

Brex-what?

A guide to Britain's potential EU exit for confused non-Europeans

On Thursday, the British will vote on whether their country should leave the European Union. This issue has so dominated political discussion in Europe that it has evolved its own headline-friendly portmanteau: Brexit. British Exit.

The results of the vote will determine whether the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) remains in the European Union or begins a years-long process of untangling itself from the continent. Friday's Bloomberg News aggregate of public surveys shows the electorate split 47 percent in favor of "leave" to 41 percent in favor of "remain" with 8.6 "undecided" — too close to call. Both sides suspended campaigning after the Thursday killing of pro-EU Member of Parliament Jo Cox.

A Brexit would have enormous economic and immigration consequences for Europe and the world, but it also would call into question what it means to be an EU member.

WHY SOME BRITS WANT TO LEAVE

Britain has long had an awkward relationship with the EU. The country stalled on joining the European Economic Community, the precursor to the union, until 1973. Controversy over the terms of its membership led the country to hold a referendum in 1975, which the pro-Europe side won. Britain has also avoided switching to the euro and being part of the Schengen Agreement, which did away with border controls between the countries.

Most polls suggest that immigration may be the central issue in the Brexit debate. Many Brits feel that EU migrants who legally move to Britain are taking jobs from local people and abusing the country's benefits system. The EU's troubled response to a recent wave of migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa has only made things worse.

REMAIN IN EU

Most high-level politicians, including Prime Minister **David Cameron**, Labour leader **Jeremy Corbyn**, and the leadership of the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party, are supporting the vote to remain in the EU. Other EU countries such as France and Germany also want Britain to remain.



LEAVE EU

The United Kingdom Independence Party and its leader, **Nigel Farage**, have an anti-EU message and have found increasing support from Britain's mainstream Conservative and Labour parties. A number of top members of the Conservative government have broken with Cameron on his Brexit policy including Boris Johnson, the former London mayor.



LUKE MACGREGOR/BLOOMBERG
Former London Mayor Boris Johnson speaks at the Reid Steel factory during a nationwide bus tour to campaign for a Brexit.

WHAT THE REST OF THE WORLD THINKS

Generally, most foreign leaders have sided with the "remain" crowd. Many European leaders, for example, seem concerned about the precedent a Brexit vote might set in the EU. Other foreign leaders, such as President **Barack Obama**, have argued that a Brexit would diminish Britain on the world stage and perhaps set off broader chaos.

On the other side, U.S. presidential hopeful **Donald Trump** has offered pro-Brexit views in interviews, though he has clarified that he was not making recommendations and was just talking personally.



SOURCES: The Washington Post, European Union, BBC News

HISTORY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Background: The European Union is an economic and political union among 28 countries. It was created in the aftermath of World War II. Its goal was to avoid conflict by having countries that trade with one another become economically interdependent.



Economic union: Because the original focus was economic, it resulted in the creation of the European Economic Community. It was formed in 1958 between Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Political union: The organization evolved into a political union spanning policy areas from climate, environment and health to external relations, security and migration. It became the European Union in 1993.

Current members: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

Membership dues: The EU's sources of income include contributions from member countries, import duties on products from outside the EU, and fines when businesses fail to comply with its rules. Each EU country contributes a small percentage (usually around 0.7 percent) of its gross national income.

Laws: EU countries vote on laws the members must follow. EU legislation is approved by both the directly elected European Parliament and the Council. The Council is made up of the governments of the 28 EU countries.

EU citizens: Residents of EU countries are EU citizens and can travel, live and work in any of the EU countries. This is possible because the Schengen Agreement.

Currency: The euro is used by the majority of the EU countries. These countries are collectively known as the eurozone. To join, a country must reach certain financial goals. Britain is one of the nine member countries that does not use the euro.



WHAT COULD HAPPEN IF BRITAIN LEFT THE EU

No country as large as Britain has voted to leave the EU. If Britain left, it would be a sign to other anti-EU groups that countries can actually exit the union if they choose. That could have a big impact all over the continent, where anti-EU parties such as France's National Front have won significant electoral support in recent years. By proving that membership in the union is reversible, a Brexit could severely damage the very foundations of the EU.

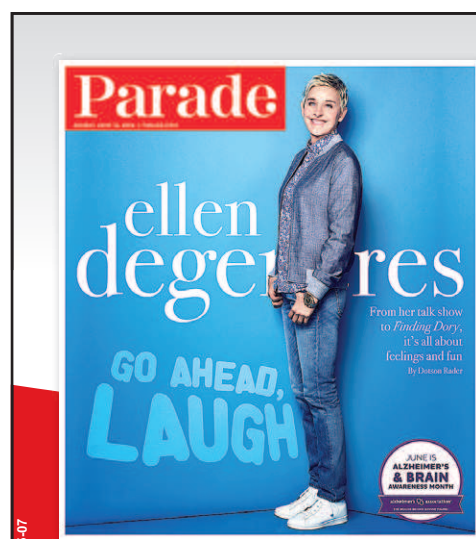
For Britain, the economic effects of leaving are a subject of fierce debate. Some argue that the union will want to maintain good economic relations with Britain, but it's also possible that EU officials would impose tough trade restrictions as a warning to others that might want to leave.

London's status as Europe's financial capital would look shaky if Britain left (HSBC Bank is already warning that it may move 1,000 finance jobs from London to France if the Brexit goes through), and a Brexit may re-spark the campaign for an independent Scotland because of the pro-EU sentiment held by a large number of Scots.



Scotland could want to be independent.

KIRA RIDER/TIMES-DISPATCH



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