

# The EU in National Referenda

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J Snell, 'European Union and National Referendums: Need for Change after the Brexit Vote?' (2017) 28 EBLR forthcoming

## Structure

- Introduction
- Results of selected national referenda
- Reasons for no votes
- Lessons
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- Conclusion

## Introduction

- 29 EU-related referendums in Member States that had already acceded
- 16 'won', 13 'lost'
- Since 2015, 'losses' in Greece, Denmark, Netherlands, UK, Hungary
- Focus on four 'losses': France 2005, Netherlands 2005, Ireland 2008, UK 2016

## Results

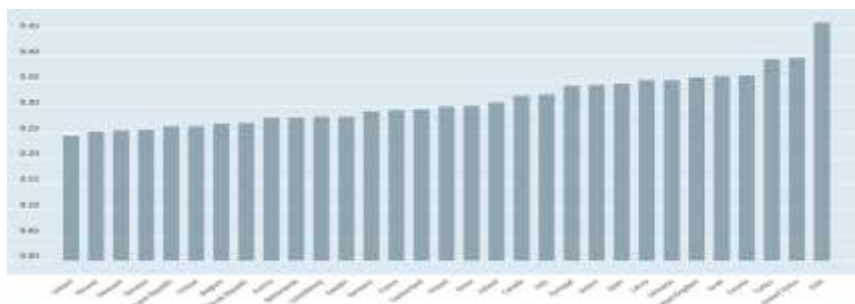
- France 2005, Constitutional Treaty: 54.9 % against, turnout 69.4 %
- Netherlands 2005, Constitutional Treaty: 61.5 % against, turnout 63.3%
- Ireland 2008, Lisbon Treaty: 53.4 % against, turnout 53.1 %
- UK 2016, membership: 51.9 % leave, turnout 72 %

## Reasons

- **France 2005:**
- It will have negative effects on the employment situation in France/relocation of French enterprises/loss of jobs
- **Netherlands 2005:**
- Lack of information
- **Ireland 2008:**
- Because I do not know enough about the Treaty and would not want to vote for something I am not familiar with

## Reasons: UK 2016

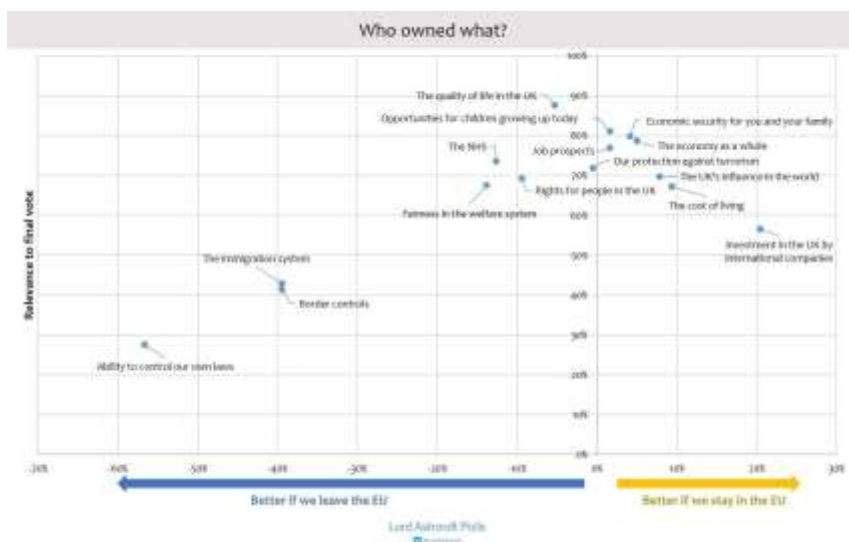
- Background conditions (OECD):
- Since 2007, the second largest fall of real average annual wages in the EU - PPP annual average wage growth -1.0%. Compare Greece -2.4%, Ireland 0.4%, Portugal -0.5%, Spain 0.6%
- UK income inequality the second highest in the EU. GINI coefficients:



## Reasons: UK 2016

- Voting by social group:
- AB (professionals and managers): 57 % remain
- C1 (clerical, administrative): 51 % leave
- C2 (skilled manual workers): 64% leave
- DE (unskilled manual workers, unemployed, pensioners): 64 % leave

## Reasons : UK 2016



## Reasons: UK 2016

- Vote Leave, '*Paving the road from Ankara*': *the EU, immigration and the NHS*:
- There are five more countries in the queue to join the EU including Turkey... This will mean net migration from the EU between about 170,000 and 430,000 each year. This will add between 2.58 million and 5.23 million people to the population of the UK by 2030. The consequences for the NHS will be a rise in... demand for A&E services of between 28% and 57%. [JS: Based eg on Turkish accession by 2020]
- Penny Mordaunt (Defence Minister in BBC, May 2016): "We're not going to be consulted... they are going to join, it's a matter of when"

## Reasons: UK 2016

- Electoral Reform Society (Sept 2016):
- 'At the start of the campaign in February, only 16% said they were *well informed or very well informed* about the referendum. This rose to 33% by a week before the referendum. Meanwhile 46% said in February they were *poorly informed or very poorly informed*, dropping to 28% in our final poll... These are low levels of informedness.'

## Lessons

- **1. The EU as an agent of globalisation**
- Fair?
- The basic bargain: wealth creation v wealth distribution
- The problem of blame allocation
- **2. Misinformation or lack of information**
- The endemic problem of complexity
- **3. Feedback loop:** Incentives facing national politicians

## Solutions

- **Mario Draghi (Sept 2016):** 'Today we must devote more attention to the redistributive aspects of integration, and especially to those people who have paid the highest price.... Recent discussions about tax fairness and a European unemployment insurance fund, about professional retraining funds and other projects with the same idealistic goals, all go in this direction.'

## Solutions

- Tax fairness - need to not hinder national redistributive efforts
  - Judicial: Case law of the Court since 2005
  - Regulatory: Commission State aid enforcement
  - Legislative: Exchange of information, Anti-avoidance, CCCTB
- European unemployment insurance fund – EU as a redistributor
- European Pillar of Social Rights

## Solutions

- **Electoral Reform Society** (Sept 2016): ‘what is needed most of all is a more informed and engaged electorate in the first place – and for that, much-improved political education in schools is essential.
- Citizenship education should be extended in primary and secondary schools...This would lay the groundwork for a more informed and engaged electorate better equipped to deliberate on the issues around a referendum.’

## Solutions

- European dimension of education
  - Identity building?
  - Interaction across borders?
  - EU civic key competences?

## Conclusion

- The EU, social policy and education – the question of competences
- The EU, social policy and education – the nature of the Union
- Alternatives?