

Remain or Brexit: the UK's referendum on the European Union

By [Lesley Docksey](#)

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The only reason the UK is having a referendum on whether the UK should stay in (Remain) or leave (Brexit) the EU, is because of the difference of opinion within the Conservative Party.

The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) was formed by disgruntled Tory MPs. It has no real policy except to get out of the EU. That doesn't stop it from shouting about how awful Europeans are and how much better off an independent UK would be.

But many Tory MPs also dislike Europe, and faced with the prospect of half his government marching off to join UKIP and destroying his small majority in Parliament, Prime Minister David Cameron promised them a referendum. Given all the other problems Britain is facing at the moment, the very divisive argument and unnecessary expense is something it can do without.

One begins to wonder if, by the time the UK has its referendum in June there will be any viable Conservative Party left in power. Ministers are supporting opposing sides, Ministry officials are told to keep their mouths shut, business leaders' opinions and polls cause outrage – all of it a huge storm in the Tory teacup. They are imploding; day by day another split, another fight amongst themselves.

Nor, if the UK votes to leave, will there be much left of the United Kingdom. It will become very disunited indeed. Scotland has made it clear that if England votes to leave while Scotland votes to remain, another Scottish independence referendum won't be long in coming.

And now the [First Minister for Wales](#) is saying very much the same. If Wales, which gets a lot of beneficial support from the EU for Welsh business, trade and farming, votes to stay while the English vote to leave, it will, he says, create a 'constitutional crisis'.

We haven't yet heard definitively from Northern Ireland but, like Wales, it's more likely to benefit from the EU than not. And following [a report](#) from the Oxford Economics consultancy for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and a CBI 'breakfast event' in [Belfast](#), maybe they will be persuaded to stay within the EU. They could of course return to Eire and create a reunited Ireland.

What is clear is that if parts of the UK are at odds with England (where the majority population resides) over this, it will become even more obvious to all the British that what really matters for both sides of this wholly political argument is England and Westminster, an aspect that many English people are also unhappy with. Divisive is a mild word for what is happening.

Leaving the EU, dire and in need of reform though it is, would severely cut down and destroy what most people would think of as democracy. Looking at [some of the people](#) who want to leave, do the British seriously think that [Boris Johnson](#), [Nigel Farage](#) and [Michael Gove](#) represent genuine democracy?

There's Culture Secretary John Whittingdale, presiding over the [wholesale closure](#) of museums and galleries in the north of England, while still ensuring culture in London deserves subsidies. Let's face it, it's only the rich who 'understand' culture, just as only they 'know how the countryside works' when defending their love of killing wildlife.

And speaking of killing wildlife, let's not omit Owen Paterson, ex-Environment Secretary who presided over the hated badger culls. He's also hugely supportive of genetically modified crops even if he [doesn't understand](#) them, has a major climate change sceptic as brother-in-law, and according to a recently published book, once suggested replacing low-paid migrant fruit pickers with our own [elderly pensioners](#).

With such ultra-right-wing people in charge, what hope for the average UK citizen?

But then staying in the EU, with Prime Minister Cameron, Chancellor Osborne and their pals in charge, doesn't look any more enticing, with Cameron's desire to get rid of [the 'green crap'](#), the [Human Rights Act](#) and the [Hunting Act](#) making the future look grim.

Osborne's 'austerity' programme benefits no one but big business and the very well-off. His determination to keep chasing the chimera of a 'budget surplus by 2020' when he is responsible for the UK being more [indebted](#) than ever promises disaster for the UK. The Tories and their ideological belief in handing all state responsibilities over to the private sector bodes ill.

And all the while these rich men and/or their friends own large tracts of land which suck up [unearned](#) subsidies from the EU, while small farmers for whom the subsidies were intended crash out of existence. Farmers are being [encouraged](#) to vote 'Leave' in the hope that British money that was paid to Europe will be given to the farmers. But will it? Has a backroom deal been done by the Brexit side?

The arguments are very polarised. The Remain side focuses on how business and trade would suffer if the UK was outside Europe. Brexit calls that 'Project Fear'. No, no, cries Remain, we are 'Project Fact'. Brexit promises 'freedom from Europe's red tape'. We can negotiate our own trade deals, claims UKIP.

Maybe, if they [have the time](#). "And who," asked Tony Blair's pal Lord Mandelson, "would want to negotiate with us?" He has a point. But the fact is *both* sides hate Europe's red tape and want to be free of it because it gets in the way of making money.

Have UK citizens understood yet that *all* the politicians screaming 'in' or 'out', 'Project fear', and 'Project fact' happen to be well supplied with money that will protect them either way? However much they try to frighten the common man, in an uncertain world whatever either side claims on the economic front can only be speculation (an accurate term to use for such money grubbers).

And what a 'frightener' this is meant to be: 'Out vote could weaken Nato', [says US general](#). Considering that Nato has long since passed its sell-by date and has had to manufacture a

whole new cold war in places like the Ukraine in order to justify its existence, I am almost tempted to vote 'leave'. Except that I love the soil beneath my feet far too much to risk it.

Ah yes, the soil.

That is at the heart of why the UK should remain with the rest of Europe, broken and battered as it is by years of poor and often corrupt leadership. For it is the people of Europe who defend what we love, not the politicians, not the financiers or global corporations and their lobbyists.

So much of the UK's environmental protections come from Europe. When Monsanto wants to cover our fields with genetically engineered crops it is the European citizens who rise up and lobby the MEPs with the result that [much of Europe](#) is GM-free.

When our precious bees, pollinating the crops on which we depend, were being seriously harmed because of the use of neonicotinoids, it was the people (over 2 million of them) who persuaded the European Parliament to enforce a ban. A [review](#) of this policy is now being carried out, but latest research has produced yet more evidence of the damage done and it is likely the ban will remain. The UK of course has already [opted out](#).

EU citizens campaigned to stop the use of Monsanto's prize weed killer, Roundup. So widely used is Roundup that its main toxic component glyphosate [can be found](#) in our urine, blood and breast milk. Roundup [was taken off](#) the shelves. The EU Parliament will be voting again on this in April and although the vote will be close, it will probably reauthorize the ban.

Europe doesn't do [fracking](#). Nor do the British people, but the Tories do. In Britain, Wales and Scotland have a ban/moratorium in place. The [majority](#) of the public are now anti-fracking, particularly as the government has withdrawn support for renewable energy and keeps changing the regulations that would restrict fracking.

EU legislation could mean that the UK might be fined for out-of-control [air pollution](#), responsible for increasing deaths. Our country is being covered in a tide of rubbish, [beaches polluted](#) by sewage and plastic bottles. No one as yet has pointed out that, with budgets slashed by Osborne's austerity plan, local authorities simply cannot cope.

Gove and Johnson thought the litter problem could be solved by asking us all to '[Clean for the Queen](#)'! That project seems to have been buried under a tide of ridicule and laughter. EU environmental laws should prompt the government to take action. Without those laws, what would the country look like in 5 or 10 years' time?

Those who want us to leave would say that Europe governing all these issues is taking away our 'sovereignty' and we will only regain it by becoming independent of the EU. Conversely, the Remain lobby has Cameron saying he will 'protect' our sovereignty by negotiation and reform from within.

But precisely whose sovereignty are they all talking about? Not yours. Not mine. Not ours. Whichever side ends up governing the UK (or England) after the referendum, it will be the sovereignty of the ruling classes, the self-important, moneyed politicians whose aim will always be to protect their own investments.

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