a constructive response to problems that are quite real. And they are quite real. So, let's say the United States, which has suffered less from the policies of the last generation than other Western countries, but nevertheless the United States' medium income for example is lower in real terms than it was 30 years ago" (...) this is duplicated over much of the world (...) the result is not just anger, but contempt for institutions (...) and Trump is one result of that, Brexit is a result of that, Marine Le Pen is a result. (...)*

ED: *Just thinking about the cause of the divisions in society – what is creating these divisions – do you think that traditional classes: working class, the capitalist class, the owners and the workers. Is that the most interesting division? Is that a good way of thinking about it these days, do you think, or is it out of date now? (...) Some have said that the divide now is a more cultural one between metropolitan internationalists, comfortable with immigration, they are called people who are happy anywhere, and people who are rooted in local communities.*

NC: *There are plenty of divides. There are divides on religion, for example, and there are divides on all sorts of things, but a fundamental divide is the class divide, and one of the reasons for the anger that you began with is because none of the institutions and none of the political parties are really representing the class interests of the large part of the work force, and that does lead to great anger. There are other sources too. And I think in many ways they are driven from them. So for example the anti-immigrant hysteria in the United States and England and elsewhere, is in part a reflection of the decline in opportunity that is the result of the neoliberal programs. When you have a large part of the population who have been either*

stagnant or declining, in fact a majority, for a generation, that's quite serious' (Chomsky 2017).

Chomsky's argument rests on the idea that blue collar workers, or the disenfranchised, have for example in the United States previously voted for Obama on the basis of hope for the future, and as hope in their perception had failed to materialise, they ended up turning to what he calls "their enemy", following the same reasoning of those who mostly voted for Brexit. An interpretation also defended, as seen above, by Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom.

Renowned political economy researcher and member of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Economic Advisory Committee, Ms. Ann Pettifor (2017), in her turn, also argues that the vote for Brexit was above all rather a demonstration of popular dissatisfaction against an economic system based on ideas of market freedom stretching beyond the democratic control of the state. As she defines, it represented an effort from those ''left behind' in Britain to protect themselves from the predatory nature of market fundamentalism' (idem p. 127). In this she echoes those who say the vote for Brexit was rather a "protest" vote from many of the disenfranchised against the forces of capitalism and, in that sense – also globalisation (Hobolt & De Vries 2016). She paints *globalisation* as "the utopian ambition" of, to quote George Soros, "market fundamentalists" (Soros & Woodruff 2008; cited in Pettifor 2017 p. 127). In her words, on the 23rd of June 2016 British voters 'exposed the fragility and even futility of the ambition to build markets beyond the reach of regulatory democracy' (Pettifor p. 127), rejecting the advice of the "experts", so famously branded by Michael Gove already in this research.

> 'With the historic Brexit vote, the British people rejected this flawed brand of economics—and in particular the dominant liberal finance narrative. And they did so because the hardship they are experiencing—repressed wages, diminished public services, rising housing costs and shortages, and insecure employment—is indirectly a consequence of the theories and policies of the mainstream economics profession. Economists led the way to the re-regulation and 'liberalization' of the finance sector over the past 40 years and to soaring levels of debt, crises, and financial ruin. Economists dictated the terms for austerity that has so harmed the British economy and society over the past ten years. On 14 February 2010, 20 of the most senior UK economists wrote to *The Sunday Times* castigating the Labour government for inadequate efforts on deficit reduction and setting the tone not only for the general election of that year but seemingly ever since (…). As the policies have failed, the vast majority of economists have refused to concede wrongdoing, nor have societies been offered alternatives. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the British public did not find the opinion of the 'experts' backing the Remain campaign compelling' (Pettifor 2017 p. 130).

Pettifor (2017) still states that the "remain" camp focused on the liberal economic argument to the virtual exclusion of everything else. She follows:

> 'But the 'experts' and the economic stories they tell have been well and truly walloped by the result of this referendum. And rightly so, because while there is truth in the story that international and in particular European cooperation and coordination are vital to economic activity and stability, there is no sound basis to the widely espoused economic 'religion' that markets—in money, trade, and labour—must be unfettered, detached from democratic regulatory over-sight, and must be left to 'govern' whole countries, regions, and continents. The British people by voting Brexit rejected this mainstream, orthodox economics, a strain of fundamentalism that they rightly judge has proved deleterious to their own economic interests' (Pettifor 2017 p. 130).

Also citing Karl Polanyi and *The Great Transformation*, she adds that 'no sooner will today's utopians have institutionalized their ideal of a global economy, apparently detached from political, social, and cultural relations, than powerful counter-movements—from the right no less than the left—would be mobilized' (Polanyi 2001; cited in Pettifor 2017 p. 131). Even though making the remark that the Brexit vote might empower the far right, or the so-called "Little Englanders", she concludes: 'Britain's 'Brexit' vote is but the latest manifestation of popular dissatisfaction with the economists' globalized, marketized society" (Pettifor 2017 p. 131).

> 'The Brexit vote was, to my mind, just one manifestation of the expected resistance to market fundamentalism. The Brexit slogans 'Take Back Control', 'Take Back Our Country', and 'Britannia waives the rules' represented an inchoate and incoherent attempt to subordinate unfettered, globalized markets in money, trade, and labour to the interests of British society. Like the movement mobilized by Donald Trump in the US, the Five Star Alliance in Italy, Podemos in Spain, the Front National in France, the Corbyn phenomenon in the UK, the Law and Justice Party in Poland, Brexit represented the collective, if (to my mind) often misguided, efforts of those 'left behind' in Britain to protect themselves from the predatory nature of market fundamentalism' (Pettifor 2017 p. 131).

Now making a parallel to the 2017 general election, just as in 5.1., we bring the words of David Manning, 64, Labour voter in Plymouth, who said that 'having witnessed first hand the way education has been dismantled by the Tories, I concluded that the alternative Labour was offering was far better for the country'. This in spite of the fact that David has traditionally supported the conservatives (Bell & Harrison 2017). Michael Dawson, ordinary voter from Canterbury, who had voted for the Conservatives in the previous general election, also decided

this time to vote for Labour on the basis that the cuts to public services need to be stopped (idem 2017). Both constituencies are traditional Tory supporters (in fact Canterbury since 1918). 'The Tory manifesto wasn't for the people', Michael said. 'It was for the rich, the upper class. You look at the Tory potential spend on the NHS and compare it to what Labour were proposing and the Labour plans are much more viable' (idem 2017). Finally, he adds: 'people are sick of austerity' (idem 2017). Mattinson and Clarkson (2017), when analysing the reactions of other ordinary swing voters to the result of the general election, conclude that 'voters swayed by Corbyn's anti-establishment appeal and Labour's hopeful message'.

On other declarations of Corbyn, Blanchard (2017) informs us that 'he said: "Never before has there been a clearer choice between the parties... a choice quite simply between hope and fear"'.

> 'He said: "Labour's campaign has already changed the face of British politics. As we prepare for government, we have already changed the debate and given people hope. Hope that it doesn't have to be like this, that inequality can be tackled, that austerity can be ended, that you can stand up to the elites and the cynics"' (Blanchard 2017).

In the words of Corbyn (2017a) himself earlier this year:

> 'People have said they have had quite enough of austerity politics, they've had quite enough of cuts in public expenditure, underfunding our health service, underfunding our schools and our education service, and not giving our young people the chance they deserve in our society (…) people voting for hope, voting for hope for the future and turning their backs on austerity' (Corbyn 2017a).

The result of the general election referred therefore to 'people rejecting the politics of fear and instead embracing the politics of hope that we can challenge austerity and we can actually start sharing the wealth out in this country a bit better' (Corbyn 2017b); while Prime Minister Theresa May herself 'correctly explained that last year's referendum was not simply a vote to leave the European Union. It was an instruction to the government to change the way the country works' (Mullan 2017 p. 20)[42].

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[42] For a summary of the key points raised by respondents in this sub-section, see *appendix 2*.

6. ANALYSIS

6.1. Evaluation of hypothesis 1

This research has opposed hypotheses based on the theories of *international relations institutionalism* and *corporate federalism*, as presented in chapter 3, showing that in effect not only right- but also left- leaning motives were of the highest relevance in the decision for leaving the European Union from the part of the British electorate. Our theories were translated to, ultimately, two independent variables, x_1 and x_2, relating to, respectively, concerns over *immigration* and concerns over *austerity*.

Our first hypothesis, as recalled from 3.3., was:

$H1_1$: If the choice of voters (y) is best explained by the theory of international relations institutionalism, the Brexit vote was mainly determined by *concerns over <u>immigration</u>* (x_1).

With the following corresponding null hypothesis is:

- $H0_1$: If the Brexit vote was *not* mainly determined by *concerns over* <u>immigration</u> (x_1), the choice of voters **(y)** is *not* best explained by the theory of international relations institutionalism.

Based on all the discussed in chapter 5, *empirical research*, we can then defend the case that, even though immigration in itself was broadly rated as one of the most important factors determining the choice of voters in leaving the European Union in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, it was not the actual main one. In fact, it can be defended, as already argued in our theoretical framework (3.2.2.) and based on all the evidence collected, that concerns over immigration were in effect a mere reflection of the real main determining factor of the vote, highlighted by our second hypothesis. In this sense, we here make the case for **H1**'s corresponding null hypothesis $H0_1$ and refute the theory of international relations institutionalism as the best theoretical approach for understanding the phenomenon.

6.2. Evaluation of hypothesis 2

We can then recall our second hypothesis, which in 3.3. reads as follows:

H1$_2$: If the choice of voters (y) is best explained by the theory of comparative federalism, the Brexit vote was mainly determined by *concerns over <u>austerity</u>* (x$_2$).

With the corresponding null hypothesis being:

- H0$_2$: If the Brexit vote was *not* mainly determined by *concerns over <u>austerity</u>* (**x$_2$**), the choice of voters (**y**) is *not* best explained by the theory of comparative federalism.

According to the discussed plus all the evidence collected, this study is confident in suggesting, therefore, that **H1$_2$**, along with the theory of comparative federalism, answers in the best way our main research question, as not only being a more solidly grounded hypothesis, but also, even potentially englobing the logic behind **H1$_1$** itself.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Answer to the main research question

In face of all the above, we can then reproduce our main research question:

What were the main determinants of the Brexit vote?

Or once again: *what were the main factors that effectively determined the choice of voters* **(y)** *in the United Kingdom* **(s)** *European Union membership referendum of 2016* **(t)***?*

Before stating the answer, though, we recall the three distinctive presumptions contained within the formulation of the question, whose understanding is necessary for the utmost unambiguity and clarity of our conclusions. As defined in 1.2., they related to:

1. *The actual options that were posed to voters;*
2. *The actual criteria that identified individuals as voters;*
3. *The actual rules on what constituted a majority of voters.*

As it can be concluded from 2.1.1., the key point to be raised over the first presumption is that the actual options posed to voters in the British 2016 EU membership referendum weren't translated to a classic *yes* or *no* question, therefore escaping from an ultimate bias towards perceived positivity (associated with *yes*) or negativity (associated with *no*), or from a possible disconnection between question and answer in the minds of voters. The options were instead translated to the self-explanatory terms *remain* and *leave*.

In regards to the actual criteria that identified individuals as voters in the context of the referendum, we can conclude from 2.1.2. that, contrary to commonplace understanding, the term "British voters" needs at best further clarification, and is at worst considerably inaccurate. That is so because some British citizens were, as exposed by Tatham (2016), controversially not entitled to take part in the Brexit referendum, while on the other hand a number of non-British citizens were granted the right to do so. Eligible voters were those (not legally excluded from voting) aged 18 years or over on polling day, with British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizenship and residence at a UK address. In the case of UK citizens living abroad, though, only those who had been registered to vote in the UK in the previous 15 years

were eligible to vote, while on the other hand Commonwealth citizens also residing in Gibraltar were granted a full say in the outcome of the vote.

When it comes to the actual rules on what constituted a majority of voters, 2.1.3. highlights in special the considerable controversy found in the devolved administrations of the United Kingdom in the aftermath of the referendum. With the UK abnormally functioning as a single constituency, an overall majority of 51.9% of voters in the United Kingdom as a whole was not necessarily followed by a majority of voters in for example the country of Scotland, whose 62% of the electorate's valid votes in effect supported remaining in the European Union (EU referendum results 2016).

With the three distinctive presumptions contained within our main research question properly reviewed for utmost clarity, and based on our analysis of findings/evaluation of hypotheses already presented in the previous chapter – which corroborates $H1_2$ –, we can then now finally provide our answer with confidence as follows:

The Brexit vote was mainly determined by concerns over austerity.

7.2. Implications, limitations and recommendations for future research

Even though a CPT-approach case study such as the present one does not strive for *generalisation* in the classical definition of the term (extending its conclusions to other cases based on clear operationalisation and measurement), a causal-process tracing approach does allow for a certain degree of generalisation nevertheless. That is what Blatter and Haverland (2012) call "possibilistic generalisation", or the elucidation of possible causal configurations within different explanatory cases based on the knowledge provided by the findings of a particular CPT study. In that sense, this study can possibly imply that the roots of dissatisfaction and Euroscepticism elsewhere in the EU are also related, just as in our case, to concerns over squeezing economic austerity. Connected to our social relevance (1.3.1.), the understanding brought about by this research has therefore remarkable implications for the success of policies and policy-makers within the EU sphere. Based on our conclusions, it is possible for these to formulate a more informed political approach to the problem so as to minimise the chances of other possible future departures of member-states from the Union; while when dealing with the United Kingdom itself in the upcoming Brexit negotiations, recognising the main determinants of the Brexit vote can prove essential for eventually guaranteeing the real best outcome for both sides.

Our theoretical framework, as discussed in chapter 3, has not been able to find a reasonable amount of academic articles in the field of political science with a deeper theoretical perspective on the reasons for Brexit itself. In any case, further analyses on whether our conclusions and supporting theoretical framework stand solid under other similar cases of European dismemberment would of course be very welcome. In regards to the methodology chosen for this study, it was of a strong, inductive qualitative character, and in this sense prone to a certain level of inevitable biasing and/or empirical research limitation as remarked by Yin (2003). In addition to this, several other factors related to our main phenomenon of interest could have been studied in more detail. In fact, as our research presents an inductive character, given how recent the topic it focuses on is, causal relations and conclusions can possibly be modified by the collection of new evidence. As a recommendation for possible future research, therefore, more studies on our topic opting for quantitative analyses, while also performed after more facets of the recent Brexit saga are clearly understood, seem imperative.

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Ms. Ann Pettifor	Renowned political economy researcher and member of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Economic Advisory Committee
Mr. David Manning	Ordinary voter, Plymouth
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn	Leader of the Labour Party (and of the so-called "Her Majesty's Official Opposition")
Mr. Jon Rowe	Ordinary voter, Maidenhead
Ms. Leanne Wood	Leader of Plaid Cymru, Wales' main localist political part
Mr. Malcolm Baker	Ordinary voter, Kidlington
Mr. Michael Dawson	Ordinary voter, Canterbury
Mr. Noam Chomsky	Acclaimed philosopher
Mr. Paul Mokuolu	Ordinary voter, London
Mr. Tim Farron	Leader of the Liberal Democrats

APPENDIX 2: KEY POINTS RAISED BY RESPONDENTS

Ms. Ann Pettifor	- The Brexit vote was a "protest" vote against the forces of capitalism and globalisation – or "market fundamentalism" – from those left behind by the system.
Mr. David Manning	- Education has been dismantled by the Tories and Labour was offering a far better alternative for the country in the 2017 general election.
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn	- The Brexit vote and the 2017 general election result were both a cry for hope resulted from popular dissatisfaction against austerity measures.
Mr. Jon Rowe	- The Brexit vote was an anti-establishment vote for change against the political and financial elite that had rather less to do with the EU itself than with the economic system as a whole.
Ms. Leanne Wood	- The ballot paper in the Brexit referendum did not refer in any way to the issue of immigration, but right-wing parties are comfortable in inflating the issue in order to create division.
Mr. Malcolm Baker	- "Leave" voters are not in their totality against immigration, while political sovereignty was also an important factor behind the Brexit vote for some.
Mr. Michael Dawson	- Cuts to public services need to be stopped and Labour seemed like the best alternative in the 2017 general election, as 'people are sick of austerity'.
Mr. Noam Chomsky	- The disenfranchised voted for both Trump and Brexit on the basis of *hope* for the future; while among all divides the fundamental divide remains the class divide.
Mr. Paul Mokuolu	- Many "remain" voters fail in grasping the rationale behind the Brexit vote, and irresponsibly call "leave" voters racists – even though nothing on the ballot paper could suggest that.
Mr. Tim Farron	- "Leave" voters weren't racists.