What We Can & Can't Measure In A Brexit Deal

SOCIAL SCIENCE WORKS

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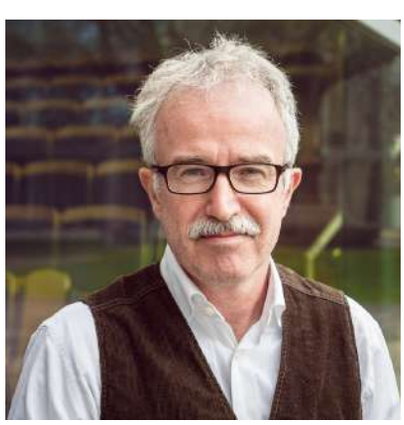
Introduction

Following the UK's decision to trigger Article 50 last week and in the midst of a chaotic, ongoing debate about the future of Britain, the European Union and how their relationship will look after the UK withdraws in two years' time, social scientists are starting to ask how we should measure the relative success or failure of a future transitional and long term deal between the UK and the EU. The paper presented by the researchers at the UK in a Changing Europe: *A Successful Brexit: Four Economic Tests* is the most high profile example of such work to date.

In this paper, Social Science Works explores the context in which the original paper was written: namely through a post-referendum lens, and finds that additional indicators that consider both the aims of the European Union and the UK, and social and political dimensions ought to be considered. This paper is intended to offer a broader perspective on what a successful Brexit could look like, both for the UK and the remaining member states. There are many more variables and nuances to consider which Social Science Works examines using a methodological framework that will assign the original paper different scores for the paper's cogency, research design, assumptions and other metrics. This paper starts with a synoptic depiction of the original paper *A Successful Brexit: Four Economic Tests*, pointing to limitations of the tests proposed in the paper.

We find that a successful Brexit can only be one that does not threaten political stability across Europe, and one that protects the rights and freedoms of British citizens at home and resident in EU member states, and likewise guarantees the rights of EU citizens resident in Britain. Further, we find the EU and the UK's ability to continue to cooperate on issues of national and international security will be a key indicator of a successful Brexit. Finally, we find that Britain's freedom to push back against multinational forces and become a pioneer in areas like climate change and renewable energy would mark a successful Brexit.

Prof. Dr. Hans Blokland
April 2017.



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A Successful Brexit: Four Economic Tests

Research usually starts with a question and then the research is designed in such a way that there is a chance that a plausible answer will be found. The British government has said that "we're going to make a success of [Brexit]", without defining what a successful Brexit would look like. Therefore, the authors of *A Successful Brexit* rightly ask themselves, how will we know if the government's plan sets out a coherent strategy for a successful Brexit? How should we judge the terms of any eventual deal and our disengagement from the EU? Over the long term, how will we know if Brexit is really 'working for Britain'? (3) To answer these questions, or 'to find out whether we are headed for a successful Brexit', we need "an agreed set of 'tests' against which we can evaluate the government's plan, the EU's position, and what emerges during the negotiations." (3)

The authors formulate four tests:

1. The economy and the public finances:
A successful Brexit will be one that makes us better-off overall.

2. Fairness:
A successful Brexit will be one that helps those who have done worst and promotes opportunity and social mobility for all across the UK, but particularly for the most disadvantaged.

3. Openness:
A successful Brexit will be one that maintains and enhances the UK's position as an open economy and society.

4. Control:
A successful Brexit will be one that genuinely increases citizens' control over their own lives.

The authors 'hope that there is a consensus that these tests are broadly the right objectives' (22). They also believe that 'there needs to be some clear, evidence based and, as far as possible, objective mechanism for assessment' (22).
The authors recognize limitations of their approach (5). 'First, Brexit will be a process not an event, and one whose implications will become clear only over a period of several years. This makes tracking cause and effect highly problematic.' Second, 'Brexit is only one of many factors shaping our economic prospects.' Third, 'because of trade-offs between the tests, deciding how to balance the different aspects will depend on individual and collective preferences, which can only be determined by the political process.'
Nevertheless, the authors 'are setting out a framework intended to be, as far as possible, neutral and objective, which will allow for an assessment (of the success of Brexit) in the future' (5).

1 The Economy and the Public Finances

The first test the authors present asks whether 'Brexit will make us better off'? Indicators here are the rate of the economic growth, GDP, employment rate, the inflation rate and the sustainability of public finance. Growth is influenced by trends in productivity, which are determined by capacities for innovation, the size and competitiveness of markets 'and a host of other factors'. These, in turn, the authors write 'are affected by the institutional context, including access to markets, new ideas and the stability of the financial system.' (7) Membership of a body like the EU plays an important role, because 'they shape our trade and investment regime, our regulatory environment, our framework for industrial policy and the cost of doing business.' The public finances depend on tax revenues which depend on economic performance. 'Getting the money back' from Brussels might consequently not really improve the public finances since Brexit might hamper economic performance and thus tax revenues.

Economic research 'on balance' 'suggests' that EU membership has benefited the EU economy 'over the last forty years' (8). But this does not imply, the authors correctly notice, that leaving the EU will damage the British economy in the future. 'Estimating future impacts depends on a raft of assumptions and a clear specification of what would have happened otherwise', they state. 'Brexit can be expected to affect domestic policies in a number of ways, both directly and indirectly. Alternative assumptions about the path of future policies will result in very different estimates' (8). This raises the general question if it is possible to predict the economic consequences of leaving the single market on the continent or to predict the economic consequences of the renewed option to negotiate trade-deals with non-EU members oneself. As the authors state themselves, the possibilities for prediction in such complex contexts are very limited, which limits the analytical scope of the testing framework proposed.

2 Fairness

Although the authors admit that 'the causal links are complex' (11), they suggest that the considerable rise of inequality of income and wealth in the UK in the last three decades, as well as the decrease of social mobility, is perceived as being related to the EU membership. Fairness, according to the authors, has a series of components: the impact of liberalisation on the 'four freedoms' of movement of goods, services, capital and labour; the geographical distribution of skill; the distributive impact of the EU on economic policy; the impact on social services and tax revenues; social and economic rights which have been implemented by way of EU regulations. These questions are largely mirrored in the four economic tests proposed: migration, trade, industrial and regional policy, public services and housing.

The evidence that the EU can be made responsible for the inequalities of income and wealth are not entirely clear, though. The authors adopt the view that EU regulations were a driving force for the kind of political consequences that brought these problems about. Whether this is indeed the case is at least up for debate as many other non-EU-countries

around the globe have undergone similar processes. Whether Britain will be more fair and equal in 5, 10 or 30 years' time, predominantly depends on political decisions taken in Britain. As political discourse will be dominated almost entirely by the debate around Brexit, it would be helpful to include a more narrowly political scientific view that could address the ways the rebalancing of powers might impact future economic policy.

3 Openness

A successful Brexit will be one that maintains and enhances the UK's position as an open economy and society, the authors write. 'Openness', the authors state, 'is not a good in itself, but rather a means to an end. To the extent that it stimulates productivity, it increases the size of the national economic pie.' Openness to the single market of the EU means less freedom to negotiate trade deals with non-European countries. More openness towards the countries outside of the Single Market implies less openness towards the EU. How this will work out in actual practice is largely unpredictable. Even though the questions encompass fruitful starting points for analysis, its scope is limited and many of these questions depend on local political decisions. Openness is supposed to preserve European economic integration, enable UK firms to establish businesses in the EU, preserve the flow knowledge and maintain a relatively flexible approach to migration, especially for skilled workers. The questions from this test revolve mostly around trade and, again, the 'four freedoms' of movement (16). This section is most closely linked to the immediate concerns of the negotiations that the British government is going to lead with the European Union within the next two years. As such, research in this direction will probably be influenced to a large degree by day-to-day politics; the history of European integration as well as the many different layers of integration in Europe today (e.g. Norway and Switzerland) will give researchers a range of case studies for useful comparative analysis.

4 Control

A successful Brexit will be one that genuinely increases citizens' control over their own lives. 'Taking back control' would: 'Increase democratic control – at all levels – of UK legislation and policy and reduce the perceived "democratic deficit" whereby decisions are taken in Brussels without sufficient input by democratically elected UK politicians' (20). Especially politically charged topics (e.g. migration and social policy) will need to be addressed in a more transparent way that would let citizens feel that their voices are being heard. This section differs from the other three sections, insofar as it is not a narrowly economic topic but more adequately belongs to the realm of political science. It addresses the important question of democratic legitimacy. There are limited means to measure legitimacy and sovereign control, however. A perceived strengthening of a country's sovereignty might well co-exist with an actual dependence on much larger, global players. Of course, the smaller a political unit, the more influence individual citizens can exert on decisions. A successful Brexit therefore needs to include the ability to get a hold of these problems in cooperation with other players like the EU. In general, these issues find insufficient resonance within this chapter and stronger connection to the issue of 'openness' could have illuminated a range of points.

Methodology of Social Science Works for reviewing research

Thematic Areas and Criteria

It is helpful to have a closer, more methodological look at the research at hand. When reviewing research, Social Science Works analyses the claims, methods, evidence, and conclusions against a backdrop of six major thematic categories: Research Design, Statistical Procedures, Assumptions, Sources, Cogency, and Funding. Within these thematic categories are two to three sub-criteria against which we evaluate the piece of research.

In regards to the conceptual framework of the research itself, our Research Design Check criteria focuses on whether the research design was appropriate for the question at hand and if the method was applied correctly.

We also provide an Assumptions Check under the criteria of whether there could be other assumptions that are ignored or omitted within the conceptual framework, or that would lead to other conclusions had they been included. A Source Check examines if sources used within the research accurately say what they claim, if other relevant sources were systematically omitted from the paper, and if other research has potentially been ignored. Our Cogency Check examines the consistency and correctness of the justifications, definitions, and conclusions or consequences within the research. Finally, a Funding Check takes into account whether or not the funder of the research has been acknowledged and if potential biases have been explored. We should note that because the paper reviewed contained no statistical measurements or other empirical data, we have decided to omit the Statistics Check evaluation point that we would normally include on a more data intensive paper.

This framework was designed with the aim of offering a method through which research could be evaluated using a more transparent and academically rigorous method, to reduce ambiguity for policymakers and the general public, and to improve the credibility of the policy making process.

Scoring and Weighting System

All Thematic Areas are then scored against a five-tiered rating system – which corresponds to a colour on a red-yellow-green scale – and given a score of zero to four – with zero indicating that significant flaws, biases, or shortcomings exist in regards to the quality of the respective thematic area, and a score of four indicating a comprehensive, rigorous, clear, and logical construction of the components of the paper relating to these themes.

Some of the thematic categories have been given double weight relative to other categories for the purposes of our evaluation – specifically Research Design, Assumptions, and Cogency Checks. We justify assigning double weight to these categories because they are the most important in guiding and shaping the research and conclusions from that research. These categories also have the potential to steer research without necessitating the need to defend these choices, which if misused or unchallenged could result in misleading or unjustifiable conclusions being drawn from the paper.

The scores from the thematic areas above are then aggregated into a total score, where it is then matched with a colour-numeric category corresponding to a certain quality of research content as well as conclusions. The following scores correspond to the following colour-numeric categories:

• 0 – 6 ▸ Red

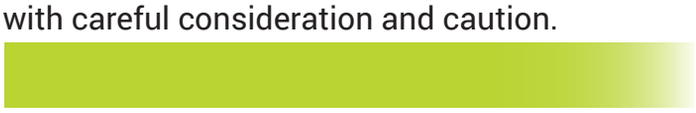
Red scores indicate serious problems in most or all of the thematic areas and that the conclusions from the research should be viewed as inadmissible.

• 7 – 13 ▸ Red-Yellow

Red-Yellow scores indicate that on the whole, the quality of the different thematic areas falls somewhere in between Red and Yellow, meaning that most areas contained a combination of serious problems or considerable omissions and inaccuracies within the research.

• 14 – 21 ▸ Yellow

Yellow scores indicate that while several areas meet more thorough, complete, and unbiased standards, some underlying problems with the research remain. The conclusions, results, and recommendations of the study should be taken with careful consideration and caution.



• 22 – 28 ▸ Green-Yellow

Yellow-Green scores indicate that, for the most part, the overall quality of research is good. A few concerns may remain, but the overall findings and conclusions of the research are mostly justifiable.

• 29 – 32 ▸ Green

Green scores signal that most or all of the thematic areas were found to meet the criteria of high-quality research. The methods, design, and conclusions of the study are justifiable.

It should be noted that because of the lack of statistical evidence in the paper, we have decided to omit the Statistics Check, effectively eliminating that category. However, since there is less within the paper to evaluate, we effectively raised the threshold for what constitutes a “Green” rating.

Social Science Works: Second Opinion Traffic Light Rating Framework

Thematic Area	Criteria	Red	Red-Yellow	Yellow	Yellow-Green	Green
Research Design Check (double weight: max 8 points)	Is the research design appropriate for the question? Has the research question been properly conceptualised? Is the method applied correctly?	A red research design is representative of a deeply flawed design. Red research design will use inappropriate tools for the question at hand. A red research design is likely use data and information that cannot address the research question. Similarly, a red research design will have methodological flaws in its execution either in part or as a whole. For red research designs using survey data, a red rating indicates missing data.	Red-yellow indicators suggest a research design somewhere between the two. Important: red-yellow indicators can only be given to research designs that do not deliberately misled or conceal information and data.	Research design marked yellow indicates research design that has some flaws. In terms of appropriateness, a yellow indicator suggests that the design uses outdated methods or methods from another discipline, without adequately explaining its reasons for ignoring more accepted design methods. For research that uses survey data, a yellow indicator suggests that the survey questions do not sufficiently address the research question. Important: only where surveys omit information can a red indicator be given.	Yellow-green indicators suggest a research design somewhere between the two.	A green indicator for research design indicates a well-put together research question and methodology. A green indicator can be given to research which uses discipline-appropriate, contemporary sampling and research methods, or to research that clearly lays out the need for an innovative research method to address the research question. For research using survey data, a green indicator suggests comprehensive and well-sampled dataset with ambiguities and data-cleaning explained clearly.
Statistical Check (single weight: max score 4 points) *This has been omitted for this paper*	Are there omissions in the survey process? Which measuring instruments have been used? Are these described? Are these problematic?	A red rating indicates that the statistical data is significantly flawed. A red indicator can be given for research that deliberately misleads or misrepresents the data. Any mistakes or misrepresentations in the statistical data will be flagged red.	Red-yellow indicators suggest the quality of the statistical procedures somewhere between the two. Important: red-yellow indicators can only be given to statistical procedures that do not deliberately misled or conceal information and data.	Statistical data marked yellow indicates that there are problems with the data, but that the data is not misleading. For example, representations of the data may be unhelpful or unclear, and choices about the types of data included in the study may not be sufficiently explained. Yellow suggests that the method is not completely appropriate for evaluating the relations in the data.	Yellow-green indicators suggest the statistical data falls somewhere between the two.	A green indicator for statistical methods indicates a clearly laid out, comprehensive and accurate representation of the statistical data. Green indicators suggest that the models are sensible, clear and accurately measured.
Assumptions Check (double weight: max score 8 points)	Do the instruments meet the quality criteria? (Objectivity / reliability / validity) Are there alternative assumptions that would lead to other conclusions with the same data and concepts?	A research paper marked red for assumptions check suggests that there is bias in the underlying assumptions of the research. The research fails to indicate its assumptions before beginning analysis or inadequately explores them. Alternative assumptions are not considered.	Red-yellow indicators suggest the paper's assumptions are somewhere between the two.	Where a paper is marked yellow for its assumptions, the paper likely examines and expresses some of its underlying assumptions, but it's not completely rigorous in exploring the implications of those, or the assumptions not taken into consideration. Alternatively, a paper with a yellow for assumptions can fail to fully consider the implications of the assumptions in drawing up its research design which might otherwise be solid.	Yellow-green indicators suggest a research design somewhere between the two.	A green indicator is a sign that the assumptions that underline the paper have been rigorously explored and defended and that alternative assumptions have been considered. A green indicator suggests that potential bias has been acknowledged and steps have been taken to address it.

Social Science Works: Second Opinion Traffic Light Rating Framework

Thematic Area	Criteria	Red	Red-Yellow	Yellow	Yellow-Green	Green
Source Check (single weight: max score 4 points)	Have the assumptions lead to inadequate decisions in the research process? Do the sources cited say what the author says they do? Have the sources been taken from a one-sided discourse and relevant sources were systematically omitted?	A paper marked red for sources suggests that the paper overlooks important work relevant to the field or research question or else misunderstands or misuses relevant research. Red can also indicate that the sources presented offer only a one-sided presentation of the current state of the literature.	Red-yellow indicators suggest sources fall somewhere between the two. Important: red-yellow indicators can only be given to sources that do not deliberately misled or conceal information and data.	Yellow indicates that the paper offers a generally balanced view of the current literature but may omit an important piece of the contemporary picture. Likewise, a yellow rating can be given for a paper that offers generally good analysis of the current literature but misinterprets a substantial contribution to the debate.	Yellow-green indicators suggest the sources are somewhere between the two.	Green indicates that the paper gives a clear, balanced and comprehensive overview of the current literature that is relevant to the problem at hand and demonstrates a solid and consistent interpretation of the current state of research.
Cogency Check (double weight: max score 8 points)	Has major research been ignored? Why? Are the justifications coherent? Consistent? Correct? Are the definitions used consistently?	Red indicates that there are serious flaws in the argumentation presented. Definitions are missing or inconsistent, the conclusions do not properly follow from the data presented or the assumptions and the implications of the study are exaggerated or minimised	Red-yellow indicators suggest the paper's argumentation falls somewhere between the two	Yellow indicates that mostly the paper is logically and consistently argued, but that there are logical leaps or some minor inconsistencies in definitions leading to some difficulty understanding the conclusions of the paper.	Yellow-green indicators suggest the argumentation falls somewhere between the two.	Green in this field suggests that the conclusions of the paper are highly justifiable, logically argued and rooted in consistent and accepted definitions. The political and social consequences of the paper are clearly articulated and justified.
Funding Check (single weight: max score 4 points)	Are the required conclusions/ political consequences of the study justified? Has the funder of this research been acknowledged? Have potential biases been explored?	Red indicates that the funder of the research is not acknowledged or is deliberately obscured. Implications from potential bias are not acknowledged.	Red-yellow indicators suggest the paper's funding acknowledgment is somewhere between the two. Important: red-yellow indicators can only be given to research that does not deliberately misled or conceal information and data on funders.	For a yellow rating, a paper will clearly acknowledge their funding sources but may fail to fully acknowledge the role of the funders in the paper or the potential biases that are part of the funder's agenda.	Yellow-green indicators suggest the argumentation falls somewhere between the two.	Green indicates that the authors acknowledge the funder and the funder's role in the completion of the research. Additionally, green papers will be transparent about their funder's agenda and acknowledge the potential biases that come with that.

Research Design Check

The great strength of *A Successful Brexit: Four Economic Tests* lies in its development of a research design for future papers examining the impact of Brexit on the UK. Of course, the paper does not describe specific suggestions for actual empirical research. Its scope is both wider and more limited. It is wider in the sense of developing an overarching framework to which social scientists, economists, policy-makers and interest groups alike can refer back to. It is also more limited because such a framework does not allow – or indeed intend – to delineate ways that researchers can look into these questions.

As a consequence, we cannot judge the paper on whether or not the questions asked are adequate for the empirical data. We can, however, ask how helpful the paper might be in exploring future research. As such, the authors have certainly produced a contribution that aims to take problems and issues from public discourse and condense them into a single document. Based on what they assume as a "consensus" in the British society, the impetus of the paper is to formulate those issues into an explicit, conceptual form so they can structure and reflect the public debate. This is important work especially in such a heated political climate as the one surrounding Britain's exit from the European Union. As a matter of communicating scientific research, the paper intends to work in both directions: it might help contextualising economic and social science research within the broader political debate and it might help to look at political issues from a more sober and scientific point of view.

Keeping in mind this overall goal of the paper, we do find, however, that there are ways in which the authors could have made an even stronger impact. Firstly, it would have been worth discussing the specificity of research on Brexit. It is, after all, a unique historical event which will pose some more general questions about how to conduct research on such a complex phenomenon. While we cannot expect the authors to have an easy answer for this problem, it would have been preferable to see it acknowledged. This could have given the paper another – historical and methodological – dimension from which to look at Brexit. Secondly, since the authors' scope appears to be mostly extensive, the paper at times gets lost in a large sum of questions and lacks a degree of specificity. More contextualisation and streamlining could render the framework more readily applicable to researchers at all stages of their career. Existing academic research and controversies are only hinted at (see Source Check) which will make it more difficult to be used as a direct starting point for the many upcoming political and academic debates.

Research Design Check Score: 6 / 8

Cogency Check

In the cogency check, the structure of the argument is examined by focusing on premises, conclusions and definitions. Typically, arguments are incomplete for reasons of rhetoric and elegancy, for example by using short-cuts that allow the reader to understand an argument more intuitively. These rhetorical decisions often cover up holes in the cogency of the argument.

The argument in *A Successful Brexit: Four Economic Tests* relies on the definitions made in-text and the assumptions that revolve around them. The crucial definitions of the argumentative structure are the tests themselves (economic growth, openness, fairness, control). While economic growth and control are cogent, openness and fairness are evaluated in this section in more detail. That the authors define the tests themselves allows the argument to appear very consistent, but it also depends strongly on its implicit and explicit assumptions, while it is not completely clear whether these elaborations are useful in the policy-making process, scientifically rigorous, or adequate for a description of the British post-Brexit reality.

Premises and conclusions

The main premises (implicit or explicit) are the following:

1. The "success" of a macro decision like Brexit can be measured and evaluated.

2. There is a consensus of what is important to the British people. The authors know this consensus and 'merely express' it and measure it with the tests.

3. The economic parameters are the most important factors to evaluate political decisions like Brexit.

All three premises are evaluated in the Assumptions section.

Conclusions (explicit or implicit):

1. The tests and parameters provided in the paper are suited to understand and analyse the consequences of Brexit (examined in the Research Design section).

2. They are a useful tool to analyse the 'government's plan, the EU's position, and what emerges during the negotiations' (page 3; analysed in the section Context).

The definitions of success measured by these tests are framed almost exclusively in economic terms, at the same time, aside from these economic concepts and measurements, the tests are rather vague. The authors explicitly state that the scope of the actual tests is very limited and that they are difficult to measure (5). This lowers the scientific value of them, nonetheless the concept is communicated as a framework for perception to evaluate coming negotiations between the EU and Britain on how the Brexit should look like.

Definition and Conceptualization of the tests

A general remark that can be made about the tests is that they are vague. When it is stated that Brexit 'will make us better off overall', it is unclear who 'us' refers to, what 'better off' exactly means and what the measurable timeframe should be for this. As the first test on the economy and the public finances appears to be sound, no further space is spent on this section as they are cogent within the definitions laid out by the authors. In addition, the section on control, which addresses issues of sovereignty has no major cogency problems. Hence, the sections relating to fairness and openness will be evaluated in more detail.

Fairness

In the fairness section, fairness is mainly understood in the realms of income inequality and unequal opportunities, as well as rights of workers and citizens and equality between UK regions and their public services (12), and hence is a very multi-layered concept. These aspects of fairness are not developed in more measurable detail, but added are instead further questions that do not expand on the layers mentioned above. These questions focus on: (1) migration, (2) trade, (3) industrial and regional policy and (4) public services and housing. In these question sections, a broad spectrum of factual, procedural and hypothetical questions is asked (13), at the same time they are not properly integrated in the four layers mentioned and not connected towards an evaluative framework. In that sense, this test lacks a coherent and cogent concept of what fairness means for whom, in which contexts and why.

Openness

The openness test (15) evaluates Brexit outcomes in regard to the impact on Britain's 'openness'. Openness is mentioned as a separate test, while it is understood as 'not a good in itself, but rather a means to an end. To the extent that it stimulates productivity, it increases the size of the national economic pie.' This definition only encompasses one aspect of the first test, the economy and public finances. The authors define an open Brexit as one which:

1. 'Preserved the current degree of economic

integration with the rest of the EU';

2. 'Enabled UK firms to establish business in the EU to sell their wares and for EU firms to set-up in the UK';

3. 'Facilitated the flow of knowledge, and preserves and extends the gains from the UK's links with foreign universities and research institutions, in particular through institutionalised cooperation in research';

4. 'And it maintained and enhanced a relatively liberal, flexible approach to immigration, particularly for skilled workers, students and others who contribute to the dynamism of the UK economy and labour market.'

To deliver a sociologically more complete understanding of Brexit, the conceptualization of openness needs to address a broader range of aspects than the mostly economic frame offered by these definitions. The paper is here coherent with the subtitle (Four Economic Tests), at the same time it lacks a thought through choice of how a more comprehensive conceptualization of how such a broad test as openness could have been conceptualized.

Cogency Check Score: 6 / 8

Assumptions Check

The aim of the assumptions check is to ensure that the research under scrutiny has fully explored the assumptions that underpin it. The reasons for this is that failure to fully explore underlying assumptions can skew the conclusions drawn from data, or, as in the case of a paper like this, can tilt the direction of the tests and how they are framed. Naturally, the paper is very clear that it neither seeks to offer a comprehensive framework for what a successful Brexit might look like, and that it only intends to offer economic tests through which one can 'objectively' measure the relative success or failure of the Brexit project. Indeed, these tests do offer crucial yardsticks against which academics and the British public can judge the performance of its politicians in securing the UK's future after the country leaves the EU. However, much remains unsaid here.
The aim of this chapter is to make clear some of those unexplored assumptions and indicate how a consideration of a fuller picture might have pushed the authors to consider different potential economic tests in their Brexit framework.

Our assessment for this chapter focuses on two major questions:

•How well does the discussion of the paper's assumptions meet standards of objectivity, reliability and validity?

•Are there alternative assumptions that would lead to other conclusions using the same data and concepts presented in the paper?

Economic Focus & Explicit Assumptions and Omissions

One of the key ways that the article is framed is through economic policy. The article and the institution that supports it, is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK. This means, as the article makes clear, that the focus of the paper will be on the economic implications of Brexit. The paper outlines the areas that it has considered explicitly: economic growth, social cohesion, public services, the UK's international influence and democratic control. Likewise, the paper acknowledges that it has chosen to overlook the potential impact of Brexit on national security. 'It will not be enough simply to look at the impact of Brexit on economic output, important though that will be, because the referendum was about much more' (3). In doing so, the paper lays out its intentions to focus on the economic implications of Brexit, indeed, the authors state that:

> *"At the heart of the EU is the single market, the largest free trade area in the world."* (8).

Which demonstrates pithily the underlying assumptions of the paper and the academic paradigm in which it is rooted.

The 'Consensus'

The paper tries to draw on what is, at various times called 'consensus' (3, 4, 9, 15 and 23), 'common ground' (3) and 'agreement' (4 and 15) across the UK. In doing so, the paper appears to appeal to a kind of common-sense approach to judging the success of Brexit. Of course, the idea of a broad consensus is a combination of media narrative and political strategies – the common ground that the paper appeals to is a blend of ideas presented by politicians and the press, it does not take into consideration the ideas and views of the public at large, or if it does, it offers no insight into these data. Additionally, the impact of Brexit on minorities and vulnerable groups is not considered. In democratic societies, however, policy-makers will have to take those into consideration just as much as the interests of the majority.

The referendum itself was famously close, and hence the idea that the British public as a whole with some kind of general view about where they want the country to be in a post-European Union membership future is unlikely. In framing the paper in this way, the authors are able to ask apparently reasonable questions, like 'Will Brexit make us better off?' (7) without having to justify themselves. There are many assumptions underneath this: who are the 'us' in this paper? Is it UK nationals living in Britain? UK nationals around the world? UK nationals in the UK and EU? Does this 'us' include EU nationals currently living in Britain? Likewise, what is 'better off'? The paper asks:

• Would it result in levels of GDP and real household income at least as high as would otherwise have been the case, over both the short and long term?

• Would it ensure that the public finances were sustainable, while allowing the government to allocate more spending to policies favoured by the electorate, such as health and social care?

• Would it allow a more balanced path of economic growth across industries and regions to allow such growth to be more sustainable and resilient to unexpected economic events? (8).

Of course, these considerations are useful, but they speak only to a paper that believes that a better off Britain can be measured in a macroeconomic manner.
Further, the paper suggests that the tests reflect a consensus between 'civil society, its nations and regions, and across the political spectrum, including as far as possible the majority of those who voted either for Leave or Remain' (3). However, in failing to reference any of these discussions, polls or responses, it is difficult to know where the consensus comes from. The paper mentions that it has taken into consideration the arguments presented by both the leave and the remain campaigns in drawing up their tests:

> *"Generally, both sides argued that Britain should remain an open, outward-looking country (immigration policy notwithstanding); that both economic growth and social cohesion mattered; that we should invest in, and improve, our public services; and that we need to maintain Britain's international influence, while preserving democratic control of our own destiny. Any tests of the success of Brexit must reflect this broad range of goals."* (3).

However, the ability of the two opposing sides' to accurately reflect the will of civil society and the public at large is questionable.

Alternative Assumptions & Outcomes

The authors write: "Openness' is not a good in itself, but rather a means to an end.' (15). For the paper's authors, the European Union is valuable insofar as 'it stimulates productivity, it increases the size of the national economic pie.' (15), but the European Union's aims go much beyond economic growth for member states. The EU aims:

• 'To establish European citizenship. This means protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

• To ensure freedom, security and justice. This means co-operation in the field of justice and home affairs.

• To promote economic and social progress.

• To assert Europe's role in the world.'
(Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2007))

These four 'pillars' of the EU make mention of economic growth just once. Equally important for member states are human rights and freedoms, the freedom to live, work and settle in other member states, security and justice through member state cooperation as well as asserting European influence worldwide. Moreover, the European Union has proved to be an extraordinary force for peace on the continent. These stated aims, when taken into consideration of a potential Brexit deal begs the questions about how the UK intends to preserve or improve on their current standings in these areas outside of the European Union. In answer to this, we will offer a broader picture for alternative indicators for a successful Brexit (page 18).

Objectivity, Reliability & Validity

Hence, although the paper tries to offer an even hand in its approach to examining a possible Brexit deal and so should be considered broadly objective in its approach, it is hard to say the same for its reliability and validity. It is difficult to say that the paper offers 'reliable' tests because, as the authors acknowledge, 'Teasing out the impact of different phenomena and distinguishing them from the effects of Brexit is bound to be analytically challenging.' (5). Hence, as noted elsewhere in this paper, without being able to attribute cause and effect and without a timeline against which to judge, the tests are an ineffective measurement. In terms of validity, the tests offered here can offer a partial picture, as the authors point to, in developing ways of understanding Brexit, but only through a very limited lens. The paper fails to take into consideration the European Union and its aims as a whole entity and as such the paper's validity stands only within a narrow paradigm.

Assumptions Check Score: 4 / 8

Funding Check

When completing our Funding Check, we examine if the authors of the research at hand have disclosed their sources of funding and if such sources of funding would lead to the need for potential biases to be explored. In regards to this second point, the real question asked by us is whether the source of funding could lead to any unscrupulous claims.
The UK in a Changing Europe is transparent about where their funding comes from. In this paper the researchers clearly state that they receive funding from the UK-based Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), a major funder of both institutes of higher learning as well as research institutes in the realm economic and social issues within the United Kingdom. The ESRC receives its funding from the newly formed UK Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy – which formed this past year as a merger between the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

In regards to whether the source of funding for the paper has any major consequences on leading to biases which – if unexplored and unconsidered – could result in wholly misleading claims, the answer is likely no. Indeed, receiving funding from a more economically-oriented research organization such as the ESRC may give the research a tilt towards a larger focus economic issues – as shown in the paper – but in terms of transparency issues, it does not raise any concerns.

Funding Check Score: 4 / 4

Sources Check

Our Sources Check examines whether sources in the research are properly interpreted and presented (i.e. the sources themselves say what the researchers claim they say), if the sources were taken from a one-sided discourse, and

in terms of the overall source choice, if major research has been ignored.

Perhaps the most notable aspect regarding sources in this paper involved the major lack of source citation. The paper itself focusses on developing a framework of indicators by which one could test the 'success' of Brexit, but many of the claims within the paper are not backed up by cited evidence of any sort. As such, it makes it quite difficult to analyse the validity and quality of sources based on any of the criteria presented above.

After reviewing the paper and checking for the following words – source, sources, findings, study, studies, research, analysis – and then examining their use in the context of source citation, we were only able to find one example of some kind of 'research' being mentioned, and only one section where 'analysis' was mentioned. Many of the other claims used in the paper stem from major assumptions about what constitutes common ground or consensus across the UK without being backed by any evidence.

Even the two examples hinting at research and academic analysis have shortcomings in terms of how they are presented. For instance, on page 8 within the 'How EU Membership Has Affected Prosperity' section, the word 'research' is used in the following context 'On balance, economic research suggests that EU membership has benefited the UK economy over the last forty years.' Yet even in this instance, it is not clarified where this research came from. The point here is not to dispute the claim per se, as it is entirely plausible that the UK has benefited from EU membership, but it is important that claims such as the one above are backed up by specific evidence, if others are to make full use of the authors' work.

Additionally, although the 'Conclusion' section on page 23 discusses the 'huge body of existing academic analysis' on topics by which we could measure the effects of Brexit, it fails to point us in any given direction about where we may find these types of analyses.

While we do not believe that the authors deliberately attempted to conceal important information or research relevant to what would make Brexit 'successful,' the lack of sources and existing literature relevant to and supporting of the major claims that the authors make is a cause for concern, as it places a massive amount of weight on unchecked assumptions made by the authors.

Sources Check Score: 1 / 4

Context

It needs to be acknowledged that the paper provides a preliminary framework to understand the consequences of Brexit. Until now the public debate has been largely chaotic and in that sense the paper delivers a reasonable, though limited, perspective on Brexit. However, it needs to be stated that even though the paper improves the public debate with its conceptualized approach, the evaluative framework the authors lay out is too narrow in the context of policy making and also in informing the public debate.

It is impossible to divide the original paper from the context in which it was written. It was written following a narrow referendum victory for the leave campaign. YouGov's recent survey found that 69% of British voters now believe that Britain should leave the European Union, including 25% of remain voters who believe that there is a democratic duty to honour the results of the referendum[1]. Since the referendum, the now-Prime Minister, Theresa May, is opposed by the leader of the remain- supporting opposition and life-long Eurosceptic Jeremy Corbyn.
As a consequence, the debate about what a transitional Brexit deal and what Britain's long term relationship with the EU should look has disappeared under a cloud of platitudes about 'Red, White and Blue' Brexits. As such, a great strength of the paper is to attempt to build structures through which the public in the UK can examine the repercussions of a future Brexit deal. Likewise, the original paper is able to frame and guide the political narrative going forwards.

1 YouGov, Attitudes to Brexit: Everything We Know So Far, 2017

With this in mind therefore, it is important to reiterate that although the indicators outlined in the original paper, given that they are rooted in an understanding of a Brexit deal as an economic project, does not offer a deep enough understanding of what a good Brexit would look like in Britain and in Europe. As such, we have developed further indicators that complement the fairness, openness, and control tests which encompass a more complete perspective than a mainly economic perspective can deliver. Most of the indicators proposed here address the test of Control.

Control: Stability for Britain through political and social stability in Europe, particularly for newer members and neighbouring non-member countries;

Any successful Brexit deal will not undermine the stability enjoyed by the remaining 27 member states. This is important for a number of reasons, not least that a post-Brexit UK will continue to trade with the EU on a large scale. Hence, it is in Britain's direct self-interest that the trading bloc does not disintegrate. Further, because the European Union's desirable membership benefits have been a driving force in improving the social and economic conditions of potential new member states. In pursuit of membership, neighbouring countries outside of the Union, have endeavoured to improve standards to meet EU regulations and ease their passage into the Union. This can be seen in the examples of Bulgaria and Romania, and until recently Turkey has followed a similar pattern. It is in Britain's interest, therefore that the Union continues to exist to continue to have a positive influence on countries to the east of the bloc.

Control and Openness: Protection of rights for EU citizens living in the UK and UK citizens living in EU member states;

Any measurement of a Brexit deal should consider what is in the best interests of all people living in Britain, and UK citizens living the remaining member states. Both groups, EU citizens in the UK, and UK citizens living in a member state of the European Union, face an enormous degree of uncertainty as they are likely to be among the first groups immediately impacted by any Brexit deal. It is vital to stress that a successful Brexit is one that does not negatively impact the lives of the roughly four million people that fall into these two categories. At most risk here are protections to pensions, access to healthcare and recognition of qualifications abroad as well, of course, as right to remain in their current country of residence. This indicator particularly illustrates the need to understand Brexit, the transitional deal and the UK and EU's long term agreements beyond a purely economic lens. There are millions of people from the UK and the EU that would be affected by a deal that failed to consider their status. Currently, the status of these people is very uncertain which puts great stress on their lives and results in them being unable to make choices in terms of their careers or family planning. Considering the emotional intensity of the debate as long as even such extreme measures as deportation cannot be ruled out, there is at least a possibility that debates around the rights of citizens should outweigh economic considerations on occasion. In the light of the severity of this situation, we believe a strong focus on strictly economic measures might distract attention and channel it in ways that might potentially put these vulnerable groups at harm. It is our expressed opinion, that without protecting the rights and freedoms of current EU-citizens in the UK and UK citizens currently in other parts of the EU, any Brexit deal ought to be judged a failure.

Control: UK's improved ability to push back against international forces – climate change, multinationals among others;

One of the key criticisms of the European Union, from many on the left at least, is that as an institution it fails to adequately combat the power of multinational corporations and as a single bloc, is slow to address some of the most pressing issues facing its citizens and people around the world, most notably, on climate change. As such, a Brexit deal that gave Britain

the ability to become a first-mover on these issues would be regarded as a success.

Security as a needed test dimension:

Even though the authors state in their paper that they won't address security matters, a comprehensive framework for understanding Brexit and its deals must include it. Therefore, continued cooperation with European powers on matters of national and international security is an important indicator in evaluating a successful Brexit. A key strength of the current relationship between EU member states is the shared intelligence databases and security cooperation. Its capacity to address security concerns will, in the long run, also impact the UK's economic stability. Britain is already a member of the Five Eyes cooperation between the UK, US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, but any Brexit deal that imperils the UK's access to its current security arrangements should be viewed as a failure.

Overall score for the paper : 21

The Yellow score (21 of 32) indicates that while several parts of the paper meet thorough, complete, and unbiased standards, some underlying problems with the proposal remain. The framework of the study should therefore be taken with careful consideration and caution. The design of the paper with 6 out of 8 points is convincing in its conceptual structure. At the same time, the indicators used are rather one-sided and therefore biased towards economic measurements, even though the proposed dimensions of openness, fairness and control are not biased towards the economy. The cogency score of 4 out of 8 indicates that some argumentative problems exist in the paper. The premises can only be to some extent accepted, which limits the conclusions that are informed by these. The definitions used for the tests are not coherent enough, which becomes apparent especially in the section on openness and fairness. Here, the actual questions that the authors relate to the indicators proposed are only vaguely in relation to each other or the indicators. In the assumptions check the paper scored 4 out of 8. The proposed consensus that they claim to express is not necessarily one to which 'we can all agree on'. Only little evidence is provided that there is actually a consensus in these realms. The funding check found a fully transparent process of disclosure. Finally, the sources check, the lowest overall score with one out of four points to a paper that would benefit significantly from better, clearer and more specific references to existing literature. The whole paper is based on economic concepts, which clearly bias the proposed framework. Alternative assumptions here would have led to different and possibly more balanced test structure. Having said this, it needs to be acknowledged that the paper fulfils a practical need of having a perceptual framework for the consequences of Brexit. However, it needs to be made clear, that in the context of policy-making an evaluative framework needs to provide a wider range of indicators.

Conclusion

The objectives of the European Union are not only about the economy, but about politics and ethics. The EU is also about having an alternative for the human disasters Europe in the last century; it's about preserving European cultural traditions and cultural exchange, cultural innovation and vitality; it's about political stability, especially in the many countries in the East of Europe. It's about political leverage to tackle social, political, economic, environmental and security problems bigger than any nation state can handle on its own. To reasonably address the consequences of Brexit, some of these non-economic measurements should be taken into account.

This paper is an attempt of this paper's authors to expand the parameters of the current debate about what a successful Brexit deal should look like with these ideals in mind. This paper has considered the work of A Successful Brexit: Four Economic Tests and presented additional considerations that ought to be included. Our aim was to help to frame the debate and offer additional indicators against which potential Brexit deals and their outcomes can be measured.

It is our understanding that there needs to be a much more vigorous debate within academic circles and beyond about how Brexit negotiations are framed and how the outcomes of those negotiations should be understood. We agree with the authors that the UK government should have a part to play in this – but must consult citizen groups as well as academics and produce more transparency in outlining their intentions for the negotiations. It is also vital, as the authors as well as our own paper make clear, to bring in independent voices in this discussion because of the politically charged nature of the debate. The current discourse in the UK makes it extremely difficult to put forward dissenting opinions. As such, the UK government, and the European Union should commission independent reports and analysis to improve the credibility of the political actors at the centre of these negotiations.

The whole truth about the impact of Brexit will undoubtedly be difficult to unpick from the myriad political, economic and social factors that influence the course of events**. Indeed, the** full impact of Britain's decision to withdraw from the European Union will probably not be felt for many decades. However, as social and political scientists and citizens of the EU and the UK we have a duty to help to shape how we understand these events. In this respect, A Successful Brexit: Four Economic Tests undoubtedly makes a more than welcome contribution.

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