

# Who Voted for Brexit?

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65th Economic Policy Panel Meeting

Malta - April 21, 2017

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# Contributions

- ▶ Comprehensive descriptive analysis of socio-economic characteristics that correlate with Brexit
- ▶ (Exposure to) EU immigration and trade policy did not play a role
- ▶ Education, low income, unemployment did play a role
- ▶ Urban-rural divide is a composition effect
- ▶ Role of turnout
- ▶ UKIP plus 25%

# Weaknesses

- ▶ Nothing about individual voting behavior
- ▶ Conterfactuals are speculative
- ▶ Short-run narratives dismissed
- ▶ Policy implications?

# Food for policy implications

- ▶ Why (many) polsters and most politicians and media got it wrong?
- ▶ If the majority of the population was for Remain, how could have been that they lost?
- ▶ Is there something rotten in the state of direct democracy?

# Why Nate was wrong

- ▶ Because people change their minds at the last minute?
- ▶ Polls do a pretty good job of predicting how people are going to vote but do a poor job of predicting who will vote
  - ▶ If we don't know who is going to turn up at the polls we do not know who is going to win the election
  - ▶ Whether voters expect their party to win or lose changes whether they will bother to vote - so that voter turnout is subject to some "Uncertainty principle"

# The “Neumann uncertainty principle”

- ▶ Nat tells us that Remain is going to win
- ▶ Leave voter Dean skips the vote
- ▶ Remain supporter Jan is no dummy, she realizes since Dean is not going to vote, she needn't bother either: Remain can win without her. But...Dean should anticipate Jan and vote and so bring Brexit to victory.
- ▶ The voter turnout game has no pure strategy equilibrium
- ▶ Only if Nate announces that there is a certain random chance that Brexit will win, will Jan and Dean be content to act as he forecasts
- ▶ The reason why pollsters do not predict the election is because they cannot predict the election

# It's the turnout!

- ▶ Nobody was expecting the 65+
- ▶ Empirical evidence on social norms, peer pressure and monitoring playing a key role in voter participation  
(Gerber, Green and Larimer 2008, Della Vigna et al 2014, Funk 2010, Larreguy et al 2016, Palfrey and Pogoreski 2016)
- ▶ When the cost of enforcement of social norms is low, the larger party is always advantaged. Otherwise, in the spirit of Olson (1965), the smaller party may be advantaged  
(Levine and Mattozzi 2017)
- ▶ Age composition of Brexit supporters, their location and turnout could be consistent with a small party advantage

# What's wrong with DD?

- ▶ Voting on distributional issues with uncertain consequences may lead to failure of Condorcet Jury Theorem  
(Bhattacharya 2013, Ali, Mihm and Siga 2017)
- ▶ Is the set of issues that are decided via a popular referendum exogenous? Not really. Often is what politicians are not able or do not want to decide on
- ▶ Maybe we should not be surprised by “weird” referendum outcomes, and be suspicious when direct democracy is advocated by populist movements



# (Never) Let the data speak for themselves!

“Therefore, throughout the analysis whenever available we use both levels and changes and let the data speak for themselves.”

