

Racial self-interest, Max Weber and the production of racism: the strategy and propaganda of Vote Leave during the Brexit referendum

Martin Shaw

The new wave of right-wing populism has taken a distinctive form in the United Kingdom, producing the country's exit from the European Union, increases in racial abuse, prolonged constitutional conflict and the election of an authoritarian Conservative government under Boris Johnson. Yet high-profile interventions by some UK-based political scientists have attempted to marginalize the significance of racism in these developments and legitimize the social attitudes through which it is mobilized. According to Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, developments like Brexit are reflections of 'how immigration and hyper ethnic change are cultivating strong fears about the possible *destruction* of the national group's historic identity and established ways of life'ⁱ (note the italicized 'destruction', which when referring to national groups generally implies genocide). They claim that the populists who articulate these fears are not generally racist; it is only some who 'veer into' racism and xenophobia.ⁱⁱ Their co-thinker Eric Kaufmann is more explicit: *white* Britishness is at stake because of immigration; a 'defensive' response is justified on *racial* grounds; and the 'white genocide' hypothesis should be given serious consideration.ⁱⁱⁱ The positions of these writers and their few co-thinkers might be thought significant principally because of their co-option by right-wing politicians, press and online warriors. However the euphemistic terminology proposed by Eatwell and Goodwin - 'cultural conservatism' to describe racially-motivated rejection of immigration, 'national populism' to encapsulate right-wing, racist-nationalist politics - has been adopted well beyond these milieux. Kaufmann's white-centric language has been less influential, but his interpretation

of an acknowledged racial element of Brexit and Trump is more ambitious, as he proposes a new concept, the ‘racial self-interest’ of white minorities, which he derives from Max Weber’s classic distinctions between types of rationality. Moreover this is not merely an attempt to conceptually ground the legitimation of anti-immigration ideas attempted by David Goodhart, the British commentator on whom he draws.^{iv} While politically Kaufmann, Eatwell and Goodwin are well to the right of most academic analysts, the tendency to obscure the role of racism, while by no means universal, is widespread in the political science literature. These are not the only scholars who present populists’ support as a largely unmediated response to migration trends and minimize the effects of populists’ own strategic political interventions; as the populism scholar Mattijs Rooduijn notes, there has been a general ‘shift from the supply side of the political spectrum to the demand side’ in populism studies.^v (Even Eatwell and Goodwin acknowledge, when their hyperbole subsides, that ‘much of our focus has been on the key “bottom-up” trends, or ... the “demand side” ... Critics might argue that we have not looked enough at the “supply side”, at how national populists themselves tap into these currents.’^{vi}) Nor are they alone in systematically minimizing the significance of racism in the Brexit referendum; this has been a general tendency as both public and academic commentary have largely confined racism to the small populist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the linked Leave.EU campaign. This has produced a widespread underestimation of the racism of Vote Leave, the officially recognized Brexit campaign which was led mainly by Conservative ministers, and the Leave electorate.

Kaufmann’s proposal is significant, therefore, partly because it aims to consolidate a distinction between anti-immigration ideas and racism which, while clearly articulated by apologists like

Goodhart, more loosely informs a swathe of more analytical academic literature on Brexit and populism which lacks this animus; and because his invocation of Weber appears to lend it sociological gravitas. However the concept is also an attempt to appropriate, albeit in the service of justifying anti-immigrant politics, real tensions in racial ideology which require critical analysis. This article takes both political and intellectual contexts seriously, probing Kaufmann's move as a route into a wider critique of attempts to deracialize Brexit. It makes two major claims. First, while Weber's distinction between types of rationality can indeed be applied to racial attitudes, allowing us to distinguish 'instrumental' from 'absolute' racial ideas, Kaufmann's attempt to use it to separate 'self-interest' from racism rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of Weber as well as of the empirical reality of Brexit. Exploring Weber's methodological proposals as a whole, we see that identifying types of racial attitude can only be a starting point for examining the social relationships which racist attitudes inform and how these are the implicated in larger social and political structures. Second, applying this approach to Brexit, this article argues that before evaluating racial 'demands' from the electorate, we must first examine the systematic 'supply' of anti-immigration sentiment by Vote Leave as well as Leave.EU. A detailed discussion shows how Vote Leave combined apparently instrumental with more absolute racial tropes in its propaganda; the interpenetration of the two types in the evidence on public opinion is examined in the light of this. Examining this campaign in its historical context, the article explores how it simultaneously reproduced pre-existing ideological structures of political racism (traceable to Enoch Powell and beyond), and may have achieved a far more decisive impact than previous political mobilizations of racism by the British right. The article concludes by considering whether Vote Leave's decisive use of a racist strategy in a historic referendum may have contributed, first, to a specific crystallization of Brexit itself, and

secondly, especially through Johnson's victory, to a new general structure of political racism in the UK.

The concept of 'racial self-interest' and Weber's ideas of rationality

At the heart of Kaufmann's view of Brexit are two key ideas. First, racism should be reserved 'for irrational feelings about other racial groups: fear, hatred, disgust, lazy stereotypes or a perception of the other as less intelligent'.^{vii} It is an exceptional element which he says, quoting David Goodhart, can be 'cordoned off' from mainstream anti-immigrant ideas 'into a place where everyone can recognise it and reject it, then place linguistic and intellectual barriers between it and other forms of thought and behaviour that may involve race but are not racist.'^{viii} Second, immigration 'strips away the hazy illusion in the minds of many White Britons that their group is more or less the same thing as Britain. This ethnicizes the majority, notably those who cherish their cultural traditions, myths and memories.'^{ix} However this ethnicization is based on a legitimate defensive attitude, 'racial self-interest', as the majority seeks to maintain their proportion of the population through immigration control. Therefore 'racism is a taboo, whereas ethnic self-interest ... is viewed as a normal. It doesn't pack the same emotive punch and thus is more likely to provoke debate than division.'^x Where Kaufmann advances from Goodhart is in seeking to ground this argument in social theory, by claiming that this self-interest is 'a form of group partiality Max Weber might classify as "substantively rational"'.^{xi} The claim is not properly referenced, but it clearly points to Weber's well-known distinction between *zweckrational* (purpose-rational) action, instrumentally rational as a means to an end, and *wertrational* (value-rational) action, absolutely oriented to a value.^{xii} Applied to racially-oriented

action, this would imply that hostility which is conditional on the numbers or impact of a particular ‘threat’ can be regarded as instrumentally (Kaufmann says ‘substantively’) rational, while hostility to out-group people *tout court* would be an expression of an absolute negative value. This is a reasonable application of Weber’s distinction, since clearly actors could have these different types of racial attitude, but it does not in itself remove instrumental anti-immigrant action from the field of racism. ‘Racial interests’ can only be second-order projections, emphasizing contingent realities and objectives, of values which prioritize a white British or similar collectivity against racial or non-racial others. To block the interpretation of such instrumental attitudes as racist, Kaufmann quotes Goodheart’s view that ‘we need to distinguish ... between the greater comfort people often feel among familiar people and places and active hostility towards outsider ethnic groups’^{xiii}, as though anti-immigrant sentiment represented no more than this comfort. By definition, however, opposition to international immigration can never be merely a reflection of inward-looking group feeling, since its rationale is outward-looking and relational, defining group interests *against* actual or potential immigrants, whether because of their particular identities or simply because they are non-members of the group. Contesting immigration therefore necessarily transforms benign group feeling into hostility towards ‘others’ whose arrival or presence is opposed. Goodheart is correct to see ‘hostility’ as a key element of racism, but since this can be passive as well as active, and indirect as well as direct, it is generally implicated in anti-immigration politics.

However Kaufmann blurs his proposed distinction by proposing a second criterion, according to which the recognition of racism depends on the beliefs about it in the societies one is studying. He proposes that opponents of immigration are non-racist if this is how they see themselves and

a majority of local others see them: ‘a majority of American and British people of all races believe that when the white majority seeks lower immigration to help maintain their population share, this is racially self-interested rather than racist behaviour.’^{xiv} This effectively allows opponents of immigration, providing they have sufficient tolerance in their milieux, to self-define their attitudes as non-racist, even regardless of holding absolute racist attitudes. Yet as he proposes this, Kaufmann shows some awareness of its difficulties: while ‘there is consensus over some definitions of racism - most agree that someone who does not want to live next to a person of a different race is racist’, there are ‘also wide areas of disagreement based on ideology’, particularly ‘around whether it is legitimate for people to seek to bolster the demographic position of their ethnic group. Immigration policy is a key battleground.’^{xv} In acknowledging these divisions, Kaufmann inadvertently demonstrates the limits of using the subjective meaning for the actors to define a concept like ‘racism’, and if he knew his Weber, would have recalled that this difficulty was anticipated. While *Verstehen*, understanding action on the basis of actors’ subjective meanings, is often seen as Weber’s key methodological idea, for him examining this meaning was only a starting-point for explanation. As Thomas Burger argues, Weber believed we needed also to attend to the ‘social relationships’ in which action is implicated, in order to understand ‘structural and collective aspects of historical reality’.^{xvi} Following this approach, social scientists would need to examine not only the consensus among racially-oriented actors, but also the beliefs of those towards whom hostility is directed, the conflictual relationships to which they give rise, and the social structures to which they contribute. Social scientists should produce their own concept, distinct from concepts of the actors, ‘constructed with a view to adequacy on the level of meaning’^{xvii}, internally coherent which actors’ concepts typically are not, and able to account for variation in ‘racist’ phenomena. In this light, racism is an example

what Weber calls the ‘special kind of general concept’ which sociology produces, a terminology for more specific analysis.^{xviii} Evidently, it cannot be defined on the basis of survey evidence in two countries, still less through the essentially political justifications which Kaufmann presents.

Finally, Kaufmann’s argument for rational ‘racial self-interest’ assumes that groups can claim ‘shares’ of populations, although no norms of group share are internationally recognized; it is unclear why this idea is any more rational than the related notion that white blood must be kept ‘pure’.^{xix} Conflating ‘ethnic groups’ with colour-based racial categories, he assigns a group share to the ‘white British’. However this is a residual term derived from official efforts to measure ethnic minorities, and there is little evidence that the majority of white-skinned British people identify their ethnicity in this way; many embrace either a non-racial idea of Britishness and/or prioritize other identities. Brexit was supported disproportionately by voters who identified as more English than British.^{xx}; to the extent that people identify as ‘white’ British, this appears to be a reaction not only to ethnic-minority advances, but also to Europeanism and Scottish nationalism, which have produced a new English nationalism. When challenged, Kaufmann has acknowledged that ‘white British’ is ‘a pan-ethnic designation encompassing ethnic English, Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish Unionist’^{xxi}, confirming that skin-colour rather than ethnic identity defines the group for which a ‘share’ is claimed while recognizing that a large white liberal section rejects this claim as racist.^{xxii} Based on his own data, therefore, it appears that it is a conservative element, not the white population as such, which is racially ‘ethnicized’. The claim for a racial share is not only normatively unfounded, but lacks a stable empirical referent: there is no coherent white British ethnic group.

Types of racist attitude in the strategy and propaganda of Vote Leave

While it is possible in principle to distinguish instrumental from absolute racially-motivated opposition to immigration, and there are conceptual grounds for arguing that both are types of racist attitude, the utility of the distinction requires demonstration in empirical analysis. In this we should investigate not only whether these types of attitude are clearly distinguishable in actors' ideas and actions, but whether they are sufficiently distinct that they can be considered to represent different phenomena (as not only Kaufmann but much political science assumes), or alternatively, related in a way which makes a general concept of racism useful in explaining both. Moreover the crucial methodological consideration of 'supply' should be addressed prior to analysis: since these types of attitude - envisaged by Kaufmann and Goodwin as directly produced by immigration - may also be identified in the ideological production of actors such as parties, campaigns and media who intervene to influence popular attitudes, it is always necessary to analyze this production as well as its consumption or reproduction in 'demand' from the population. In the case of the Brexit referendum, during which political actors actively aimed to mobilize anti-immigration sentiments to a high degree, it would appear to be a methodological requirement to first analyze the extent, modalities and results of political actors' efforts to produce these sentiments, before addressing opinion evidence.

In the light of this approach, this section examines the Leave campaigns' production before turning to voters' endorsement of anti-immigration attitudes in the 2016 Brexit referendum. In the analysis of Brexit, a simple but widely reproduced empirical misrecognition - which ironically involves taking at face value the conflicted self-representations of the two Leave

campaigns - has made a major contribution to the tendency of both commentators and scholars to minimize the significance of racism. Although right-wing British Euroscepticism was originally centred on the Conservative Party, UKIP's mobilization - which pioneered the linkage of immigration and Europe - had been the key to achievement of the referendum, and its leader Nigel Farage sought a prime place in the Leave campaign. Brexit-supporting Conservative ministers were determined to exclude UKIP and instead their Vote Leave, with Labour MP Gisela Stuart as vice-chair, was recognized as the official campaign. Yet Leave.EU waged an aggressive, largely anti-immigration campaign; its advertisements were even 'deliberately sent to supporters of the British National Party and Britain First'^{xxiii}, the far-right group to which the murderer of Jo Cox MP was linked. It was responsible for what most commentary regarded as the emblematic 'racist' moment of the referendum (which K. Durrheim *et al.* argue that Leave.EU may have actively contrived^{xxiv}) in which Farage unveiled his 'Breaking Point' poster using an image of Syrian refugees to represent migration into Britain. Leave.EU attacked Vote Leave for giving immigration insufficient priority, while Vote Leave's chair, Michael Gove, said he 'shuddered' when he saw Farage's poster. This mutual criticism facilitated a consensus that Leave.EU was the principal locus of 'racialized nationalism', as Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever put it.^{xxv} In this perspective, Vote Leave was globalist, Leave.EU racist: 'If the Vote Leave campaign was led by individuals like Boris Johnson who fantasized about re-establishing Britain as a global hegemon (ie Britain as the best in the world), many of the key leaders of Leave.EU articulated a narrative of British nationalism that was more insular and Powellite in tone (ie Britain for the British). At the centre of this perspective were concerns around immigration.'^{xxvi} This limitation of racism to the secondary campaign also limited recognition of the entire Leave movement's responsibility for the widespread post-referendum racist abuse.^{xxvii}

Not all observers accepted this differentiation of the campaigns; Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, forcibly accused Vote Leave leaders of ‘Project Hate’. This section shows that in fact Vote Leave, by far the larger of the campaigns, should be regarded as the most significant and systematic producer of racist anti-immigration sentiment: it strategically weaponized immigration on a massive scale; central elements of its propaganda were obviously racist; and it knowingly enabled hostility and harm towards Europeans, Muslims and others. Tim Shipman, who interviewed leading Leave figures, demonstrates that differences between the campaigns concerned strategy and timing rather than the principle of mobilizing immigration^{xxviii}, underlining that Vote Leave’s strategist, Dominic Cummings (later Johnson’s chief adviser when he became prime minister), understood that it could not win without making immigration central. Cummings’ aim was to establish its respectable credentials by focusing on sovereignty before introducing immigration to widen Leave’s appeal and concretize the key demand to ‘take back control’. In his own reflections, he asks: ‘Would we have won without immigration? No’, adding, ‘It is true that we did not do much on immigration before the 10 week official campaign. That is because ... we did not need to. It was far more important to plant other seeds and recruit support that would have been put off if we had focused early on immigration. Immigration was a baseball bat that just needed picking up at the right time and in the right way.’^{xxix} According to Cummings, its key pitch was: ‘Vote Leave to take back control of immigration policy. If we stay there will be more new countries like Turkey joining and you won’t get a vote. Cameron says he wants to “pave the road” from Turkey to here. That’s dangerous. If we leave we can have democratic control and a system like Australia’s. It’s safer to take back control.’^{xxx}

However Vote Leave's propaganda involved not just a two-stage but also a two-*level* campaign, emphasizing different types of anti-immigration attitude which can be characterized as instrumental and absolute. In public appearances, Vote Leave leaders spoke of managing immigration and even promised to unilaterally maintain EU citizens' residence rights. One level of propaganda featured Johnson - who had previously been identified with a relatively liberal immigration stance - with slogans such as 'I'm pro-immigration, but above all I'm pro controlled immigration. In the EU the system has spun out of control. Join Me, Vote Leave', displayed on literature and Facebook advertisements.^{xxxix} However most material operated on a much cruder level. Vote Leave's official election broadcast, shown as the law required on all terrestrial public television channels and regularly repeated over the month before polling day - and therefore accessible to almost all voters including the elderly - is key evidence. Following lurid graphics representing the immigration threat of Turkey, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro joining the EU and the '£350 million' the UK was alleged to contribute weekly, it climaxed with a split screen video showing (staying in the EU) a surly foreign man elbowing a tearful elderly white woman out of the queue in an Accident and Emergency department, while (leaving the EU) the woman is contentedly treated without having to wait.^{xxxix} This amalgam was reflected in Vote Leave's print leaflets; whistleblower Shahmir Sanni says, 'The campaign was always talking about Immigration. The most proud moment for many of Vote Leave's staff was how well the Turkey leaflet did.'^{xxxix} It was also dominant in the campaign's huge, highly targeted Facebook campaign, under the radar for commentators in 2016 but much of which was later published by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.^{xxxix} Cummings claims to have 'served about *one billion targeted digital adverts*, mostly via Facebook and strongly weighted to the period around postal voting and the last 10 days of the campaign'^{xxxv}; individual users may have

been presented with hundreds each. The DCMS reproduces images, many of them identical to those in the broadcast, with the largest clusters focused on immigration, Turkey and the £350 million.^{xxxvi} The overriding themes were the allegedly massive numbers of potential migrants and the specific threat from Turkey and the Balkan states. Advertisements highlighted lurid claims like: ‘5.23 MILLION MORE IMMIGRANTS ARE MOVING TO THE UK! GOOD NEWS???’^{xxxvii}; the viewer was invited to press a ‘YES’ or ‘NO’ button, so presumably ‘no’ respondents were further targeted, since variants focused on each of the states and repeatedly on Turkey. The poverty of potential immigrants was emphasized by contrasting the countries’ average incomes with the UK’s, and the otherness of people from distant, Muslim-majority and/or little-known countries hardly needed to be laboured. There was obviously a strategic choice to focus mainly on the hypothetical ‘threat’ of people from applicant states rather than EU citizens already in the UK, presumably because the latter could have created a backlash on which the Remain campaign would have capitalized. As Cameron would finally acknowledge in his 2019 autobiography, ‘It didn’t take long to figure out Leave’s obsession. Why focus on a country that wasn’t an EU member? The answer was that it was a Muslim country, which piqued fears about Islamism, mass migration and the transformation of communities. It was blatant. They might as well have said: ‘If you want a Muslim for a neighbour, vote “remain”.’^{xxxviii} Moreover the hostility orchestrated by UKIP and the press would have meant that the material was also understood to relate to East Europeans, and the campaign did venture some obvious racist attacks on them, for example its ‘Reason No. 8’ to leave, ‘To stop convicted criminals from countries like Latvia and Romania coming to the UK’.^{xxxix}

The dual propaganda strategy can be partly interpreted through the classification discussed above: the Johnson-centric advertisements represented a 'rational', instrumental appeal which did not reject immigration but sought 'control', while the 'FIVE MILLION', Turkey-centric advertisements contained both highly alarmist representations of numbers and implicit absolute stereotyping of poor, foreign, largely Muslim masses. However there are three reasons why it would not be convincing to interpret the difference between the strands as a difference between the promotion of 'racial self-interest' and a racist element which could be 'cordoned off'. First, the types were combined in the same campaign, for which Cummings gave a single rationale, and overlapped, for example when the argument for control was combined with alarming ideas of alien invasion. Second, the aim of creating fear of foreigners and conjuring up a threat to the vulnerable English was clearly established by the television broadcast, the most widely-available propaganda and the clearest overall expression of Cummings' key message; there the inflammatory tropes were dominant. Third, the DCMS report shows that there were many fewer advertisements of the first type than the second. Since research into supporters' reception, discourse, 'likes' and reposting is lacking, we cannot establish how the different elements of the propaganda were influential. However this assessment by a media scholar suggests that the absolute, emotive appeal was dominant and effective: 'the main Leave camp message was much more intuitive and straightforward [than Remain's], which is particularly important for social media campaigning. ... their message was also highly emotionally charged, which facilitated the viral spread of Leave ideas. There is evidence to suggest that high arousal emotions such as anger and irritation spread faster than messages focusing on rational or economic arguments, particularly on social media.'^{xl} Assessing Vote Leave's propaganda as a whole, it appears as a barely veiled attempt to arouse - if not hate - fear of others.

Anti-immigration and racist attitudes among Leave voters

Understanding how Leave voters responded to this campaign is complicated further because of the interaction with underlying attitudes. Polls before the referendum showed that most Leave and many Remain supporters already supported enhanced immigration control; support and the salience of the issue increased further during the campaign (but declined significantly afterwards).^{xli} Research suggests that immigration was the second most supported reason for voting Leave; yet since the most supported reason, sovereignty or ‘taking back control’, had been concretized primarily in terms of immigration (other instances such as the UK’s freedom to negotiate its own trade deals, important to Conservative politicians, did not resonate so much with voters), the vote was substantially the vote for migration control which Kaufmann and Goodwin as well as most Leave leaders contend. Many voted wholly or partly for other reasons, and some - not least among the one-third of ethnic-minority voters who supported Leave - will have regarded themselves as anti-racist and could have been repelled by the more lurid propaganda (as Kaufmann shows, both anti-immigrant and Leave supporters were much less likely to regard immigration restriction as racist than supporters of immigration and Remain^{xlii}). However the narrow Leave victory was attributed particularly to the campaign’s success in motivating over two million habitual non-voters to turn out, a key rationale of Cummings’ last-minute social media blitz.

There was no general correlation between local European immigration and Leave voting; cities with the largest European immigrant populations were strongly Remain, while semi-rural and

post-industrial areas with low European immigration recorded Leave majorities. Yet district-and neighbourhood-level analyses produced ‘the striking observation’ that ‘in terms of migrant share growth, only migration from the mainly Eastern European EU accession countries positively correlates with the Leave share’^{xliii}, and evidence ‘that increase in migration level in the local vicinity is associated with a more pro-Brexit stance.’^{xliv} However we cannot assume that these associations represent unmediated effects; in most of the affected localities, UKIP had campaigned around the East European presence over the previous decade, and Leave support closely mapped previous support for UKIP.^{xlv} (Indeed, in a demonstration of the overlaps of Conservative and UKIP as well as Leave support, ‘67.1% of the leave vote consists of voters who have at least dabbled with UKIP’ by voting for them once or more in 2014-16 or expressing a strong likelihood of voting for them.^{xlvi}) The argument that anti-immigration sentiment was heavily mediated is also supported by the decline in the salience of the issue after the referendum. In the following two years, ‘sovereignty’ became more important than ‘immigration’ for Leave supporters. Immigration was now embedded in Brexit rather than mobilized strategically to win it, and the post-referendum battle was over whether or how Brexit would happen.

Evidence on racial prejudice suggests that Leave voters’ opposition to immigration could have reflected absolute as well as instrumental concerns. ‘Increasing awareness and decreasing social tolerance’^{xlviii} had made open expression of racism more difficult, but even in this context, British Social Attitudes analysts argue, ‘when it comes to racial prejudice, we are not seeing the clear trend towards social “liberalization” that is so marked in other areas. ... In the 30 years between 1983 when BSA was founded and 2013 when we last asked this question on BSA, the

proportion of the public who described themselves as either “very” or “a little” racially prejudiced varied between a quarter and over a third of the population. It has never fallen below 25 per cent.’ Self-reporting could underestimate prejudice,^{xlix} so there was clearly a substantial electoral constituency for absolute as well as instrumental racism. In a study of UKIP’s 2009 electoral breakthrough, Rob Ford, Matthew Goodwin and David Cutts had argued that the party had two types of supporters, ‘strategic Eurosceptics’ and ‘polite xenophobes’, but there were close associations between the different racial views: ‘hostility to one out-group tends to correlate with hostility to others; those who dislike immigrants tend to dislike racial minorities and to dislike the “foreigners” from the EU encroaching on British politics.’¹ Similarly, Maria Sobolewska’s and Ford’s study of 2016 voters found distinct but partially overlapping racial attitudes: ‘about half the people who stated at the time of the referendum that immigration undermines British culture also thought that equal opportunities for ethnic minorities went too far. The impact of both attitudes on the decision on how to vote in the EU referendum was significant when both are analyzed together in statistical models of the vote.’^{li} Direct hostility to established minorities’ rights, which might be construed as absolute racism, did not correspond entirely to supposedly instrumental beliefs about the racial effects of immigration, but to a considerable extent they went hand in hand. Indeed much research has shown that was a strong correlation of Leave voting with ‘authoritarian’ views, suggesting widespread absolutism.^{lii} This discussion suggests difficulties for Kaufmann: individuals’ views don’t map clearly on to one type, but combine them; a large section of anti-immigrant voters with wide-ranging concerns about ‘others’ are likely be expressing absolute racist values. Overall, the structure of anti-immigration public opinion, rather having a clear binary character in which two separate phenomena can be mutually ‘cordoned off’, is closer on this evidence to a single ideological

arena, in which numerical concerns responding to instrumental tropes interact with more absolute hostility to specific groups. It would have been surprising, indeed, if Brexit had produced strongly bifurcated attitudes, because the campaign's goal - despite its varied propaganda - was to draw voters with different attitudinal inclinations into a single Leave-voting coalition. Indeed the only place in which instrumentality could be clearly separated from overt racism was in the Leave leaders' clear intention to mobilize racism, regardless of their professed personal opposition to it.

Continuity and transformation in British political racism

In moving, following the methodology discussed above, from the attitudes which the Leave campaigns promoted to the social relationships to which they contributed, the obvious analytical starting point is the consequences for the direct and indirect targets of hostility and others caught in the atmosphere they created. Vote Leave mobilized prejudice against Turks, Albanians, Muslims and Eastern Europeans, while knowingly creating a threat to the rights of all EU nationals living in the UK. Its leaders will not have intended to create abuse and violence - since it could have adversely affected their campaign (as they feared had happened after the murder of Jo Cox MP) - but they clearly priced in this risk, and the campaign notoriously stimulated an increase in hate crime which affected a wide range of ethnic, national and even sexual-orientation 'others'.^{liii} While Vote Leave leaders tactically indicated limits to anti-European hostility by proposing unilateral guarantees for EU citizens' residence rights, in government after the referendum they soon supported the refusal to honour these guarantees, with even Stuart - who chaired a report recommending them^{liv} - joining her fellow-leaders to vote against them in

2017. Prolonged uncertainty about their status aggravated feelings of threat among Europeans in the UK^{lv}, especially of being pitched into the ‘hostile environment’ for migrants from which others were already suffering.^{lvi}

In these consequences, which Kaufmann, Goodwin and Goodhart predictably ignore, we can see a common feedback loop - familiar in Britain since the nineteenth century - in which political elites mobilize popular sentiment which is expressed in abuse, which they then placate by implementing harsher policies against ‘racialized outsiders’.^{lvii} However the pivotal role of racism in Vote Leave’s campaign was unprecedented in a national election, let alone a constitutionally transformative referendum. It is therefore necessary to consider how far it represents a transformation, too, of the structural role of racism in British politics. The case for continuity is easily made. The tension between absolute and instrumental tropes in racist propaganda has been clear at least since the beginnings of a liberalization in racial attitudes. In 1968 Enoch Powell’s notorious ‘rivers of blood’ speech emotively evoked the plight of an elderly white woman living alone in a street surrounded by ‘negroes’ - an image to which Vote Leave’s election broadcast offered homage - but at its heart was a ‘rational’ case predicated on an argument about numbers, in a way which anticipated the 21st century anti-immigration mainstream. He even suggested that clusters of Italians or Germans in British cities would constitute the same sort of ‘alien’ presence as large numbers of blacks.^{lix} Yet Powell was ostracized by the Conservative leadership and ended his career on the margins, as a Unionist MP representing a Northern Ireland constituency (four years earlier, Peter Griffiths, the Conservative candidate for Smethwick in the 1964 General Election whose supporters used the slogan, ‘If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour’, which he refused to repudiate had been similarly

stigmatized^{lx}). The effect of this reception was that mainstream conservative anti-immigration politics attempted to insulate itself against the charge of racism by separating the ‘rational’ (instrumental) from the ‘emotive’ (absolute) case, by focusing on numbers of immigrants rather than specific undesirable groups. The ‘research’ organization Migration Watch UK sums up their pitch: ‘The problem is the current scale of immigration, which is simply unsustainable.’^{lxi} Even Farage tries to claim this ground: ‘I knew that touching the immigration issue was going to be very difficult. ... the only thing that upsets me about it is that, had it been wilfully and overtly a racist message, I might have deserved some of [the criticism]. But it wasn’t. It never was. It never, ever was. It was a logical argument about numbers, society.’^{lxii} Yet Kaufmann’s construction of this interest in numerical reduction as racial is realistic, since its primary function is to mobilize ‘majority’ identity against incomers; and in promoting it, numerical advocacy has never proved enough. Thus in 2014 Farage notoriously said, in terms which echoed the sentiment of the Smethwick Conservatives half a century earlier, ‘Any normal and fair-minded person would have a perfect right to be concerned if a group of Romanian people suddenly moved in next door’, and his attempts to disavow racism were ‘continually hampered by the less than welcoming views held by many UKIP members and voters’.^{lxiii} Likewise in 2018 Johnson, already notorious for having followed Powell in referring to black children as ‘piccanninies’, wrote a newspaper column describing burka-wearers as ‘looking like letter-boxes’, which prompted a wave of attacks on Muslim women. These remarks were described as ‘casual’ but clearly constituted a strategically motivated intervention, on which he doubled down while campaigning to be Conservative leader in 2019.

Despite these continuities, the case for the transformative impact of the Vote Leave campaign on the role of racism in the structure of British politics is strong. The referendum was the culmination of a decade in which Farage's linking of populist Euroscepticism with immigration had two decisive policy results, Cameron's commitments to reducing immigration to the 'tens of thousands' (against a level of over 200,000) and to holding a EU referendum, and more broadly contributed to the Conservatives' 'hostile environment' policy which deepened official racial hostility towards migrants. In the aftermath of the Leave victory, there were three even more fundamental changes. First, the Conservatives became overnight a majority pro-Brexit and even more strongly anti-immigration party, while the weakened Labour opposition also appeared further constrained by the anti-immigrant attitudes reinforced by the Leave campaign. Theresa May, the new Tory prime minister, attacked Remainers as 'citizens of nowhere'; and other formerly pro-Remain ministers vied with each other to prove their anti-European and anti-immigration credentials. Second, Vote Leave's opposition to the EU's principle of freedom of movement effectively dictated May's principal 'red line' in the Brexit negotiations, so pushing the UK away from a 'soft' Brexit towards a 'hard' geo-economic role outside the EU's Single Market and Customs Union as well as the EU itself. Although this 'red line' was sometimes represented as May's personal choice, it is impossible to see any likely Conservative leader having defied the anti-immigration logic of the Leave victory. Third, although racism was mostly embedded rather than manifest in the radicalization of the Brexiters during the bitter conflict after 2016, it resurfaced in Johnson's 2019 campaigns for the Tory leadership and in the General Election, in which the Conservative propaganda returned (if not so exclusively) to Vote Leave's themes of hostility against Europeans and an immigration 'surge' (now presented as a danger of Labour rather than the EU). While Powell had been marginalized, Johnson successfully

mobilized racist themes to become prime minister, installed what many described as a Vote Leave government, won the Conservatives' first large majority in three decades, and began to implement a 'hard' Brexit. Certainly, Johnson was widely regarded as an opportunist or 'shapeshifter', capable of 'liberal' gestures; while maintaining the 'hostile environment' his government - which contained an unprecedented number of ministers of ethnic-minority origin - also marginally recalibrated immigration policy, including dropping the failed 'tens of thousands' target. Yet in early 2020, Johnson's government mounted the first deportation flight to Jamaica since the Windrush scandal, and in the face of criticism, his spokesperson said that 'certain parts of Westminster still haven't learned the lessons of the 2019 election'. Vote Leave had helped produce an authoritarian populist government which, far from hiding racism away, celebrated the symbolism of cruelly separating dozens of Jamaican-born men who had come to the UK as children and had lived in Britain all their lives, from their partners and their own children, as the meaning of its electoral success.

Conclusion

This article has examined the implications of Eric Kaufmann's attempt to provide a conceptual basis for the distinction commonly made by political scientists between anti-immigration attitudes and racism. While recognizing Kaufmann's political motives for reinforcing this, his reference to Weber's types of rationality has been taken taken seriously by formulating a distinction between 'absolute' and 'instrumental' racial attitudes, which in principle should both be regarded as expressing hostility and therefore racist. In a discussion of the 2016 Brexit referendum, it has been shown that this distinction is more useful in differentiating strands of

Vote Leave propaganda than disaggregating voters' attitudes. However absolute and instrumental tropes were combined in the same campaign and research shows strong overlaps of absolute and instrumental attitudes among voters, so that we can conclude that anti-immigrant opinion, rather than having a strong binary structure, is better understood as a single racialized field involving interaction between different ideas both proposed by political actors and held by voters. Following the logic of Weber's methodology, according to which the analysis of subjective orientations should lead to relational and structural analysis, the paper has shown how Vote Leave's anti-immigrant campaign set up hostile relationships between both racists and state policy, on the one hand, and minorities including Europeans and Muslims; how the oscillation between instrumental and absolute tropes was a well established structure in British anti-immigration politics; and how their mobilization in Brexit yet appears to have had unprecedented significance and impact, transforming the structure of political racism through the consolidation of an authoritarian populist government which celebrates its racist credentials. While therefore it would be far too simple to treat Vote Leave's racist effects as short-term, the lasting significance of these developments still remains to be seen. In particular, there has not been space in this paper to explore the significance of the sharp polarization of opinion between Leave and Remain, a cleavage sharper than party alignments, which is widely seen as an expression of broader 'closed' and 'open' orientations.^{lxiv} While Vote Leave appears to have transformed the structures of racism in British politics and society, it may also have transformed the bases of anti-racism. Both the narrow Leave victory and Johnson's election win rested on the effective orchestration of a large conservative anti-immigration minority rather than secure majority opinion, even among those Kaufmann calls the 'white British' let alone in British society as a

whole. New political forces may yet mobilize an ‘open’ majority to reverse the shift which Vote Leave produced.

References

-
- ⁱ Eatwell and Goodwin, *National Populism*, xxi-xxii, emphasis in original.
- ⁱⁱ Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London: Pelican 2018), xii.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Eric Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities* (London: Allen Lane 2018), 482-89; see the critique of A. Dirk Moses, ‘“White Genocide” and the Ethics of Public Analysis’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 21:2, 201-213.
- ^{iv} David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: Hurst 2017).
- ^v Mattijs Roudijnn, ‘State of the field: How to study populism and adjacent topics? A plea for both more and less focus’, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 58, 2019: 364.
- ^{vi} Eatwell and Goodwin, *National Populism*, 271.
- ^{vii} Eric Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism: Ethno-Demographic Interests and the Racism Debate* (London: Policy Exchange 2017), 10.
- ^{viii} David Goodhart, ‘Racism: Less is More’, *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 85, no.3, 2014, 253, quoted by Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism*, 21-22.
- ^{ix} Eric Kaufmann, ‘It’s NOT the economy, stupid: Brexit as a story of personal values’, *LSE Blogs: Politics and Policy*, 7 July 2016., blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/personal-values-brexit-vote (viewed 19 July 2016).
- ^x Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism*, 2.
- ^{xi} Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism*, 10, citing Shadi Hamid.
- ^{xii} Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 15.
- ^{xiii} Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, cited by Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism*, 3.
- ^{xiv} Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism*, 2.
- ^{xv} Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism*, 7.
- ^{xvi} Thomas Burger, *Max Weber’s Theory of Concept Formation: History, Laws and Ideal Types* ((Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), x.
- ^{xvii} Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, edited by Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964),.110.
- ^{xviii} Burger, *Max Weber’s Theory of Concept Formation*, 138.
- ^{xix} Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism* and *Whiteshift*.
- ^{xx} Jan Eichhorn, ‘Identification with Englishness is the best clue to understanding support for Brexit’, *LSE Blogs: British Politics and Policy*, 31 March 2018) from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-black-box-of-brexit-identification-with-englishness-is-the-best-clue>, viewed on 5 April 2018.
- ^{xxi} Eric Kaufmann, tweet to the author, 23 December 2018.
- ^{xxii} Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ *Is Not Racism*, 43.
- ^{xxiii} Tim Shipman, *All Out War: The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain’s Political Class* (London: William Collins, 2016), 418.
- ^{xxiv} K. Durrheim, M. Okuyan, M Twali, E. Garcia-Sanchez, A. Pereira, J. Portice, T. Gur, O. Winer-Blotner, and T. Keil, ‘How racism discourse can mobilise right-wing populism: The construction of identity and alliance in reactions to UKIP’s Brexit “Breaking Point” campaign’, *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 28, 2018, 385-405.
- ^{xxv} Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever, ‘Racism, Crisis, Brexit’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 41, no.10, 2017, 1806.
- ^{xxvi} Virdee and McGeever, ‘Racism, Crisis, Brexit’, 1806.
- ^{xxvii} Virdee and McGeever, ‘Racism, Crisis, Brexit’, 1808.
- ^{xxviii} Shipman, *All Out War*, 36-56.

^{xxix} Dominic Cummings, ‘On the referendum #20: the campaign, physics and data science. Vote Leave’s

-
- ‘Voter Intention Collection System’ (VICS) now available for all’, dominiccummings.com/2016/10/29/on-the-referendum-20-the-campaign-physics-and-data-science-vote-leaves-voter-intention-collection-system-vics-now-available-for-all (viewed on 10 February 2017).
- ^{xxx} Dominic Cummings, ‘On the referendum #21: Branching histories of the 2016 referendum and “the frogs before the storm”’. dominiccummings.wordpress.com/2017/01/09/on-the-referendum-21-branching-histories-of-the-2016-referendum-and-the-frogs-before-the-storm-2 (viewed on 10 February 2017).
- ^{xxxii} Department of Culture, Media and Sport, ‘Vote Leave/50 Million Ads’ (London: DCMS 2018), 54.
- ^{xxxiii} Vote Leave, election video, 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIYq5xMW98I (viewed on 20 July 2016; removed from YouTube in 2018); Brian Wheeler, ‘Ad breakdown: Vote Leave EU referendum broadcast’, *BBC News*, 24 May 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36367247>.
- ^{xxxiiii} Shahmir Sanni, tweet, 6 January 2019.
- ^{xxxiv} Department of Culture, Media and Sport, ‘Vote Leave/50 Million Ads’.
- ^{xxxv} Cummings, ‘On the referendum #20’, his emphasis.
- ^{xxxvi} Department of Culture, Media and Sport, ‘Vote Leave/50 Million Ads’.
- ^{xxxvii} Department of Culture, Media and Sport, ‘Vote Leave/50 Million Ads’, 45.
- ^{xxxviii} Quoted by Michael Savage and Emma Graham-Harrison, “‘Johnson is a liar who only backed Leave to help his career’ - David Cameron”, *The Guardian*, 15 September 2019.
- ^{xxxix} Department of Culture, Media and Sport, ‘Vote Leave/50 Million Ads’, 59.
- ^{xl} Vyacheslav Polonski, ‘Impact of social media on the outcome of the EU referendum, in Daniel Jackson, Einar Thorsen, and Dominic Wring (eds) *EU Referendum Analysis: Media, Voters and the Campaign* (Bournemouth: The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community 2016), 94.
- ^{xli} Rob Ford, How have attitudes to immigration changed since Brexit?, 2018, medium.com/@robfordmancs/how-have-attitudes-to-immigration-changed-since-brexit-e37881f55530 (viewed on 31 December 2018).
- ^{xlii} Kaufmann, ‘*Racial Self-Interest*’ Is Not Racism, 32-43.
- ^{xliiii} Sasha Becker, Thiemo Fetzer and Dennis Novy, ‘Who voted for Brexit? A comprehensive district-level analysis’, *Economic Policy*, vol. 32, no. 92, 2017: 601-50 (621)
- ^{xliiii} Tak Wing Chan, Morag Henderson, Maria Siloni and Jutta Kawalerowitz, *Understanding the Social and Cultural Bases of Brexit* (London: U.C.L. Institute of Education, Department of Quantitative Social Science Working Paper No. 17, 2017), 21.
- ^{xliv} Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath, ‘The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate-Level Analysis of the Result’, *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 87, no. 3, 2016: 323-32
- ^{xlvi} Jonathan Mellon and Geoffrey Evans, ‘Are Leave Voters Mainly UKIP?’, *British Election Study*, 2016. britishelectionstudy.com/bes-impact/are-leave-voters-mainly-ukip-by-jonathan-mellon-and-geoffrey-evans/#.W2gVIC2ZNm9. (Viewed on 15 October 2018.)
- ^{xlvii} UK in a Changing Europe, ‘New polling reveals shift from immigration to sovereignty as the priority. 27 July 2018, ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/New-polling-reveals-shift-from-immigration-to-sovereignty-as-the-priority.pdf (viewed on 30 July 2018).
- ^{xlviii} Nancy Kelley, Omar Khan and Sarah Sharrock, *Racial prejudice in Britain today* (London: NatCen Social Research 2017), 5.
- ^{xlix} Kelley, Khan and Sharrock, *Racial prejudice in Britain today*, 6.
- ^l Robert Ford, Matthew Goodwin and David Cutts, ‘Strategic Eurosceptics and Polite Xenophobes: Support for the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2009 European Parliament Elections’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 51, 2, 211.
- ^{li} Maria Sobolewska and Rob Ford, ‘Brexit and identity politics’, in Anand Menon, ed., *Brexit and Public Opinion* (London: UK in a Changing Europe 2018), 21-23.
- ^{lii} John Curtice, ‘The vote to leave the EU: Litmus test or lightning rod?’, in *British Social Attitudes 34* (London: NatCen Social Research 2017).

-
- ^{liii} Alina Rzepnikowska, 'Racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK before and after Brexit vote', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2018: 61-77.
- ^{liv} British Future, *Report of the Inquiry into securing the status of EEA+ nationals in the UK* (London: British Future 2016).
- ^{lv} Tanja Bueltmann, *Experiences and Impact of the EU Settlement Scheme: Report on the 3million Settled Status Survey* (Newcastle: the3million and Northumbria University, 2019).
- ^{lvi} Colin Yeo, *The hostile environment: what is it and who does it affect?* (London, UK: Free Movement 2017).
- ^{lvii} Satnam Virdee, *Race, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (London: Red Globe, 2014).
- ^{lviii} Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000), 183-85.
- ^{lix} Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain*, 181n.2.
- ^{lx} Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 44.
- ^{lxi} Migration Watch, 'What is the problem?', www.migrationwatchuk.org/what-is-the-problem (viewed on 15 January 2018).
- ^{lxii} Quoted in Jason Cowley, 'Nigel Farage: the arsonist in exile', *New Statesman*, 8 December 2017.
- ^{lxiii} Rob Ford and Matthew Goodwin, *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain* (London: Routledge 2013), 282.
- ^{lxiv} John Curtice, *The Emotional Legacy of Brexit: How Britain Has Become a Country of 'Remainers' and 'Leavers'* (London: The UK in a Changing Europe 2017).