

Document 1 - The Guardian view on Great British Railways: renationalisation can put passengers back in the driving seatEditorial

A new 'guiding mind' for the industry will end the fragmentation that came with privatisation. But the public will want to see cheaper tickets too

The Guardian, Tue 3 Jun 2025

Government guidance documents rarely feature soaring prose to fire the imagination. But a recent Department for Transport policy update contained one passage to lift the spirits of train users up and down the country. Setting out the future of Great British Railways (GBR), the public body that will oversee a renationalised and reintegrated rail network, its authors observe that "instead of having to navigate 14 separate train operators, passengers will once again simply be able to use 'the railway'".

Last month, this journey back to the future began as the first renationalised South Western Railway (SWR) service departed Woking for London Waterloo, complete with union jack branding and the logo "Great British Railways: coming soon". The remaining nine private franchises will be back in public ownership by 2027, by which time a new GBR headquarters will be up and running in Derby. The transport secretary, Heidi Alexander, hailed the moment as a new dawn. There can be little doubt that a reset is badly needed. Fragmentation, in the name of competition, was the original sin of the destructive and ideological privatisation of the rail network in the 1990s. The wrongheaded decision to separate the management of track and trains led to confused accountability and buck-passing between train operators and Network Rail.

Accompanying marketisation, and the restless search for profit, inaugurated an era in which a baffling profusion of ticket types did little to mitigate the cost of travelling on the most expensive trains in Europe. Poor performance by franchises such as Avanti West Coast and TransPennine Express (taken back into public ownership in 2023) undermined public confidence in an industry crucial to Britain's green transition. A period of disastrous industrial relations, and reduced passenger numbers since the pandemic, have compounded a sense of crisis.

It would be foolish to hope for an instant turnaround. The future shape and finances of rail travel are still unclear, following the post-Covid collapse in lucrative commuter and business travel. But having been constituted explicitly as a publicly run "guiding mind" for the whole network, carrying responsibility for both track and trains, GBR will have the power to rationalise its operations and place the interests of passengers first. A simpler, more joined-up ticketing system should be a priority.

Somewhat bathetically, the optics of last month's SWR launch were compromised by Sunday engineering works and the need for a rail replacement bus from Surbiton to London Waterloo. Some things never change. But though free-market dogmatists will have relished that hitch to proceedings, a large majority of the population strongly welcome the prospective return of a vital public good to public hands. Much of their support, however, is undoubtedly linked to a hope that GBR will do something to address the often prohibitive cost of travelling by rail in Britain. On the subject of cheaper tickets, Ms Alexander has been noticeably reticent, pointing to current subsidies of £2bn a year. Labour should think bigger. After a disruptive and demoralising period, imagination is needed today for an industry that delivers crucial economic, environmental and societal benefits.

Document 3 - UK Supreme Court rules legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex

BBC, 16 April 2025

Summary

- The UK Supreme Court rules that the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex
- Judges say the "concept of sex is binary" while cautioning that the landmark ruling should not be seen as victory of one side over another
- Transgender people still have legal protection from discrimination, the court adds - read the full 88-page judgement
- The Scottish government had argued that transgender people with a gender recognition certificate (GRC) are entitled to sex-based protections, while For Women Scotland argued they only apply to people that are born female

- For Women Scotland says it's grateful for the decision after a "long road" of legal battles, while charity Scottish Trans urges people "not to panic"
- The Scottish government says it acted "in good faith" and will work with Westminster to understand the full implications of the ruling

Document 2 - Women win legal clarity—but Britain's gender wars intensify

The Supreme Court's ruling on sex was the easy part. Implementing it will be harder

People from the transgender community hold a protest against the Supreme Court ruling on the definition of a woman
The Economist, May 1st 2025

IT WAS A landmark decision. On April 16th Britain's Supreme Court ruled that, for the purposes of the Equality Act of 2010, the country's main anti-discrimination law, "man" refers to a biological man and "woman" to a biological woman. The judgment ended years of legal uncertainty about such matters. Since sex is a protected characteristic under the act, it means a space or service that excludes men, such as a women's bathroom, can also exclude all transgender women (biological males). The next day, the British Transport Police announced it would now conduct strip searches on the basis of biological sex, rather than how a person identifies.

Transgender people were devastated; "gender-critical" feminists, who saw their views reflected in the judgment, rejoiced. Sir Keir Starmer, the prime minister, thanked the court for providing much-needed clarity. Yet two weeks on, the hope that this would swiftly resolve one of Britain's most polarising issues has faded. Victory in one legal battle, even a landmark one, is not the end of the gender wars.

The judgment itself was definitive. Although Britain's highest court was not the first in the world to rule on this question, it has been the clearest. Until now, the predominant interpretation of the Equality Act was that "woman" could mean either a biological woman or a trans woman with a gender-recognition certificate (GRC), a document held by around 8,500 people in Britain, which allows them to legally change their sex on their birth certificate. The act protects against sex discrimination in the workplace, schools and services open to the public, such as hospitals, shops or restaurants. It also covers justified exemptions—for example, in single-sex bathrooms, competitive sport, and associations and charities. The five judges unanimously found that interpreting "sex" as including "certificated sex" made the act incoherent, particularly in areas like pregnancy provisions and lesbian rights.

Critics claim the ruling was flawed. The judges failed to define "biological sex", they argued, and no trans voices were heard during the case. Yet the court noted that the term "biological sex" is used widely to describe the sex of a person at birth. And no trans groups applied to speak at the hearing. Even the Scottish government, whose ministers had contested the case, accepted the judgment without protest.

Now comes the harder part. The ruling needs to be implemented in organisations such as the National Health Service, which has for years based ward placement on gender presentation—dress, names and pronouns. It is already facing internal resistance. On April 26th a wing of the British Medical Association, the doctors' union, condemned the Supreme Court's verdict as "scientifically illiterate", arguing that sex and gender are complex. Several other unions and charities have spoken out against it, too. Refuge, a domestic-abuse charity supporting both biological and trans women, said it would continue to welcome trans women to its shelters.

The fight goes on

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the regulator which enforces the Equality Act, has floated the idea of separate "third spaces" for trans people. In a (non-binding) update, it suggested that in some circumstances, trans people could also be excluded from the facilities of their biological sex. Clarification on these and other thorny practical questions will come when the EHRC issues binding guidance this summer. Gender-critical campaigners insist the law is settled. "Ignorance of the law is no excuse," says Naomi Cunningham, an employment barrister and the chair of Sex Matters, a gender-critical charity. But those mandated to provide sufficient single-sex toilets and changing rooms, such as employers, gyms and pools, will probably wait with any retrofitting until official guidance arrives.

The judges were at pains to stress that trans people still have protections: "gender reassignment", like "sex", is a protected characteristic. Other rights conferred by a GRC—such as marrying according to one's acquired gender, or being recorded as such on a death certificate—are unchanged. For many trans people this is cold comfort. They feel that in balancing rights the court struck a blow to a vulnerable minority. "I regard this as an act of cruelty," says Robin White, a barrister who is transgender.

To some Britain looks as if it is rolling back trans rights, even as countries including Ireland, Malta and Spain increasingly allow rights based on gender self-identification. Plenty of people also worry that the ruling could lead to a rise in discrimination. To many, however, the court's decision reflects a desire to protect women's rights rather than a dislike of trans people. While half of Britons think people should be able to transition socially, only 34% think they should be allowed to change their legal gender, according to YouGov, a pollster. Asked about the recent ruling, some 59% of Britons agreed with the court and 18% disagreed, found Electoral Calculus, another pollster.

Among activists the ideological trenches seem only to be deepening. Both sides are gearing up for further court battles. Gender-critical feminists have vowed to push for rapidly implementing the ruling in prisons, hospital wards and lavatories. Trans activists will try to get their cases to the European Court of Human Rights. "This is gender apartheid," says Jane Fae of TransActual, a trans-advocacy group. "There will be no giving way."■

Document 4 - E.U. and U.K. Strike a Deal: What to Know

Top officials from Britain and the European Union gathered in London on Monday to announce a "reset" of post-Brexit relations.



Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, and Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain in Tirana, Albania, on Friday. Credit: Leon Neal/Getty Images

By Jeanna Smialek Reporting from Brussels, *The New York Times*, May 19, 2025

Top officials from the European Union and Britain announced a deal in London on Monday that will tighten their trade and defense relationships, as the two allies pivot toward a post-Brexit future.

The summit had been billed as a major reset of relations, and it was closely watched given the context: Both Europe and Britain are trying to figure out how to reorient themselves in a world where America is a less reliable ally.

Here's what to know.

What was announced on defense and security?

Officials announced a new defense agreement, the biggest outcome of the summit. Diplomats have been negotiating for weeks on the plans, which are expected to set the tone for relations at a critical moment, as Russia's war in Ukraine grinds on and as the United States urges European nations to shoulder a greater responsibility for their own security.

"The E.U. and U.K. are providers of global stability," Antonio Costa, the president of the European Council and one of the officials attending the summit, said on

Monday. "We must be guardians of the rules based global order."

The defense deal lays the groundwork for Britain to eventually become a bigger part of European defense efforts, including a 150 billion euro loan program for joint procurement and investment. That plan is largely limited to E.U. nations and select allies, and Britain has been eager to take part.

The deal "will pave the way for the U.K. defense industry to participate," the British government said.

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With the defense partnership, the two sides agreed to biannual meetings between Kaja Kallas — the E.U.'s top diplomat — and the British foreign and defense secretaries, as well as more cooperation on crisis management exercises and improved information sharing, including of classified information.

What was agreed on trade and immigration?

The partners agreed to plan on relaxing some post-Brexit trade barriers to make it easier for animals and food to move between the two economies without

onerous sanitation certifications and checks. And, as the British emphasized, it will now be possible for the nation's producers to again sell raw meat products into the bloc, including burgers and sausages.

In return, Britain will have to make sure that it permanently aligns with European Union food safety and animal welfare rules.

And the two sides also agreed to work more closely together on detecting and deterring illegal migration.

What have been the sticking points?

Reaching an agreement was far from seamless. Europeans — and particularly coastal countries like France and Belgium — insisted that Britain extend access to U.K. fishing waters for more than a few years. Fishing is a politically sensitive topic, and the British side was hesitant to make that move.

After discussions that went to the last minute, the two sides agreed that they would allow European boats to access British fishing waters until June 30, 2038. That's not the indefinite extension that some in Europe wanted, but it is a far longer window than the four years that the British had initially suggested.

"This agreement brings stability and predictability for fishermen and fisherwomen on both sides of the channel," said Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission and one of the attendees in London on Monday.

Likewise, tensions had emerged over a youth mobility program, which is meant to give young people from both sides access to each other's countries. Europe was pushing for lower tuition for E.U. students who study at U.K. universities. Their British counterparts argued that granting that access would be too expensive.

In the end, the two sides agreed to "work toward" a plan — rebranded the "youth experience" scheme, rather than the "youth mobility" scheme, to avoid any hint of immigration.

See also <https://www.britishchambers.org.uk/policy-campaigns/global-britain/our-solutions/uk-eu-summit-2025/>

"The exact conditions related to this scheme will be decided during the negotiations," according to a European Union fact sheet.

In fact, much of the final deal is broad-brush — a plan to collaborate in the future, but one with details that remain to be determined.

What are the politics?

For the European Union, striking new trade and security agreements is an important way to prove to the United States that it is an economic and diplomatic power to be reckoned with.

President Trump has hit Europe with several waves of tariffs and is only beginning to make deals to de-escalate the situation. While Britain has struck a preliminary deal with the U.S., the European Union has made limited progress toward one.

And both partners see a need for greater collaboration in a world where the United States is a less-willing supporter of its traditional allies. Britain's defense industry could benefit from being included in Europe's push to rearm, and Europe could benefit from Britain's military capabilities.

But the partners also face domestic pressure to defend their own interests — and Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, faced particularly stark criticism as the deal became public.

The insurgent Reform U.K. party, led by Nigel Farage, a Trump ally and famous Brexit backer, has attacked the proposed youth experience plan.

On Monday, headlines in some British publications made it clear that Mr. Starmer would also face backlash over other aspects of the deal. "This humiliation is only the beginning," read one on the front page of *The Telegraph*. "Starmer rejects claim 'win-win' UK-EU deal has sold out fishing sector," read another in *The Guardian*.

Document 5 - This humiliating surrender is only the beginning

European Union secures 12-year access to British waters as Starmer crumbles – just like Brussels always thought he would

James Crisp, Europe Editor, *The Telegraph*, May 19 2025

Brussels has landed a whopper of a "Brexit reset deal" on fish, securing 12 years access to British waters.

It's a significant victory for the European Union, a humiliating surrender from Sir Keir Starmer, and yet another example of Brexit-voting British fishermen being thrown under the bus.

Britain originally pushed for a one-year deal, setting up annual negotiations on fishing rights to replace the five-

year pact struck in the Brexit trade negotiations, which expires next year.

That was the plan when the UK conceded to EU pressure in the final hours of those painful, high-stakes talks that brought a deal signed on Dec 30 2020.

But once Brussels has a concession, it never willingly surrenders it. Instead, it uses it as a foothold to push for more. It demanded five years, which, after some haggling, brought Britain to make a compromise offer of three years.

By Sunday, 24 hours before Monday's UK-EU summit, Britain had moved to four years.

Recommended

European Commission negotiators, under pressure from EU capitals, especially Paris, were turning the screws.

If Britain wanted to limit fish to four years, then the Swiss-style veterinary deal to boost trade would be limited to four years as well.

Tying the two deals together would make it much harder to claw back more fish for British boats in the future.

It's an established commission tactic; the first Brexit fishing deal expires at the same time as an agreement on continued UK access to the EU electricity market.

The British wanted the veterinary deal to be kept permanent. Otherwise, its decision to sacrifice Brexit freedoms and align with EU plant and animal health rules would look very weak. It would undermine the Government's claims that it would bring economic growth and lower grocery prices if the deal was temporary.

Weak negotiating position

Experts believe that the deal will bring a 0.1 per cent boost to GDP, which seems a moderate return for such a concession. But the deal will make it easier to export British fish to the EU, which is the major market for the UK, which exports most of what it catches.

With the summit hours away, and Sir Keir hoping for a third deal with a major partner in recent weeks, the UK was in a weak negotiating position.

This was the moment the EU was waiting for as the talks entered the endgame. The clock was ticking, as Michel Barnier used to say.

The EU could easily walk away with no deal, but that was not an option for a Prime Minister bleeding support to Reform UK.

If Britain wanted no deadline on the veterinary deal, it would have to pay big for it in fish, three times as much as it had offered.

In the wee small hours of the morning, Britain surrendered and agreed it would last 12 years.

Late ambush pays off

At this stage, it is unclear whether this will mean fish catches on the same terms as the expiring deal, which would be an EU victory, or potentially allow even more.

What is clear is that Sir Keir has surrendered one of the few points of leverage the UK had in its dealings with the EU, where fish is politically very important, until 2038.

The reset has also secured a defence pact with the EU and paved the way for UK involvement in EU rearmament programmes after Emmanuel Macron's France insisted it was conditional on a deal on fish.

Recommended

The EU's last minute ambush in the dying hours of the reset negotiations has paid off in spades.

Brussels was always confident it would. There is precedent. The same thing happened during the last hours of the Brexit trade negotiations.

Britain under Boris Johnson also caved in on fish to get a trade deal that prevented an economically devastating no deal and a return to World Trade Organisation terms. Mr Johnson at least had the excuse that he got a trade deal in return, rather than a reset agreement that merely tinkers around the edge of one already weighted in the EU's favour.

Uphill battle

The negotiations with the EU were always going to be an uphill battle. Brussels knows that Britain needs the deal more than it does and that size matters.

Its tough negotiation stance, which has secured a promise for more talks on youth mobility, is based on the belief that the heft of its single market, with 460 million consumers, will always tell in the end.

That conviction was strengthened in these new talks because the UK does not have the shelter of a trading bloc at a time when Donald Trump is threatening to trigger a global trade war.

The threat of Russia has also weakened Britain's hand, although it made the defence pact easier to do and accelerated the reset.

Britain has given away an awful lot for some modest gains.

Brussels is ruthless about negotiating in the EU's own interest, and its own interest alone.

Sir Keir, a Remainer who once pushed for a second referendum, might have hoped he'd be given an easier ride by the European Commission than the Tories.

In the end it was a case of plus ça change – the more things change, the more things stay the same.

Document 6 - Labour's immigration plans at a glance

BBC News, 12 May 2025

Sir Keir Starmer has unveiled Labour's long-awaited plans to cut levels of immigration into the UK. The prime minister said measures in the white paper, a blueprint for future laws, would make the system "controlled, selective and fair".

Here is a summary of the key measures.

Work visas tightened - for some

Overseas workers will now generally need a degree-level qualification to apply for the main skilled worker visa, instead of the equivalent of A-level, reversing a change made under Boris Johnson's government.

This higher threshold will not apply to those already in the UK renewing their visa - but ministers say it will prevent new visa applications for around 180 jobs, reducing immigration by around 39,000 a year by 2029. Lower qualification requirements will remain on a "time limited basis" for sectors deemed to be facing long-term recruitment issues.

What this means in practice is not yet clear, with the government's migration advisory body tasked with recommending roles for inclusion.

Lower-qualification visas will be capped and restricted to employers with a workforce training plan in place, whilst those applying will also face extra restrictions on bringing their dependants to the UK.

But loosened for others

At the same time, the government wants to expand eligibility for its dedicated work visa for graduates of elite universities outside the UK.

The visa for international students who plan to set up a business in the UK will also be reviewed, and ministers say they want to make it easier for "top scientific and design talent" to apply for the global talent visa.

Longer residency waits

Immigrants will typically have to live in the UK for 10 years before applying for the right to stay indefinitely – double the current five-year period.

Under the plans, this period could be reduced through a new "earned settlement" system, under which people would be awarded points to reflect their contribution to the UK "economy and society".

It is not yet clear when this longer qualifying period will kick in - details of the new system, along with a similar scheme that will apply to applications for citizenship, will be consulted on later this year.

Care visa scrapped

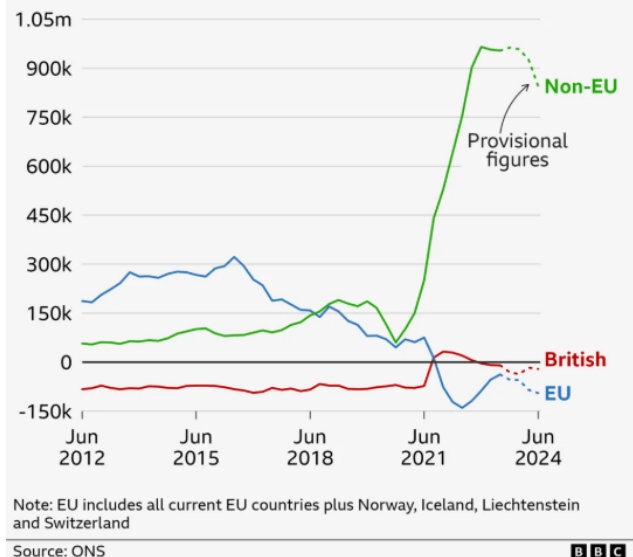
A dedicated visa for social care workers introduced during the Covid pandemic will close to new applicants next month.

Ministers say the visa, which was tightened last year, was a key driver of increased immigration in the years after Brexit, and better pay in the sector can solve longstanding recruitment problems.

Visa extensions will be permitted until 2028, and those who already have working rights will be able to switch sponsor during the term of their visa.

Net migration to the UK

12 month UK arrivals minus departures



Stricter student rules

Overseas graduates will only be able to stay in the UK for 18 months after their studies, instead of two years currently.

Ministers are also thinking of charging English universities a new 6% tax on tuition fee income from international students, which they are promising to reinvest into the higher education and skills system.

The government says it expects this to be passed on to international students in the form of higher fees, reducing applications by 7,000 per year.

Refugee pilot extended

A "limited pool" of people who lack refugee status in the UK but have been recognised as refugees by the United Nations will be allowed to use existing sponsored worker routes to come to the UK to work.

Ministers say this will build on a three-year EU-sponsored pilot project that saw around 100 skilled refugees and their families allowed to work in specified sectors such as IT, construction and engineering.

Tougher English tests

Language requirements for all work visas will increase, whilst adult dependents of visa-holders will be required to demonstrate a basic understanding of English to come on a spousal and partner route.

The government says those extending visas will be required to demonstrate a higher level of English when applying to settle in the UK.

Skills and training

The government says firms in sectors deemed to rely too much on overseas workers will be "expected to comply" with strategies to boost workplace skills. These will also be determined by official migration advisers, but government sources say IT, construction and healthcare are likely to feature.

Family rights reviewed

The government says it will table legislation to "clarify" how the right to a family life in European human rights law should apply to immigration cases.

It also says Parliament will be able to adopt a "framework" aiming to limit the extent to which family

rights can be used to delay the removal of people without the right to stay in the UK.

No overall cap

The prime minister said the government wants to "significantly" reduce net migration - the number of people coming to the UK minus those leaving - from the record levels it has reached in recent years.

But the prime minister is not putting a number on the overall level of net migration he wants to see – saying this approach has consistently failed in the past.

Opposition parties have also declined to specify exactly what levels of migration they want to see each year.

The Conservatives now say they would allow MPs to decide annual caps each year through a vote in Parliament.

PM Keir Starmer's speech in full: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-remarks-at-immigration-white-paper-press-conference-12-may-2025>

Document 7 - Keir Starmer's immigration plans: research shows you don't beat the far right by becoming them

The Conversation May 12, 2025

Katy Brown, Research Fellow in Language and Social Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University

As British prime minister Keir Starmer vowed to “finally take back control of our borders” in a landmark speech on immigration on May 12, it felt a little like déjà vu.

Some nine years earlier, we had heard those exact words repeated over and over in the build-up to the Brexit referendum from former prime minister Boris Johnson and the Leave campaign. It was a refrain also used by Nigel Farage and UKIP.

Of course, this direct reference was the point. Starmer used it to claim that the Labour government's white paper on immigration was finally going to deliver on what had been promised and desired for many years.

In these opening lines, the tone was set. And as the speech went on, there were echoes of far-right language and ideas reverberating throughout. Starmer lamented the “squalid” state of contemporary politics, the “forces” pulling the country apart, and the previous government's so-called “experiment in open borders”.

This speech and the white paper that it unveiled are but the latest indication of the rightward direction of travel within UK politics, led by mainstream and far-right parties alike – as exemplified in recent months by the footage released of immigration raids and deportations.

Some will argue this is Labour's response to the rising threat of Reform UK, with results in the recent local elections seen as evidence of the far right's growing popularity. So the story goes, Labour is proving that they can be tough on immigration, showing would-be Reform defectors that they can be trusted after all.

This familiar narrative seems to follow a prevailing wisdom which is parroted in political, media and public debates – that appeasing the far right is the way to defeat it. Rather than beating the far right at their own game, however, research shows that these techniques simply legitimise their key talking points and further normalise exclusionary politics.

Starmer's speech is a case in point. In using “take back control” from the outset, there was no hiding the intended audience or message. Starmer claimed that this project would “close the book on a squalid chapter for our politics, our economy, and our country”, implying that excessive immigration has directly caused these problems and that stopping it solves them. This chimes with classic far-right narratives where migration is framed as the root of all societal ills.

When these kinds of ideas are pushed by those in government, with great authority and influence, they are given greater credence and weight. A strikingly clear example of this came in the summer of 2024 when participants in racist riots waved posters containing the slogan “stop the boats” (a phrase popularised by the previous Tory government).

Another component of the speech that was reminiscent of far-right tropes was the idea that increased immigration was a deliberate tactic by the previous government. Starmer suggested that the Conservatives were actively pursuing a “one-nation experiment in open borders” while deceiving the British public of their intentions.

Far-right conspiracies are often premised on the idea that elites are deliberately encouraging mass immigration. It’s not hard to see how Starmer’s words could act as a dog whistle in this scenario.

These claims are especially damaging when we think about the draconian measures introduced under former Conservative governments, such as the Rwanda policy. Labour is now indicating that these proposals didn’t go far enough.

To justify bringing far stricter immigration rules, Starmer stated that “for the vast majority of people in this country, that is what they have long wanted to see”. As far-right parties so often do, Labour suggests that they are delivering on “people’s priorities”. Yet are they really a priority for people, or are we told that they are a priority which then makes them more of a priority?

Research by Aurelien Mondon, senior lecturer in politics at the University of Bath, illustrates how people’s personal and national priorities differ dramatically. When people in the UK were asked to name the two most important issues facing them personally, immigration didn’t even make it into the top ten.

However, when asked the same question about the issues facing their country, immigration topped the list. How can something that doesn’t affect you in your day-to-day life suddenly become a top priority for your country? We need to challenge the narrative that the government is simply acting on people’s wishes and acknowledge its own capacity to set the agenda.

Other priorities

Some will say that harsher anti-immigration policies are a necessary evil to defeat the far right. However, if people’s personal priorities are really the cost of living, housing and education, why is the government not focusing more of its energy on these things rather than scapegoating migrants?

What’s more, research shows that even based on these terms, these strategies are ineffective and can actually boost the success of the far right electorally. After all, its ideas are being repeatedly normalised.

In all this tactical talk, we lose sight of the fact that people are living the consequences of this rhetoric and policies right now. Rather than focus on Reform’s potential performance in a general election that is probably years away, we should recognise the immediate consequences of the rhetoric that has accompanied this white paper. Even if this did put a dent in Reform’s prospects, what is the meaning of defeating them if the policies they promote become part of the mainstream in the process?

The bottom line is that you do not beat the far right by becoming them. It doesn’t work electorally or ideologically, and even if it did, minoritised communities suffer the consequences regardless. The far right is not some threat lying waiting in the future – its normalisation is happening now.

Document 8 - How Nigel Farage’s Reform UK party upended British politics

The Labour and Conservative parties are reeling from Nigel Farage’s election success.

The Washington Post, May 4, 2025

James Heale is the deputy political editor of the Spectator magazine in London.

“Guess who’s back, back again?” After Britain left the European Union in 2020, much of Westminster hoped that they had seen the last of Nigel Farage. But the veteran Brexiteer is dominating British politics once again, having been elected to Parliament in July using the music of Eminem as his campaign song. Last week, Farage’s insurgent party, Reform UK, stormed to victory in the English council elections. With 30 percent of the projected national share, Reform trounced both Labour (20 percent) and the Conservatives (15 percent).

For more than a century, power in Britain has changed hands intermittently between those two parties. But amid voter fury about decrepit public service, Farage threatens their stranglehold on British politics. On Thursday night, Reform showed it could win seats right across England, from Devon in the south to Durham in the north. Its highest vote share came in Tony Blair’s old constituency of Sedgfield, a former coal mining center.

Much of Farage's campaign was inspired by America. His main pledge was a "DOGE in every county" — a promise that auditors would root out and eradicate wasteful spending at a local level. His rallies, like those of Donald Trump, featured plenty of razzmatazz, including fireworks and Union Jacks galore. On Facebook, he played "pothole golf," knocking balls into holes on unfixed roads to underline their neglect; on TikTok, he helped plant flowers in them.

Instead of hyping these local elections into a battle for the fate of the nation, Reform campaign staff focused on bin collections, reasoning that voters were less interested in ideology than the delivery of basic services. It was only in the final week that the campaign shifted to national issues, in a push to get out the vote. Farage headed to Dover to decry the 37,000 migrants who arrived in Britain illegally via the English Channel last year and pledged to introduce a "minister for deportations."

It was a strategy vindicated by results. Reform won 677 of 1,641 wards and became the largest party on 14 of 23 councils. It also gained a fifth member of Parliament in the House of Commons too, snatching a Labour seat in the Runcorn and Helsby by-election, winning by just six votes. For strategists, the results showed that a vote for a minor party is no longer a wasted vote. As one puts it, "If you vote Reform, you get Reform." That will be the party's message to voters in the Scottish and Welsh parliamentary elections next May.

The rise of Farage's party poses major problems for Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour government. "The message I take out of these elections," he said on Friday, "is that we need to go further and we need to go faster on the change that people want to see." But with Britain's annual economic growth running at just 1 percent, there are increasing doubts within Labour about whether Starmer can deliver sufficient "change" by the next general election in 2029.

A bad night for Labour was even worse for the Conservatives. "A total bloodbath" is how leader Kemi

Badenoch described the results, as the Tories lost 676 councillors and every single authority that they controlled. The party — which ruled Britain from 2010 to 2024 — now faces a total wipeout, with Reform, Labour and the Liberal Democrats on the left eroding every part of its aging electoral base. Much like the Gaullists in France, the traditional party of the British center-right risks being consigned to the history books by a brash new upstart.

Reform UK now wants to accelerate this process. Already, the party has signaled that it will seek injunctions to stop the Home Office from housing asylum seekers in council areas it now controls. The aim is to draw a contrast between Reform-run councils and others, much like Republican governors in the U.S. who sent undocumented migrants to Democratic-controlled "sanctuary cities."

Both Labour and the Conservative Party argue that, with Reform members elected to office, the party will soon find governing very different from campaigning. The bulk of local authority spending is dictated by statutory duties, such as adult social care. Far from wielding a chainsaw like Argentine President Javier Milei, they argue, Reform will yield merely token savings in its DOGE-style crusade. Big egos in small parties tend to clash, with civil war being a feature of Farage's previous political forays.

Yet such jibes are usually said as much in hope as in expectation. The constraints imposed on Reform's councils might serve instead as a justification for the party in its campaign for national government in 2029. Now that local bastions have been seized, next comes Wales and Scotland in 2026. And Downing Street looms on the horizon.

Farage's approach to party management evokes the Ship of Theseus: Elements of his ship are constantly changed over time, but always the vessel sails on. Right now, Farage has a favorable wind at his back and a clear destination in mind.

Pour voir les résultats des élections locales du 1^{er} mai 2025 :

• **Results of the local elections**

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2025/may/01/local-elections-2025-full-mayoral-and-council-results-for-england>

• **Local Elections explained to kids** 😊

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/articles/ce82krln0wdo>

More on Brexit five years on

Glossary

- “I want my money back”
- “Get Brexit Done”
- “Take back control” – Breaking Point
- £350 million a week
- Brexit – Hard Brexit – Soft Brexit- No-deal Brexit
- The Erasmus programme – The Turing Scheme – Horizon
- The Northern Ireland Protocol - The Windsor Framework – The Backdrop deal
- Global Britain
- The Bruges Speech - The Bloomberg Speech – The Greenwich Speech (“Unleashing Britain’s Potential)
- Leave – Remain – Remainers- Brexiters – Brexiteers – Bremonoans - Bregret

Five Years On

Document 1 – VIDEO UK marks five years since Brexit amid calls to rejoin EU

TRT World, January 31 2025

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmJMa2QOO6s&ab_channel=TRTWorld

Document 2 – ARTE - Brexit : histoire d'une désunion

<https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/RC-016693/brexit-histoire-d-une-desunion/>

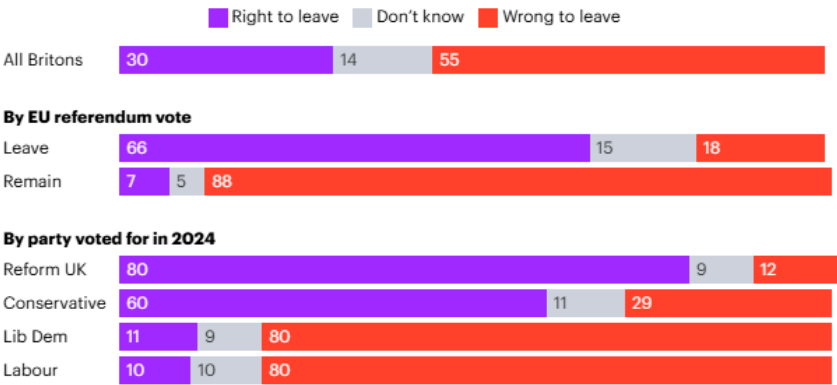
See also <https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/112300-000-A/irlande-du-nord-la-frontiere-de-tous-les-dangers/>

Document 3 – A YouGov Poll

<https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/51484-how-do-britons-feel-about-brexit-five-years-on>

One in six Leave voters now say it was wrong for the UK to vote for Brexit

In hindsight, do you think Britain was right or wrong to vote to leave the European Union? %

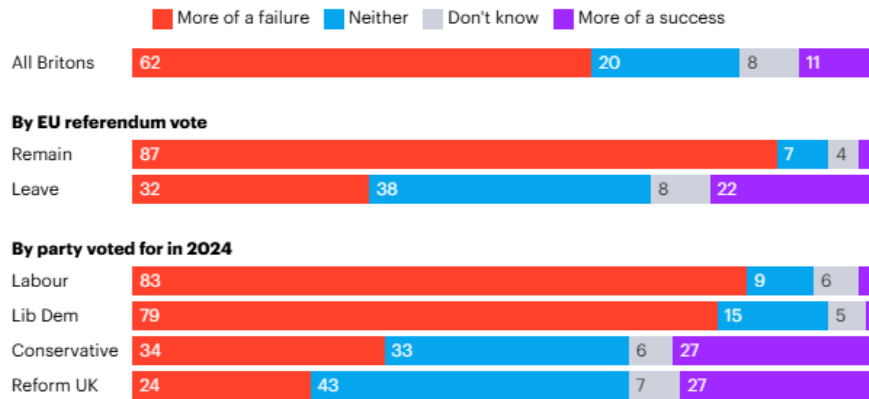


YouGov

20 - 21 January 2025 • [Get the data](#)

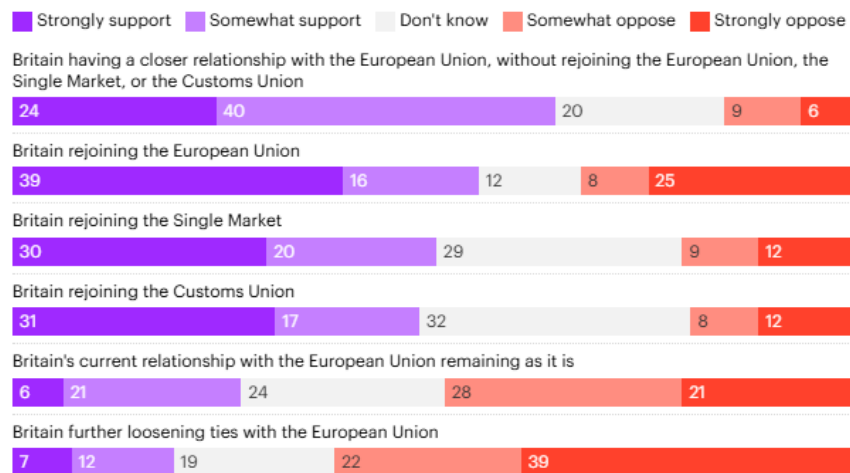
Only 11% of Britons say Brexit has been a success, with more Leavers saying it has gone badly than well

And so far, do you think that Brexit has been more of a success or more of a failure? %



Britons favour a closer relationship with the EU, with 55% of the public in favour of rejoining

And when it comes to Britain's relationship with the European Union, to what extent would you support or oppose each of the following? %



Document 4 - BBC News / Explainer Five key impacts of Brexit five years on

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdrynjz1glpo>

Five years ago, on 31 January 2020, the UK left the European Union.

On that day, Great Britain severed the political ties it had held for 47 years, but stayed inside the EU single market and customs union for a further 11 months to keep trade flowing.

Northern Ireland had a separate arrangement.

Brexit was hugely divisive, both politically and socially, dominating political debate and with arguments about its impacts raging for years.

Five years on from the day Britain formally left the EU, BBC Verify has examined five important ways Brexit has affected Britain.

15 1) Trade

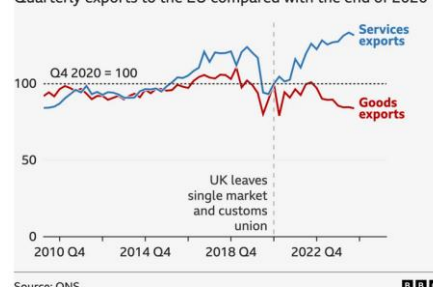
Economists and analysts generally assess the impact of leaving the EU single market and customs union on 1 Jan 2021 on the UK's goods trade as having been negative.

20 This is despite the fact that the UK negotiated a free trade deal with the EU and avoided tariffs - or taxes - being imposed on the import and export of goods.

The negative impact comes from so-called "non-tariff barriers" - time consuming and sometimes complicated new paperwork that businesses have to fill out when importing and exporting to the EU.

Since Brexit UK goods exports are down services exports are up

Quarterly exports to the EU compared with the end of 2020



There is some disagreement about how negative the specific Brexit impact has been.

30 Some recent studies suggest that UK goods exports are 30% lower than they would have been if we had not left the single market and customs union.

Some suggest only a 6% reduction.

We can't be certain because the results depend heavily
35 on the method chosen by researchers for measuring the "counterfactual", i.e what would have happened to UK exports had the country stayed in the EU.

One thing we can be reasonably confident of is that small UK firms appear to be more adversely affected
40 than larger ones.

They have been less able to cope with the new post-Brexit cross-border bureaucracy. That's supported by surveys of small firms.

It's also clear UK services exports - such as advertising
45 and management consulting - have done unexpectedly well since 2021.

But the working assumption of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the government's independent official forecaster, is still that Brexit in the long-term
50 will reduce exports and imports of goods and services by 15% relative to otherwise. It has held this view since 2016, including under the previous Government.

And the OBR's other working assumption is that the fall in trade relative to otherwise will reduce the long-term
55 size of the UK economy by around 4% relative to otherwise, equivalent to roughly £100bn in today's money.

The OBR says it could revise both these assumptions based on new evidence and studies. The estimated
60 negative economic impact could come down if the trade impact judged to be less severe. Yet there is no evidence, so far, to suggest that it will turn into a positive impact.

After Brexit, the UK has been able to strike its own trade deals with other countries.

65 There have been new trade deals with Australia and New Zealand and the government has been pursuing new agreements with the US and India.

But their impact on the economy is judged by the government's own official impact assessments to be
70 **small relative to the negative impact on UK- EU trade.**

Brexit trade deals official impact assessments

Trade agreement	GDP boost/impact £bn/year	% of UK GDP
CPTPP (11-nation)	+2.0	+0.08%
Australia	+2.3	+0.08%
New Zealand	+0.08	+0.03%
Possible US-UK	+1.6 to +3.4	+0.07 to 0.16%
Possible UK-India	+3.3 to +6.2	+0.12 to 0.22%
Brexit impact	-100	-4%

Source: UK government impact assessments

However, some economists argue there could still be
75 potential longer term economic benefits for the UK from not having to follow EU laws and regulations affecting sectors such as Artificial Intelligence.

2) Immigration

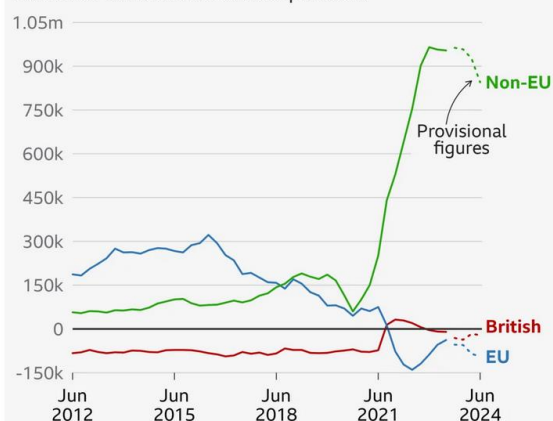
Immigration was a key theme in the 2016 referendum
80 campaign, centred on freedom of movement within the EU, under which UK and EU citizens could freely move to visit, study, work and live.

There has been a big fall in EU immigration and EU net migration (immigration minus emigration) since the
85 referendum and this accelerated after 2020 due to the end of freedom of movement.

But there have been large increases in net migration from the rest of the world since 2020.

Net migration to the UK

12 month UK arrivals minus departures



Note: British includes British nationals and other groups from overseas territories with connections to the UK such as Hong Kong

Source: ONS

BBC

90 A post-Brexit immigration system came into force in January 2021.

Under this system, EU and non-EU citizens both need to get work visas in order to work in the UK (except Irish citizens, who can still live and work in the UK
95 without a visa).

The two main drivers of the increase in non-EU immigration since 2020 are work visas (especially in health and care) and international students and their dependents.

100 UK universities started to recruit more non-EU overseas students as their financial situation deteriorated.

The re-introduction of the right of overseas students to stay and work in Britain after graduation by Boris Johnson's government also made the UK more attractive

105 to international students.

Subsequent Conservative governments reduced the rights of people on work and student visas to bring dependents and those restrictions have been retained by Labour.

110

3) Travel

Freedom of movement ended with Brexit, also affecting tourists and business travellers.

British passport holders can no longer use
115 "EU/EEA/CH" lanes at EU border crossing points.

People can still visit the EU as a tourist for 90 days in any 180 day period without requiring a visa, provided they have at least three months remaining on their passports at the time of their return.

120 EU citizens can stay in the UK for up to six months without needing a visa.

However, a bigger change in terms of travel is on the horizon.

In 2025, the EU is planning to introduce a new electronic Entry Exit System (EES) - an automated IT system for registering travellers from non-EU countries. This will register the person's name, type of the travel document, biometric data (fingerprints and captured facial images) and the date and place of entry and exit.

It will replace the manual stamping of passports. The impact of this is unclear, but some in the travel sector have expressed fears it could potentially add to border queues as people leave the UK.

The EES was due to be introduced in November 2024 but was postponed until 2025, with no new date for implementation yet set.

And six months after the introduction of EES, the EU says it will introduce a new European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS). UK citizens will have to obtain ETIAS clearance for travel to 30 European countries.

ETIAS clearance will cost €7 (£5.90) and be valid for up to three years or until someone's passport expires, whichever comes first. If people get a new passport, they need to get a new ETIAS travel authorisation.

Meanwhile, the UK is introducing its equivalent to ETIAS for EU citizens from 2 April 2025 (though Irish citizens will be exempt). The UK permit - to be called an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) - will cost £16.

4) Laws

Legal sovereignty - the ability of the UK to make its own laws and not have to follow EU ones - was another prominent Brexit referendum campaign promise.

To minimise disruption immediately following Brexit in 2020, the UK incorporated thousands of EU laws into UK law, becoming known as "retained EU law".

According to the latest government count there were 6,901 individual pieces of retained EU law covering things like working time, equal pay, food labelling and environmental standards.

The previous Conservative government initially set a deadline of the end of 2023 to axe these EU laws.

But with so much legislation to consider there was concern there was not enough time to review all the laws properly.

In May 2023 Kemi Badenoch - the Trade Secretary at the time - announced only 600 EU laws would be axed by the end of 2023, with another 500 financial services laws set to disappear later.

Most were relatively obscure regulations and many of them had been superseded or become irrelevant.

All other EU legislation was kept, though ministers reserved powers to change them in future.

And the UK has changed some EU laws. For example, it banned the export of live animals from Great Britain for slaughter and fattening and changed EU laws on gene editing crops.

Brexit has also given the UK more freedom in certain areas of tax law.

EU member states are prohibited from charging VAT on education under an EU directive. Leaving the EU enabled Labour to impose VAT on private school fees.

A zero rate of VAT on tampons and other sanitary products was introduced by the UK government in 2021. This would not have been possible in the EU as the EU VAT Directive at the time mandated a minimum 5% tax on all sanitary products. However, in April 2022

the EU's rules changed so the bloc also now allows a zero rate on sanitary products.

5) Money

The money the UK sent to the EU was a controversial theme in the 2016 referendum, particularly the Leave campaign's claim the UK sent £350m every week to Brussels.

The UK's gross public sector contribution to the EU Budget in 2019-20, the final financial year before Brexit, was £18.3bn, equivalent to around £352m per week, according to the Treasury.

The UK continued paying into the EU Budget during the transition period but since 31 December 2020 it has not made these contributions.

However, those EU Budgets contributions were always partially recycled to the UK via payments to British farmers under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and "structural funding" - development grants to support skills, employment and training in certain economically disadvantaged regions of the nation. These added up to £5bn in 2019-20.

Since the end of the transition period UK governments have replaced the CAP payments directly with taxpayer funds.

Ministers have also replaced the EU structural funding grants, with the previous government rebranding them as "a UK Shared Prosperity" fund.

The UK was also receiving a negotiated "rebate" on its EU Budget contributions of around £4bn a year - money which never actually left the country,

So the net fiscal benefit to the UK from not paying into the EU Budget is closer to to £9bn per year, although this figure is inherently uncertain because we don't know what the UK's contribution to the EU Budget would otherwise have been.

The UK has also still been paying the EU as part of the official Brexit Withdrawal Agreement and its financial settlement. The Treasury says the UK paid a net amount of £14.9bn between 2021 and 2023, and estimated that from 2024 onwards it will have to pay another £6.4bn, although spread over many years.

Future payments under the withdrawal settlement are also uncertain in part because of fluctuating exchange rates.

However, there are other ways the UK's finances remained connected with the EU, separate from the EU Budget and the Withdrawal Agreement.

After Brexit took effect, the UK also initially stopped paying into the Horizon scheme, which funds pan-European scientific research.
However, Britain rejoined Horizon in 2023 and is projected by the EU to pay in around €2.4bn (£2bn) per year on average to the EU budget for its participation, although historically the UK has been a net financial beneficiary from the scheme because of the large share of grants won by UK-based scientists.
The future

There are, of course, a large number of other Brexit impacts which we have not covered here, ranging from territorial fishing rights, to farming, to defence. And with Labour looking for a re-set in EU relations, it's a subject that promises to be a continuing source of debate and analysis for many years to come.
Clarification: This article has been updated to clarify the amount of time EU citizens can spend in the UK, visa free.

Document 5 - Brexit has some benefits, No 10 says on anniversary

BBC, 31 January 2025

The prime minister believes Brexit has had some benefits, Downing Street has said on the fifth anniversary of the UK leaving the European Union. A No 10 spokesman pointed to freedom from EU regulations, helping to make the UK a more competitive financial hub.

However, he said Sir Keir Starmer also wanted "to make Brexit work better for the British people" and strengthen relations with Europe.

The Conservatives accused the government of being "determined to dismantle Brexit and drag us back into the EU's grasp".

But the Liberal Democrats criticised the Brexit deal struck by the Tories as "an utter disaster for our country" and called for close ties with the EU.

The UK officially left the EU at 11:00 GMT - midnight in Brussels - on 31 January 2020, three-and-a-half years after the the 2016 referendum. The government has marked the anniversary with little fanfare, with no official events to celebrate the occasion. Asked why the PM had not said anything specific for the anniversary, Downing Street said the government was "very much looking forward".

A Number 10 spokesman said: "We know we can do better to make Brexit work for the British people, that it's in the UK's national interest to have a more co-operative relationship with the EU. "They're our largest trading partner and our closest neighbour, and will be vital in helping us to tackle ongoing threats to our security, and that's why we're working together with the EU to strengthen our partnership."

Asked what benefits Brexit had brought, he said the UK was "no longer bound by EU procurement rules". "That is a big benefit for us, as well as our freedom to adapt our financial services regulations to make them more suited to the UK market environment, and that's enhanced London's competitiveness as a financial hub," he added.

Since winning power, Sir Keir, who backed remaining in the EU and once supported a second referendum, has promised to "reset" relations with the 27 nation bloc and secure a better deal with it. However, he has stressed the UK will not be rejoining the EU or the single market, which enables goods, services and people to move freely between member states who also apply many common rules and standards. The government has also pledged the UK will not rejoin the customs union - an agreement between EU countries not to charge taxes called tariffs on things coming from outside the bloc.

Over the weekend Sir Keir will host German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, before attending a meeting of EU leaders in Brussels on Monday.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch called Brexit "the greatest vote of confidence in our country", but said there was "still a lot more to do". She said a trade deal with the United States would be a "Brexit opportunity we need to take".

Nigel Farage, one of the key figures behind the Brexit campaign, said it had been a success constitutionally and in terms of foreign policy but admitted many who voted to leave would say "it's been a huge disappointment". The Reform UK leader said huge numbers voted for Brexit to cut immigration but the figures had gone up, which he blamed on the previous Conservative government. He rejected the idea the public had been misled about the benefits of Brexit, and claimed that if he had been in charge immigration would have gone down.

Former chief Brexit negotiator Lord Frost told BBC Radio 4's Broadcasting House Sir Keir wanted to "inch us back into the orbit [of the bloc] by stealth", with rules on food standards and other areas set in Brussels. The Tory peer argued the current Brexit deal was working well and it was not necessary to start "tearing bits of it up again".

Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey used the anniversary to reiterate his call for a UK-EU customs union deal, saying it would "unlock growth, demonstrate British leadership and give us the best possible hand to play against President Trump".

Green MP Ellie Chowns also called for the UK to rejoin the customs union and agree a youth mobility scheme with the bloc, which would make it easier for young people to study and work in the EU.

She added that "full membership of the EU remains the best option for the UK" and said her party would pursue "a 45 policy to re-join as soon as the political will is present".

Document 6 - Why the Brexit debate will never die

Was it ever possible for the promised results to be delivered?

Will Dunn is business editor of the New Statesman. He writes on a range of topics including inflation, housing, the Bank of England, the world of work and the cost of living crisis.

By Will Dunn, **The New Statesman**, 31 January 2025

By the time Brexit sort-of actually happened, five years ago today, most people were already sick of talking about it. Most people had been sick of talking about it in June 2016, when a body of voters equivalent to 27 per cent of the population rewrote our geopolitical and economic status.

This, aside from the fact that most people didn't want Jeremy Corbyn to be prime minister, was the winning insight of the 2019 election: most people also wanted to forget about Brexit. To a certain extent that was achieved by the pandemic that arrived shortly after Brexit Day in 2020. But it's also true that many people will not be able to stop talking about Brexit for a long time, because it has changed our country in some fairly significant ways.

In a decade of talking about Brexit, nothing has been more popular than dodgy claims about economic impact. There was Vote Leave's famous bus-emblazoned bullshit about losing £350m on EU membership, and George Osborne's economically illiterate claim that Brexit would deflate the housing market (it's a pity it didn't). So far the most convincing model for the overall cost to the economy has probably been that of the economist John Springford, who used a "weighted basket" of other countries to model how a counterfactual, remain-voting UK would have performed after 2016. It looks like this:

Springford's model sensibly stops in 2022, where the energy price shock makes further comparison tricky, but it seems fair to say that by late 2021 the gap in actual GDP growth between Brexitland and Remainia was somewhere between £30bn and £40bn per year. This is a long way from being a crippling blow to the UK's £3trn economy. But it's also not great, and it's not a single shock – it's a long-term drag, particularly on goods exports, 41 per cent of which went to the EU in 2023. And it is very much not over, because there are parts of Brexit that are only just being implemented; the

third phase of the post-Brexit border regime has just begun today, and the cost to UK exporters of the new safety declarations has yet to be absorbed.

We can therefore thank Brexit for sharpening our economy to become more dependent on services (of which our exports have increased) and less dependent on goods (of which exports have decreased). So a Leave vote was a vote for a wealthier London full of office workers and against manufacturers and farmers. Remind me, was it sold like that?

A major reason many people voted Leave was to "take back control" of the UK's borders, which was widely understood to mean increased control of immigration. The UK's immigration certainly has changed since Brexit Day. In the year to June 2019, around 347,000 people came to live in the UK from outside the EU; in the year to June 2024, this had risen to more than one million people from outside the EU. More than twice as many people came to the UK from India in year ending June 2024 than came from the EU.

At the same time, people born in the EU represent the largest component of people *leaving* the UK; 44 per cent of long-term emigration is by EU nationals and 16 per cent is by British nationals.

Obviously, if people arrive to do the same jobs then there is no reason an economist should care what country they come from. According to Oxford University's Migration Observatory, however, people who arrived from the EU in 2022 mostly came for work, whereas people from South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and other non-EU regions came mainly for family reasons.

I'm not sure putting off Portuguese plasterers and attracting Indian in-laws was an explicit selling point of the Leave campaign. By June 2023, 72 per cent of Leave voters thought non-EU immigration was too high.

That is why Brexit will never be done. It didn't deliver the results it was supposed to. Economists will continue to point out that this is because it introduced more hurdles for businesses to jump through and took a further £10bn a year of investment (according to some estimates) out of an economy that was already dangerously under-investing. Populists will continue to claim that Westminster has betrayed the will of the people and that Brexit must be "saved", because it is

obviously much easier to pretend this than to come up with a coherent plan for the economy. Brexit is either an ongoing frustration, or the gift that keeps on giving, and

we will probably still be talking about it in another five years.

This piece first appeared in the Morning Call newsletter.

Document 7 - Scotland knows Brexit is holding Britain back. Why won't Labour admit it?

Comment - John Swinney, *The Guardian*, Fri 31 Jan 2025

John Swinney is the SNP leader and the first minister of Scotland

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jan/31/scotland-brexit-britain-labour-eu-europe>

The pantomime season may be over, but when it comes to the government's much-repeated claim to be pursuing economic growth above all else, the cry of "It's behind you" is sounding ever louder. This classic panto joke works when everyone in the audience can see something clearly but the character on stage pretends not to. So it is with Boris Johnson's Brexit deal and Rachel Reeves's attempts to kickstart the economy. Reeves and Keir Starmer are ignoring what is blindingly obvious to everyone else: Brexit is a significant drag on Britain's growth prospects. They know it's true but refuse to acknowledge it and, more importantly, to do anything about it.

There is, however, nothing comical about this situation. The hard Brexit negotiated by Johnson took the UK out of the EU, the single market and the customs union and brought an end to freedom of movement. As a result, people are paying the price through higher food bills, lower growth and therefore lower tax revenue that could and should be spent on the NHS.

Today marks the fifth anniversary of the UK formally leaving this great project – in which countries come together on the basis of agreed values – to share and enhance sovereignty for the common good. For Starmer, however, it seems Nigel Farage is more of an influence on his decision-making than the interests of Scotland, where European freedom of movement in particular enriched our country in so many ways, culturally and economically.

To be clear, I don't see freedom of movement as merely a trade-off to secure business access to the huge single market. They are complementary benefits, helping business, communities and our world-class universities. Enabling people to live, love, work and study across the European Union is one of the EU's great achievements. And, of course, Brexit was driven through despite the fact that Scotland, as well as Northern Ireland, voted decisively to remain in the EU. This itself calls into question the idea of the UK as a voluntary union of equal partners.

The EU is not perfect, but its founding values – human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights – are precious fundamentals in our society that I want to protect and nurture. Those values are, however, being challenged internally and externally. So, as the European commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, made clear in her speech in Davos last week, that is all the more reason for countries that believe in cooperation to continue to work together in a shared endeavour to champion those values.

For many people, although those values will be keenly felt, it is the economic cost that matters most. This week the Scottish government presented yet more evidence of the continuing damage to trade and GDP as a result of hard Brexit. It simply isn't possible to claim that growth is the number one priority while engaging in a Westminster conspiracy of silence over Brexit. Labour appears to be casting around in an ever greater panic for ideas to boost growth, while ignoring all the evidence of the damage caused by the Brexit deal it inherited but refuses to seek to change in any meaningful way.

I believe it is time to fight back against that hard Brexit Westminster consensus. In the short term, the government needs to clarify urgently what it actually wants from its much-vaunted "reset" of European relations. The Scottish government is clear on our priorities: for example, we need an ambitious veterinary agreement to help our food and drink industry; we need closer cooperation on energy to help boost investment and tackle the climate emergency; and we badly need a youth mobility scheme to open up greater educational opportunities for our young people again.

A bolder and necessary step would be to join the single market and the customs union and refuel our trade with Europe. The Scottish government would be a willing partner with the UK government and the EU in pursuit of those goals, which would have a real impact on people's lives. I urge the government therefore to think again about its self-defeating red lines and to seek a genuinely closer relationship with our fellow Europeans.

For Scotland, the real prize, of course, is to become a member state in our own right for the first time. It is striking that EU countries very similar to Scotland enjoy higher productivity and greater equality than the UK. For Ireland, it has been said persuasively that it was the policy flexibility that came with independence, alongside EU membership, that enabled economic take-off.

For the rest of the UK, it seems inevitable that the journey back to being an EU member state will start at some point.

Surely it is better to start that journey now than to continue to put up with such ongoing, needless economic damage.

Nigel Farage, *The Daily Telegraph*, 31 Jan 2025

NIGEL FARAGE Nigel Farage is leader of Reform UK and Member of Parliament for Clacton

It is five years today since Brexit finally came to pass. The UK'S membership of the European Union ended officially at 11pm on January 31 2020 and our status as a free and independent state began.

5 At the time I called this the greatest moment in the modern history of our great nation. Those words came from the heart. For those of us who believe that charting our own course outside the anti-democratic EU is highly desirable, it felt as though we had got our country back.
10 But it hasn't been easy. First, Covid struck. This was followed by the Conservative government recklessly devoting itself to years of bitter infighting instead of ruling in the interests of the people and making sure Brexit worked. For them, this project was simply about
15 political convenience.

And now we have a Labour government run by Remainer-in-chief, Sir Keir Starmer, that is determined to take Britain back into the orbit of the EU via the back door.

20 This is a national tragedy. Because one thing on which every honest person can agree is that the job has been left unfinished. Yes,

We would cut regulation and truly unshackle this great country and its people

25 there have been many great Brexit victories which must be celebrated, particularly in foreign policy terms. But the full benefits of Brexit have not been realised – yet. I believe it's now only a question of time before we can right this wrong.

30 British politics has changed. The days of the old two-party system are over. Now, it is a threehorse race – and Reform UK has the momentum. Our membership has passed that of the Conservatives and is on its way to 200,000. Successive opinion polls show that we are tied
35 or even ahead of Labour. We are the only party looking forward to the next general election. For the good of the country this abysmal socialist administration must be turfed out and replaced by a governing party that believes in maximising Britain's potential, not talking it
40 down.

A Reform UK government would seize the golden opportunities that Brexit allows. Unlike Labour and the Tories, our party genuinely believes in this project.

Just consider how things stand in Northern Ireland
45 today. It is an EU-inspired limboland. Hundreds of pieces of legislation there still conform to EU standards, not to British standards. This is a travesty. A Reform UK

government would tackle this straight away. We would cut regulation and truly unshackle this great country and
50 its people.

And whatever Kemi Badenoch may claim about being a true Brexiteer, I don't believe her.

She has a special place in history when it comes to frustrating Brexit. As Business and Trade Secretary, she
55 spared thousands of EU regulations that were supposed to be thrown on a "Brexit bonfire" from being burned. Her failure to see through the Retained EU Law Bill is proof that the Tories never really believed in Brexit.

Indeed, their unwillingness to light that Brexit
60 conflagration has given Starmer the chance to crawl back to Brussels seeking a closer relationship. By retaining those laws, Britain is perceived by the EU to lack the confidence, or the will, to strike out on its own. Reform UK would have as many bonfires as it takes to
65 get the EU'S red tape out of Britain for good, to send the message to EU chiefs: we are never coming back.

The overwhelming reason that voters backed Brexit was immigration. People were sick and tired of having a porous border. Leaving the EU, they thought, would
70 allow the nation to be far more discerning – to "take back control".

The fact that under the Tories the opposite occurred, and immigration rocketed to unprecedented levels between 2020 and 2024, is a particular slap in the face. That trend
75 is set to continue, with five million more immigrants expected to settle in the UK between now and 2032. This has done more than anything to damage faith in our politics.

Thousands of those who arrive here do so illegally by
80 boat. Under a Reform UK government, all should be turned back to the EU, through which they passed. We are the only party brave enough to leave the European Convention on Human Rights and finally stop the boats. Britain can do so much better, and leaving the EU
85 properly so that it is truly liberated must be the next step.

The UK government must focus fully on reforming areas such as fishing rights and taxes, which still bear the scars of our EU membership. And I am putting Keir Starmer on notice that if there are any more betrayals,
90 you can mark my words that there will be repercussions for Labour at the ballot box.

The time has come to let those of us who started Brexit in 2016 finish the job in 2029. Reform stands ready to do just that.

Document 9 - Brexit wasn't a failure. It liberated us from the declining, dictatorial EU

Starmer might be itching to rejoin the sclerotic bloc, but the argument is even weaker now than it was five years ago

David Frost, The Daily Telegraph, 31 Jan 2025

David George Hamilton Frost, Baron Frost is a former British diplomat, civil servant and politician who served as a [Minister of State at the Cabinet Office](#) between March and December 2021. Frost was [Chief Negotiator of Task Force Europe](#) from January 2020 until his resignation in December 2021. He was granted a Life Peerage in September 2020 Cf. Interview with Frost on Telegraph website / Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJrsDH6O6rs>

So it's five years since we finally left the EU, since that last surge under Boris Johnson when Britain picked over the traps left by the unreconciled Remainers and finally

5 broke through the fence.
Many, at least in the political class, remain unreconciled, and claim the British people are too. Expect, this anniversary week, to be confronted by sheafs of opinion-poll paper, thick as autumnal leaves in
10 Vallombrosa, telling us that we regret our decision and are just desperate to send our bureaucrats back to the Berlaymont and the best part of £20billion a year to the Commission's account at the

I wonder. Plenty of polls in the years running up to the
15 referendum saw public opinion jump and swoop around like planes trying to get down at Heathrow in last week's storms. Yet when we faced an actual decision, we thought hard, and said "no thanks". Actually getting out was the "nearest run thing you ever saw", to quote
20 Wellington, but like Waterloo, it changed everything.

For, despite all the sound and fury of those years, despite all the wailing and gnashing of teeth of the Remain class in their personal Gehenna of the "non-eu" channel at Florence Airport, aren't we actually managing things
25 perfectly well? Doesn't being outside the EU seem kind of ... normal?

Have we all forgotten how it used to be? The endless rowing about the British abatement and our budget contribution? The summit meetings with beleaguered
30 Britain in a minority of one? The effort to knock Giscard d'estaing's scary European Constitution into shape? The fishing conflicts. The beef wars. The endless defeats at the European Court of Justice. The constant struggle to stay out of the euro and then not to get suckered into
35 bailing it out again when it went wrong, as it will again. (Remember, we even lent the Irish £3.5billion in 2010 to help them out – and precious little thanks we got for it from Ireland's inward-looking and graceless political class.)

40 And finally, the disdain and contempt with which David Cameron was treated in his trivial renegotiation for even daring to ask for things that might make all this a bit

better in future. Oh, and the six million (it turned out) EU migrants.

45 Can we really have forgotten all this? Don't we remember how bad it was? Compared to this, even the bickering over Northern Ireland, and one court case over sand eels on Dogger Bank, hardly registers on the Richter scale. Meanwhile we are getting on with
50 governing ourselves.

So, what is this reset actually for? For sure, things haven't gone perfectly in the last few years. But it's our mess. We will, in the end, sort it out ourselves. Our biggest problems all predate Brexit: the economic sugar
55 rush of immigration, a slothful and unreformed public sector, the ossified planning system, the net zero madness, and the growing levels of tax, spend, and regulation.

Now we have the freedom to solve these problems
60 ourselves. We don't have to run to Brussels for permission to change VAT; to establish freeports; to change our farming support system; to reach new trade agreements; to do foreign policy deals with our old allies, like Aukus (between Australia, the United
65 Kingdom, and the United States); to change our rules on gene editing or clinical medical trials; to alter our animal welfare provisions; to cut tariffs on things we don't produce ourselves; to protect the environment in our fishing grounds; to change our rules on driving
70 licences, the size of lorries or the costs of car insurance; and much more. Nor are we sucked into their innovation-killing rules on AI or their free-speech-euthanising Digital Services Act.

Yet Keir Starmer thinks our current relationship with the
75 EU is not normal, is so bad it needs his famous "reset". He's drunk the Remainer Kool-aid – he believes our trade is falling and our economy is collapsing, even though even the IMF has to admit that, since we finally left the EU'S economic zone at the end of 2020, we've
80 grown faster than France, Germany, and indeed the whole eurozone. Not difficult, admittedly, and we should be doing better – but why does he think tying ourselves to them again will improve things?

He seems to think that all is well with the neighbours.
85 Has he looked over the fence recently?

They only stop bashing each other over the head with the garden tools to tell us how wonderful things are and how we should come and join them.

Keir Starmer sympathises. He wants in again, to stop us
90 doing foreign policy without asking Brussels first and to give the EU control over our food-and-drink sector. He's pushing a Bill through parliament that lets the EU set our goods regulations. And – I guarantee it – he's ready to give up full control of our fishing grounds,
95 which is now so tantalisingly close in 2026 after years of quota-sharing.

Starmer and his friends are winning the polling if not the argument. He's spent years suggesting that Britain's First Disobedience, that tasting of the fruit of the
100 forbidden tree of national independence, has brought upon us all our woe. Now it's beginning to pay off. We can't let this happen. Sadly, the Brexit movement has largely shut up shop in the past year or two. But we

mustn't allow the debate to be lost without a fight. So, I
105 and some colleagues have been working to create a new campaigning and information body, to provide honest information about Brexit and the opportunities that national independence can give us. Watch this space – and do get in touch if you think you can help.

110 We don't need, and I don't want, to refight the Brexit wars. There's no need for it. We can govern ourselves perfectly well. We just want to be left to do it.

In my vision of the future, the Brexit argument is over, and Britain has two major parties, both patriotic, both in
115 favour of national democracy, one of the Left, one of the Right, using all their efforts to deliver the best results for the British people. There's a lot to do before we reach this point. But we have begun the journey, and it's a journey forward to the future, not one back to
120 Brussels.

A historically complicated relationship

(Copyright Mme Marquardt a colleague in Janson de Sailly)

"We have our own dream and our own task. We are with Europe, but not of it. We are linked but not combined. We are interested and associated but not absorbed." (Winston Churchill, *Saturday Evening Post*, 15 February 1930)

Britain chose not to become a founding member of the European Union (EU) for several reasons:

- Tradition of "splendid isolation" from Continental affairs in the 19th century.
- Importance of the Commonwealth.
- "Special relationship" with the United States.
- Strong tradition of parliamentary sovereignty.
- Importance of coal for British energy and industry (the EU started as the European Coal and Steel Community, the ECSC, founded in 1951).
- Opposition especially from the left: fear of loss of control over industrial policy, leaving workers worse off.

But in the 1950s and 1960s, attitudes began to change:

- European integration moving forward on Britain's doorstep.
- The colonies gradually gained independence.
- The "special relationship" with the United States was called into question, especially in the context of the Vietnam War (≈1950s-1973).

After Charles de Gaulle's France vetoed British entry several times in the 1960s, Britain finally became a member of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973.

A newly elected Labour government then renegotiated the terms of Britain's membership and held a referendum on 5 June 1975. 67% of Britons voted "yes" or "stay"; 33% of Britons voted "no" or "pull out".

But new objections to the EEC began to emerge in the following decades:

- The Treaty of Maastricht (1992/1993) created a more political union, whereas many Britons wanted Europe to remain an economic project. This also ran counter to their tradition of parliamentary sovereignty. The EU's Single Market (*marché commun*) is based on free movement, especially of people (*liberté de circulation*). For Britain, that translated into fear of immigration from poorer countries. After the Eastern enlargement of the European Union (2004, 2007), Britain under Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair (1997-2007) was one of the few countries that placed no restrictions on Eastern workers coming to the United Kingdom. The result was an increase of immigration in some areas (fear of the "Polish

plumber”).

- Resistance to the adoption of the Euro.
- Symbolic and emotional aspects play a role, e.g. abandoning traditional British units in favour of the international system. Tabloids have been spreading lies about Europe for decades (the EU decides the curvature of bananas, Euro bills make you impotent...).

This also led to a shift in parties’ attitudes towards Europe:

- While socialist Jacques Delors was President of the European Commission (1985- 1995), Labour became more comfortable with European integration.
- The Conservatives became more eurosceptic. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) renegotiated the British rebate, i.e. that Britain had to contribute less to the European budget (“I want my money back”). Conservatives were also deeply divided over the Treaty of Maastricht (1992/1993) during the premiership of John Major (1990-1997). David Cameron (2010-2016) then tried to rejuvenate the party by changing that. In 2006, he told his party that it needed to stop “banging on about Europe”.

Brexit timeline: events leading to the UK’s exit from the European Union

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- In a referendum held on **23 June 2016**, the majority of those who voted chose to leave the European Union.
- On **29 March 2017**, in writing to European Council President Donald Tusk, **the Prime Minister formally triggered Article 50** and began the **two-year countdown to the UK formally leaving the EU** (commonly known as ‘Brexit’). The UK had long been expected to leave the European Union at 11pm on 29 March 2019. However, following a House of Commons vote on 14 March 2019, the Government sought permission from the EU to extend Article 50 and agree a later Brexit date.
- On **20 March 2019** the Prime Minister wrote to European Council President Donald Tusk, **asking to extend Article 50 until 30 June 2019**.
Following a European Council meeting the next day, EU27 leaders agreed to grant an extension.
- On **2 April 2019**, the Prime Minister announced she will seek **a further extension to the Article 50** process and offered to meet the Leader of the Opposition to agree a deal that can win the support of MPs.
At a meeting of the European Council on 10 April 2019, the UK and EU27 agreed to extend Article 50 until 31 October 2019.
- On **19 October 2019**, the Prime Minister’s new Brexit deal was lost on amendment in the Commons. In accordance with the *European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019* – commonly known as the ‘Benn Act’ – the Prime Minister wrote to European Council president Donald Tusk, **to request an extension to the Brexit process**.
On 28 October 2019, EU Ambassadors agreed a further Brexit extension to 31 January 2020.
- On **12 December 2019**, Boris Johnson won a majority in **the UK General Election** and reaffirmed his commitment to ‘get Brexit done’ by 31 January 2020.
- On **23 January 2020**, **the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020** received Royal Assent. This is the legislation that will implement the withdrawal agreement negotiated by the UK and the EU.
- At 11pm on **31 January 2020**, the UK left the EU and entered **a transition period**.
- At 11pm on **31 December 2020**, the transition period ended and **the United Kingdom left the EU single market and customs union**.

You take a look [HERE](#) at the campaign Leaflet the Cameron Government published at the time