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Topic: An analysis into the transformation of Britain's politics- From unity with the EU to Brexit being imminent

Slant: History

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Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

Student's Signature :

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Abstract (Not more than 150 words giving a rough outline of your research)

This research paper encircled around Brexit, and sought to gain a deeper insight into various aspects of this hot and controversial topic. As such, the main research being invested into was finding out how this idea even managed to surface in the first place and why Britain had not managed to achieve success in negotiation talks with the European Union for prolonged periods of time. Moreover, the rational choice theory was also probed into to find out the basis of this theory and how it could be put into use to efficiently explain a certain political movement.

Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter

1.1 Background

In the severe aftermath of World War 2, European integration was dubbed by many as the pivotal solution to resolve extreme nationalism issues which had taken a repercussion on most parts of the continent. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, nationalism refers to loyalty and devotion to a nation and acting out of the country's interests. Moreover, in a speech on 19 September 1946, then Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill emphasised and lobbied for a United States of Europe. While this idea did not materialise, the Merger Treaty on July 1st 1967 subsequently created the European Communities (later known as the European Union through the Maastricht Treaty) and Britain was officially ratified into it in 1973.

Since then, Britain had maintained firm economic and social ties with other countries in the European Union until the 2016 referendum, in which 52% of its citizens voted in favour of departing from the EU. While this revelation was considered to be a bewildering piece of result, negotiation talks regarding the withdrawal started to occur between the EU and the succeeding government after the resignation of David Cameron. Great Britain was scheduled to leave the EU on the 29th of March 2019, but a modus vivendi could not be compromised. As such, the negotiation period was stalled until 31st October 2019, and then again until 31st January 2020, during this period in which Theresa May was forced to step down as the Prime Minister Post and Boris Johnson's Conservative Party were assigned with the paramount task of leaving the EU as soon as possible to appease and achieve the majority of the people's wishes.

1.2 Rationale

The rationale of this project was to analyse why Brexit failed under one leader (Theresa May) while successfully yielding harvests under another (Boris Johnson). The reason is, Brexit is still an extensively discussed topic in the international politics scene, with theorists still rationalising why Britain opted for it and many still wondering how it will affect not only the country but also the European Union as a whole.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What were the factors that led to Brexit?
2. To what extent did the Rational Choice theory sway the outcome of Brexit under the two different leaders?
3. How far did the leadership qualities of Theresa May and Boris Johnson influence the support they garnered among the British while implementing Brexit?

1.4 Thesis Statement

Boris Johnson, adopting a more nuanced approach while handling Brexit as compared to Theresa May, coupled together with the Rational Choice Theory, managed to allow Brexit to yield harvests and eventually succeed under his leadership

1.5 Scope of Research / Delimitation(s)

- The timeline of research was from June 2016 onwards when the Brexit Referendum was introduced by then president David Cameron.
- The leadership qualities of the two succeeding leaders Theresa May and Boris Johnson was focused on through a wide array of sources such as their autobiographies or clauses/decisions being proposed while handling the Brexit procedure.
- The rational choice theory was also utilised when analysing the information being gathered and hence determining how this theory had affected the denouement of Brexit and delayed the idea of coming to fruition.

1.6 Significance of Research / Usefulness

It can fill up knowledge gaps in individuals and allow them to comprehend better about the different aspects of Brexit. Besides, they can gain a deeper insight into the basis of the Rational Choice theory and how it can be put into good use to analyse certain political actions in the future.

1.7 Limitations

Due to a surfeit of sources regarding Brexit, some had presented a biased point of view and indirectly wished to voice out their support of a particular political party. As such, while conducting this research, the sources being employed had to be nitpick with care lest it reveals conflicting interests or prejudicial perspectives.

Apart from this, the basic premise of Rational Choice Theory is that aggregate social conduct results from the conduct of individuals in the society. Therefore, for this theory to be utilised to justify Brexit, it had made the assumption beforehand that the British have conducted their own personal cost and benefit analysis to determine that this cause is worthy to be pursued. Following this, they exercised their voting rights on a party which can fulfil their needs to great efficiency and one which can be the most beneficial to them (Brexit per se).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Factors leading to Brexit

- **2.1.1 The emergence of the June 2016 Brexit Referendum**

During the 2012 NATO summit meeting, former UK prime minister David Cameron probed into the idea of utilising a European Union Referendum to enliven the new implementation of the Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative Party. However, the fact he was only considering was met with several backlash, especially from the Conservative Eurosceptics who labelled it as “too distant and non-committal”. After being under much pressure from the Conservative Eurosceptics and the rise of the UK Independence Party, Cameron announced during his Bloomberg speech that he would hold a Referendum if re-elected in the 2015 elections, mentioning “I believe in confronting this issue- shaping it, leading the debate, not simply hoping a difficult situation will go away.” (Cameron, 2013). With 3 years of renegotiation talks taking place, Cameron proclaimed in a House of Commons speech on 22 February 2016 that the referendum was set to be held on 23rd June 2016 and the referendum question to be “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

- **2.1.2 The Leave and Remain campaigns; why was the former more successful?**

The Leave campaign was mainly led by Dominic Cummings (a British political strategist), and hence it is essential to understand his stance on Brexit before delving further into his aims and goals proposed through this cause. His stance stemmed from his opinions on Britain's politics, which caused him to have several preoccupations while pursuing a successful 'Leave EU' campaign. Firstly, he heavily criticised the British political and administrative classes, "which he variously damns as incompetent, lacking in relevant knowledge and mired in dysfunctional bureaucracies." (Morgan, 2018). Secondly, he has long encouraged for an increased utilisation of science and technology, mentioning how these are required for Britain's society to constantly improve in this globalised world. Thirdly, Cummings modelled his decisions according to Tetlock's forecasting theory, basing them upon "rational probabilistic assessments of specific, measurable, time-defined outcomes" (Tetlock and Gardner, 2015). As such, during the campaigning procedures, his case for Leave was due to the high possibility of Britain being able to contribute more positively to the world. To support his point, he labelled the EU as "a crap 1950s idea, being excessively hierarchical and centralised, and as such lacks the error-correcting mechanisms of a national parliamentary government." (Shipman, 2016). Therefore, he viewed the EU as a hindrance for Britain's progress, and that the country would be able to attain greater achievements if they left them. For example, the term "contribute positively" as aforementioned refers to how Cummings felt the country could obtain more breakthroughs in the science and educational fields if they were out of the EU as they do not have to abide by its "legal and regulatory regime" (Morgan, 2018). To back up Cummings' claim, John Curtice, a British political scientist, also mentioned how those voters who "felt that membership of the EU undermined Britain's distinctive identity were more likely to vote for Leave" (Curtice, 2016) and went on to report that the same was true for voters "with a weak sense of European identity". Thus, it was evident that several British suffered a lack of identity with the country being in the EU, and that this contributed to counter-productivity in the country with them being unwilling to sacrifice effort to work. Hence, Cummings' view that British could contribute more positively to the world after Brexit was viewed as a relatively valid argument. On the contrary, it should be noted that Cummings' position was an advisor to the Ministry of Education when he entered the political field and had once started an extremely ambitious project for an overhaul and renewal of the education system in 2013. Thus, the Remain campaign had questioned the feasibility of his point and argued that his targets were overly zealous.

Secondly, with the unprecedented rise of extremist forces demanding a 1930s style of protectionism, Cummings put forth another main argument for the Leave campaign, mentioning “the fastest route back to 1930s protectionism is continuing with no democratic control over immigration or human rights policies for terrorists and other serious criminals, therefore the best practical policy is to reduce unskilled immigration and increase high skill immigration and this requires getting out of the EU”. (Cummings, 2016). Evidently, Cummings’ point was if Britain continued to remain in the EU, trade disasters would inevitably occur in the future and this would take an extreme toll on its economy. Hence, to prevent such disasters, he wished to achieve it through a series of measures, ranging from upholding a more democratic and strict control over unskilled labour to a wider acceptance among the public of the ideology of free trade. Therefore, he felt that this could be attained with greater efficiency after Britain leaves the EU, outlining his plan to form “new institutions for international corporations to minimise the probability of disasters” (Cummings, 2017) if Brexit successfully materialized. Contrary to this, it should be acknowledged that there is a low threat of protectionism occurring in Britain, with no political parties pushing for such an ideology. To back up this claim, opinion surveys carried out across the globe revealed how Britain’s public opinion was one of the most favourable of pro-free trade in the industrialized world (Pew survey, 2014). Hence, the Remain campaign had rendered the proposed solution of ending low-skilled immigration as ineffective, especially since this aspect of immigration is also heavily valued in several sectors of the UK economy such as hospitality, retail and agriculture. Moreover, the Remain campaign had constantly provided warnings and projections of the ruinous short-term economic damage Britain would receive if Brexit were to happen and that “Cummings remedy is not only unduly costly; it promises to be even more injurious than the underlying ailment” (Morgan, 2016).

Despite the Remain campaign warnings about the economic damage, many viewed that the long-term economic benefits outweighed the short-term negative impacts. They felt Brexit opened up to many new economic opportunities for the country and acceded to the free trade and free market ideas as proposed by Cummings, “viewing the regulatory nature of the EU as imposing on personal market freedom” (Bateman, 2016). Besides, while only some were amiable to the idea of reducing low-skilled immigration, most British wished to take back control of its own borders and not be imposed by any EU laws. This is evident in Lord Ashcroft’s election day poll of 12369 voters, where “one-third of Leave voters said the main reason was that leaving offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over

immigration”. (Ashcroft, 2016). In addition, the point of losing national identity made during the Leave campaign particularly appealed to the British, with English nationalism having a key role in the results of the Brexit poll. In Britain, it saw the largest margin of victory of voters voting for “Leave” with 53.4%, and that many have cited one of the key reasons being prioritising the English national identity. Thus, the 3 reasons of economic benefits, immigration and national identity were key to the victory of the Leave campaign and for Brexit to successfully happen.

2.2 Brexit negotiations under the 2 different leaders

- **2.2.1 Theresa May’s failure to come to terms with the EU on a Brexit agreement; how and why did it happen?**

As Cameron was a ‘Remain’ campaigner, he resigned after the Referendum result, to which Theresa May was subsequently appointed. Taking over the position in a time of uncertainty, she was bound to face a multitude of challenges. Firstly, the procedure of leaving as well as future relations with the EU were never discussed during the Referendum campaigns, which presented Theresa May with a blank sheet with no point of reference to allude to. Most importantly, her main challenge was that the ‘leave’ campaigners were divided into 2; the ‘soft’ Brexit-ers and ‘hard’ Brexit-ers who had completely different opinions on the Brexit negotiation talks.

These two terms are “defined primarily in terms of the UK’s relationship with the EU Single Market” (a market which allows goods to circulate within the EU). (Menon and Fowler, 2016). For the ‘soft’ Brexit campaigners, their integral goal was for the UK to continue its membership in the Single Market and since they were a Non-EU state after Brexit, the only way to achieve this was through engaging in the European Economic Area. Through this, it promised the UK the freedom of trade movement, albeit it has to abide by the laws of the Single Market and “also contribute financially towards EU support for less developed EU states and regions.” (Menon and Fowler, 2016). As such, the goal which the ‘soft’ Brexit-ers were pursuing translated to a lessened financial impact on the UK’s economy as no major changes were required to be implemented and that they were able to preserve freedom in its trade sector. Apart from this, another principal aim of the ‘soft’ Brexit-ers was that they wanted to continue being in the EU Customs Union which implied that “the Non-EU state enjoys free trade with the EU in exchange for applying to those the EU’s common external tariff.”. However, a prerequisite for this was that the trade laws and policy of the UK had to model after the EU, but that the method in which goods were imported/exported out of the

country remained unaffected. In other words, the 'soft' Brexit-ers did not wish for a major overhaul of the trade industry. In addition, the 'soft' Brexit-ers had garnered support from several politicians, particularly those who had advocated for the 'remain' campaign before the Referendum. For instance, the main successor organisation to this campaign, Open Britain, had stated that "a lack of public support for free movement were key drivers of the vote to leave, hence free movement of people cannot continue as it has been done" (Soubry and McFadden, 2016) which suggests that they hoped to maintain membership of the Single Market and instead gain reforms to this issue. On the other hand, the 'hard' Brexit-ers demanded the UK government to sever all ties with the EU Single Market, and instead choose to abide by the World Trade Organisation rules in the future. Through such a method, it will hinder trades between the UK and the EU membership states, with tariffs potentially imposed on goods being transported. Moreover, the 'hard' Brexit-ers also requested for a complete withdrawal from the Custom Union, such that they could be provided with the freedom of implementing its own trade policies and possibly harvesting more benefits for the country's economy in the long run as they did not have to act in accordance with the EU. It is also worth noting that during the 'Leave' campaign in which its motto was 'take back control', campaigners have voiced out their support of taking back the UK's funding in the EU and instead utilise it on 'more useful' aspects such as the NHS. Thus, this will be impossible to achieve if it remained in the Single Market, which required annual contributions to the EU budget.

Evidently, Theresa May had to face a paramount task of appeasing these 2 groups of people who had completely opposite goals during negotiation talks. To make things worse, her stance on Brexit was unclear, with a constant emphasis on her motto "Brexit means Brexit" after upholding the Prime Minister position in 2016 but providing no further explanation on it. As such, many made a mockery of her motto, describing it as "firm and unambiguous on the surface but after a little reflection unravelled into a world of trouble ahead" (BBC, 2016) and endeavoured more details about the future plans she had outlined for the country. Moreover, Theresa May had been a fervent supporter of the "Remain" campaign during the Referendum and hence when she assumed the role of Prime Minister, there were casted doubts of her abilities and that she had to swiftly transform into a "Leave" Brexit-er to hopefully establish her credentials. Thus, it is seemingly obvious that at the start, the people were already not confident of Theresa May to negotiate a deal with the EU. After huge pressure being exerted on her to shed light on her stance, she finally revealed in the October 2016 Democratic Party Conference that she was heading towards the 'hard' Brexit direction,

mentioning ‘We are leaving to become, once more, a fully sovereign and independent country.’” (May, 2016) While this certainly increased her support among the ‘hard’ Brexit-ers, it resulted in an uproar among the ‘soft’ Brexit-ers as their aims were unlikely to be met. Besides, to regain more control of her party, Theresa May endeavoured to sideline Parliament to start plans of leaving the EU, arguing that the people had already exercised their voting rights. However, the Supreme Court rejected her case, mentioning how the entire Parliament had to issue their approval to this process before being able to begin. This led to an anti-judge furore in the Eurosceptic Press, with people labelling Theresa May as “enemy of the people” (Daily Mail, 2016) in November 2016. Thus, when she started negotiation talks in 2017, her party was not united as one, which resulted in “a lack of explanations to the general public about the compromises that need to be done”. As a result, the little support she had among the people diminished even greater, and outrage among politicians towards her actions was increasing.

Still, she persevered as Prime Minister and went on to negotiate a withdrawal agreement over the next 2 years with the EU on how Brexit would happen. Despite this, she “struggled heavily in trying to get parliamentary support for the legislation needed to implement the deal” (BBC, 2019), which caused her proposal to be rejected 3 times. Over time, her own party members and the people began to voice out publicly over their dissatisfaction with Theresa May and with more cabinet ministers resigning from their posts, she eventually announced her stepping down of her Prime Minister post on 24th May 2019. In hindsight, Theresa May's short reign as Prime Minister was due to the failure to deliver Brexit and a lack of support from the public and her own party members right from the beginning.

- **2.2.2 Boris Johnson’s swift agreement with the EU to uphold his pledge of finalizing Brexit**

After the stepping down of Theresa May, Boris Johnson was elected to become UK’s Prime Minister on 25th July 2019, with over half of the 160000 Conservative Party members offering their support for him. Unlike Theresa May, Boris Johnson’s motto of ‘Get Brexit Done’ was succinct, with him constantly making speeches to promise to deliver Brexit before the stipulated given date of 31st October 2019. Moreover, he was so resolute in achieving this till he did not reject the possibility of leaving the EU in a no-deal. Although this would have resulted in several repercussions in the trade and economic sectors and that most members of Parliament were not amiable with this idea, he hoped to fulfill the people’s wishes who felt this was a possible option regardless. Despite this, he also regularly updated the public on the

plans he had outlined in his Brexit negotiation process; while his proposed plans were similar to Theresa May's previous withdrawal agreement, one main difference was that under his policy, "Northern Ireland would remain aligned to EU Single Market rules on goods and would operate a dual tariff system, applying the EU's common external tariff on any goods entering the country but destined for the EU"(Patel, 2019). By allowing Northern Ireland to remain in the EU Single Market, this appealed to the aims of the Northern Ireland citizens they did not wish to witness a major trade disruption in their country. However, despite the backing of numerous politicians in the Conservative Party and the clarity of Boris Johnson's plans, this did not necessarily connote an increased support among the public for him. In fact, according to a Yougov survey of 1689 adults in the UK, only 39% supported Johnson's deal as compared to a 32% which opposed it, leaving 29% who chose to remain neutral. (Yougov, 2019). The small margin between his believers and opposers implies that Johnson did not have the majority of the public's support. In addition, when those who supported his deal were asked to cite their reasons, the dominant one was to "get Brexit done which is nevertheless testimony to how many people share the sense of exasperation it encapsulates". (Fisher, Macfarlane and Bale, 2019). On the other hand, just a mere 4% mentioned the trade benefits/Northern Ireland issue under Johnson's deal and many were unable to explain the difference between his and Theresa May's withdrawal agreement. Hence, it goes to suggest that the public neither favoured Boris Johnson as a more suitable Prime Minister nor took precision in details about the deal, but rather wished to get it completed quickly due to the immense amount of negotiation time they had undertaken and delays suffered as a result of unable to achieve a compromise. Nevertheless, with the majority support of the Conservative Party, Boris Johnson successfully managed to negotiate a withdrawal agreement and the UK left the EU officially on 31st January 2020, "closing a rancorous chapter in the country's history". (Stewart and Boffey, 2020).

- **2.3 The rational choice theory, as applied to politics**

In recent decades, the rational choice theory has surfaced as one of the most influential subfields in the area of political science. The "Rational Choice theory contends that political behaviour is best explained through the application of its supposedly value-neutral assumption that posit man as a self-interested, purposeful and maximizing being." (Spring, 1991). As such, the results of political movements are determined by voters who have conducted their own needs analysis before exercising their voting rights on an option which favours them the most. Therefore, voters might have differing vested interests which

indubitably leads to a clash of opinions, hence delaying a certain political movement from coming into fruition as politicians are required to achieve the goal of a majority compromise with the clauses/plans.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The rational choice theory was inculcated into this framework as the British were highly likely to vote out of their self-interest and personal gain, thus allowing this theory to be extremely germane in providing a detailed explanation on the differing outcomes of Brexit under the 2 different leaders. To collate data, I explored the speeches and clauses relating to Brexit proposed by the two different leaders. Afterwhich, the rational choice theory was applied to deduce if individuals in the country had voted due to the advantages they stood to gain under the different proposals and hence affected the outcome of Brexit. Besides, the collated data also allowed me to indagate into the two leaders' leadership skills and whether this hindered the support they managed to garner for Brexit.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Interpretation

- 4.1: The usefulness of the Rational Choice Theory to explain the failure of Brexit under Theresa May

The rational choice theory, which one again entails that voters have conducted their own needs analysis before exercising their voting rights on a cause which benefits them the most, had been particularly applicable in this context. Under Theresa May's proposal, the hard Brexit-ers would have more than likely been able to achieve their aims, which included a major overhaul of the trade industry and increasing expenditure on national initiatives and causes such as the NHS. As a result, with them being able to attain their desired benefits, they inevitably would have voiced out their approval of what Theresa May had proposed. On the other hand, the soft Brexiters could not gain much tangible benefits from Theresa May's proposal as what she had outlined were not in aim with this group of people, who hoped the country could still maintain firm trade ties with the European Union with only minor tweaks to its economy as a whole.

Moreover, it was also discovered that the number of soft Brexiters had outnumbered its counterparts, with a greater population wishing Brexit to have minimal impact on their

livelihoods. This was compounded by the fact that those who had campaigned for the country to remain in the EU before the referendum voting were also leaning towards the ‘soft’ Brexit stance, as they wanted to mitigate the apparent ‘detrimental’ impacts of Brexit through gaining reforms to the country’s trade partnerships with the EU instead of completely severing ties. Hence, this played a crucial role in contributing to the eventual failure of Theresa May’s proposal, with a larger populace having conducted their own needs analysis beforehand and determining that a hard Brexit could not yield many concrete benefits for their standards of living and the country’s economy as a whole.

- **4.2: How the success of Brexit under Boris Johnson was mainly attributed to impatience among citizens**

However, while the Rational Choice Theory was able to be utilized in explaining the failure of Theresa May’s proposal (with people actually comparing the benefits they stood to gain under a soft or hard Brexit), this could rarely have been said the same for Boris Johnson’s proposal. When Boris Johnson had uphelded the Prime Minister’s role and was handed with the paramount task of delivering Brexit, the citizens across the UK had already been left frustrated and exasperated by the prolonged duration the negotiations had taken, with the time period constantly been extended. This is evident from how only a mere 4% of people who were surveyed were able to specify the differences between the proposals from the two leaders, and more than half of them had expressed their irritation over how a compromise had always been unable to be reached. The Brexit situation had escalated to such a disappointing stage where several voters even became amiable to the idea of a no-deal, which essentially rendered the past two years of negotiations as being useless and counterproductive.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the shortcomings of not being able to effectively apply the rational choice theory when analysing Brexit negotiations under Boris Johnson, it had proved to be extremely useful to account for Theresa May’s failure in delivering Brexit. As such, when future political movements surface, the rational choice theory is a suitable framework to be employed by one to examine and analyse the reasons behind their success or failure.

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Appendices (If Any)