

'I Don't Want Another Five Years of "The Only Thing We Talk About Is Brexit"': The Dynamics of EU (De)politicisation in Post-Brexit Britain

ANNE-MARIE HOUE¹  and LOUIS STOCKWELL² 

¹Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, Oxford ²Politics & International Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry

Abstract

The 2016 Brexit referendum was a watershed moment for the politicisation of the European Union (EU) in the United Kingdom. Much has been written about the politicising effects of the referendum, along with the Leave result's subsequent contestation in the media as well as in national and European election cycles. Using longitudinal media discourse analysis and in-depth focus group data, this article examines how everyday narratives of the EU reflect the extent of the (de) politicisation of the EU and its institutions 8 years on from the referendum and 4 years after the United Kingdom's formal departure from the EU. We compare citizens' narratives of the EU to the framing of UK/EU relations in the media, juxtaposing the differentiated narratives and constructions of EU (de)politicisation in post-Brexit Britain. We find that, in 2024, both media and citizen narratives reflect a diminished level of politicisation of both the EU and Brexit issues, with fewer and less emotive media headlines compared to previous years, combined with a sense of resignation, apathy and wanting to 'move on' amongst citizens. Importantly, however, whilst the saturation of EU issues in the media has declined post-2016, this overall trend is punctuated by moments of renewed politicisation in times of crisis, reflecting citizen narratives that the relationship between the EU and the United Kingdom may never be truly 'settled', and therefore remains open to renewed contestation in the future. The implications of this for understanding the dynamics of EU (de)politicisation in a former member state are discussed.

Keywords: Brexit; constructivism/discursive institutionalism; integration theories; political sociology

Introduction

The 2016 Brexit referendum marked a significant moment in UK–European Union (EU) politicisation, prompting extensive debate about its polarising effects and the contestation of the Leave result across media and elections. The referendum and ensuing Leavers–Remainers cleavage had lasting consequences on British identity and political behaviour. However, as much as Brexit was linked to significant polarisation and politicisation at the time of the referendum and in the years that followed, it is unclear to what extent this is still the case. Has EU politicisation subsided 5 years after the United Kingdom's formal departure? This article examines how politicisation has evolved in the years since the United Kingdom's withdrawal. Using a mixed-method approach, we compare media salience and framings of UK–EU relations with citizen narratives 8 years after the referendum. Drawing on this combined focus group and media content analysis, we present two main findings.

First, both datasets suggest the EU issue has become less politicised over time since the referendum. Yet politicisation has not returned to pre-Brexit levels; this holds for both

media and citizen perspectives. Indeed, whilst salience and polarisation have declined, they remain higher than pre-referendum levels. Our focus group findings suggest that the decrease in interest regarding Brexit may stem from feelings of apathy and fatigue rather than a lack of interest. Such sentiments were narrated by many participants, who felt misled by politicians and powerless in the process. Both Leaver and Remainer participants expressed fatigue and a desire to shift attention to more salient concerns. Second, we identify an important caveat to our first finding, which suggests that the politicisation levels of the EU and Brexit, although trending downwards over time, do so in a non-linear fashion that suggests the ongoing possibility of (re)politicisation. During crises such as COVID-19 and the UK–EU ‘vaccine wars’, for example, a notable spike can be observed in media politicisation. This dynamic was also reflected in focus groups, in which participants often struggled to assess Brexit’s consequences and felt the UK–EU relationship would never be ‘normal’.

Our article thus theoretically contributes to the literature on EU (de)politicisation by examining the question of salience, polarisation and resonance (De Wilde, 2011) not in member states or countries like Norway or Switzerland that never joined the EU, but in the particular case of a former member state. We also offer a novel methodological contribution by analysing (de)politicisation trends at both the mass (media) and individual levels in a single study. The remainder of the article goes as follows. First, we review EU politicisation literature, focusing on the United Kingdom and Brexit’s role in shaping these dynamics. Second, we outline our methodology, explaining how we operationalise (de)politicisation through a combination of quantitative measures of media saturation and a qualitative analysis of media headlines and focus group discussions. We then present our media analysis, methods and findings. Third, we present our focus group analysis and provide a more in-depth examination of the four main dynamics towards the EU that we identified in the data. Finally, we conclude with the broader implications of our research and some avenues for further studies.

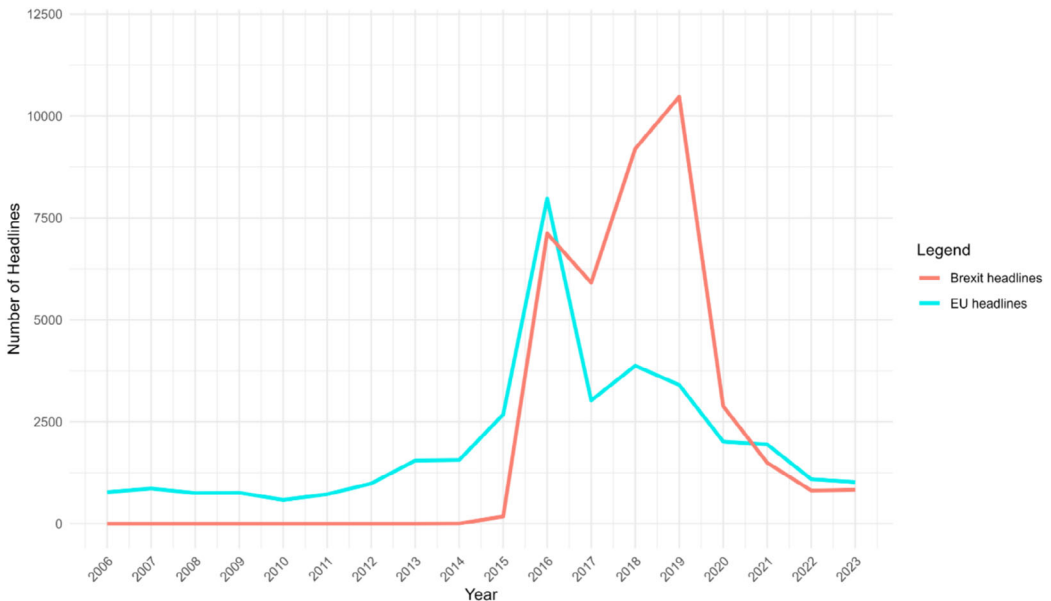
I. EU Politicisation, Referendums and Brexit

For over a decade, the field of European studies has known a ‘definitional consensus’ about the conceptualisation of EU politicisation (Zürn, 2019, p. 977) as ‘an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU’ (De Wilde, 2011, p. 560). In empirical studies of EU politicisation at a mass level, this definition is often translated into the measurement of the extent of politicisation through three dimensions, namely, ‘salience’, ‘polarisation’ and ‘public resonance’, with salience generally presented and the essential criteria (Hutter et al., 2016; Green-Pedersen, 2012). EU politicisation has, however, been studied in many ways, with different methods and approaches answering questions such as how the EU becomes politicised (De Wilde and Zürn, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter et al., 2016), what shape it takes in times of crisis (Börzel and Risse, 2018; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter et al., 2016) and what its implications can be for politics more generally (Hix and Bartolini, 2006; Houde et al., 2023). EU politicisation processes have also been mainly studied within the different domains of the EU and its member states. However, research has shown that the EU can also be politicised in other states. Through its various treaties and years of discussion

over potential accession, Switzerland, for instance, remains strongly connected to the EU, despite never having formally joined it. In their large-scale study on six West European countries, Hutter and Grande (2014) show that the European issue was intensely politicised in the late 1990s in Switzerland but declined sharply in the 2000s after the ‘latest and decisive national referendums on the issue’.

Yet, whilst referendums may mark the decline of politicisation in some contexts, other empirical studies suggest they can equally reignite or intensify political conflict (see Stockwell, 2025). In the context of European integration, some research proposes a ‘referendum hypothesis’, suggesting that the occurrence of referendums is a key factor in the rise of EU politicisation at the national level (Grande and Hutter, 2016; Hutter et al., 2016). One referendum that was presented as ‘the latest and decisive’ one on the EU issue was, of course, the 2016 Brexit referendum. David Cameron described the referendum as a means to ‘settle this European question in British politics’. Countless studies have shown, however, that the Brexit referendum instead intensified the politicisation and polarisation of UK public sentiments towards the EU. New identitarian cleavages of Leavers and Remainers reshaped the United Kingdom’s political landscape and became emotionally significant for individuals (Gellwitzki and Houde, 2022; Hobolt et al., 2021). The Brexit vote, therefore, raises important qualifications for understanding EU politicisation via referendums. Referendums are relatively rare in the United Kingdom and are not institutionalised to the same extent as in countries like Switzerland, Denmark or Ireland. Moreover, prior to the 2016 vote, public engagement with the EU was relatively low, and the issue had limited salience in everyday politics, as reflected below in Figure 1. Existing research has shown that many voters did not view the referendum strictly as a decision

Figure 1: Yearly Coverage of the EU and Brexit in the British Media 2006–2023 (Total Number of Headlines). [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



about the EU, but as a broader vehicle for expressing anger towards elites, concerns about immigration or nostalgia for national sovereignty (Atikcan et al., 2020; Moss et al., 2020). In this respect, the United Kingdom may be understood not as wholly exceptional, but as a case where high politicisation emerged abruptly via a referendum, with intense emotional and symbolic investments that extended well beyond the formal question on the ballot. Our study takes these dynamics into account by examining not only the institutional moment of referendum, but the medium-term evolution of EU (de)politicisation across public discourse and citizen narratives.

Existing scholarship has also suggested that, for some disappointed with the vote outcome, the Brexit issue has remained unresolved (Atikcan et al., 2020; Hobolt et al., 2021; Nadeau et al., 2021; Van Der Eijk and Rose, 2021). Although Brexit has been formally implemented since 2020 and, anecdotally, the volume and intensity of discussions appear to have waned, questions about the extent and manifestations of EU politicisation in the United Kingdom, 8 years on from the referendum, remain seldom addressed in the empirical academic literature. These are the questions that will be explored in the remainder of this article.

II. Method and Data

In this study, we adopt a mixed-method, multi-level approach to the operationalisation and measurement of EU (de)politicisation dynamics in the United Kingdom. By combining quantitative media content analysis and qualitative focus group approaches to assessing (de)politicisation at both the mass media and individual levels, we capture both the ‘macro’ (mass media) and ‘micro’ (individual) manifestations of politicisation (see Zürn, 2016). Thus, we aim to provide a more holistic assessment of (de)politicisation dynamics than would be possible via single method approaches, or those that focus only on a single level of politicisation. We chose to examine (de)politicisation 8 years after the referendum to capture medium-term trends beyond the immediate aftermath. This moment allows us to assess whether patterns have persisted, faded or resurfaced in response to events at critical post-Brexit junctures such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Northern Ireland Protocol dispute and the 2019 and 2024 general elections. Whilst partly pragmatic, this time frame offers analytical value by situating Brexit within a broader context of contestation that spans the referendum, exit negotiations and post-Brexit periods.

In our analysis of politicisation at the mass (macro) level, we focus primarily on the issue salience and polarisation dimensions of politicisation as we agree that the third resonance dimension (in some studies ‘actor expansion’) is largely already taken into account by macro manifestations of salience and polarisation (see Dür et al., 2023; Green-Pedersen, 2012). We first operationalise the salience of Brexit and the EU through a media content analysis (see Antoine et al., 2023; Givens and Luedtke, 2005; Grande and Hutter, 2016). Specifically, we used the Lexis Nexis database to identify the monthly number of headlines in four high-circulation UK media outlets from July 2016 to June 2024 that mentioned either the ‘European Union/EU’ or ‘Brexit’. We plotted the monthly trend of keyword usage longitudinally, using a Y axis indexed to July 2016 in order to more clearly trace relative post-referendum trends. We opted to limit our search to mentions in headlines rather than all in-text mentions in order to capture both the ‘prominence’ and ‘attention’ aspects of issue salience (see Kiouisis, 2004; Lim, 2010).

To select the four publications, we followed the approach of Kriesi et al. (2012) and Hobolt (2009), opting primarily for high-circulation newspapers with a secondary selection criterion of varied editorial positions on Brexit. This was done to diversify the ideological positions of the newspapers on Brexit in order to control for any potential effects of editorial bias. We captured data in the form of both print and website article headlines for two national broadsheet newspapers of record, the *Guardian* (left-leaning) and *The Times* (right-leaning), along with two high-circulation tabloid format newspapers with opposing editorial positions on Brexit in the *Daily Mirror* (left-leaning pro-remain) and *Daily Mail* (right-leaning pro-Brexit). The total number of article headlines in our data that matched either of the keyword searches was 61,356 across these four newspapers. We justify the selection of these legacy media sources on the basis that mainstream print media still enjoys high levels of readership along with greater levels of social prestige and agenda-setting power when compared to other emerging digital media sources (Hobolt, 2009; Schranz and Eisenegger, 2016). As such, we are confident that an in-depth analysis of mainstream media outlets and newspapers of record still enables the most robust assessment of the evolution of issue contestation in the public and political spheres.¹

To operationalise the polarisation dimension at a mass level, we collected data on the percentage of articles each month that were coded as ‘negative articles’ by the Lexis Nexis database. Nexis classifies negative articles as any text that includes a ‘significant use of negative language’ such as ‘mismanagement’, ‘incompetence’, ‘deceptive practice’, ‘misconduct’, ‘negligence’ and ‘theft’. Unfortunately, the Nexis database does not delineate between all other types of non-negative articles, so we were unable to track the extent to which changes in negative coverage equated to more ‘positive’ or ‘neutral’ coverage. Hence, whilst we acknowledge that the coding of negative news via the Nexis algorithm is not a perfectly accurate measure of polarisation, we argue that tracking changes in the percentage of negative coverage over time allows for an approximate measure of this dimension (where a value of 50% would represent a high degree of polarisation), as well as an assessment of how the tone of EU–UK discourse has evolved post-Brexit.

To add greater depth to the measure of polarisation at the mass level, we applied an emotion discourse analysis (see Koschut, 2018) to capture the emotional language contained in the headlines. We analysed the top five pages of the most relevant articles, as determined by the Lexis algorithm, over a monthly period at roughly four-year intervals from 2016 to 2024. Specifically, we were interested in the tone, language and framing of media coverage relating to Brexit and the EU at two critical junctures post-referendum: July 2016, the month following the referendum, and February 2020, the month following the United Kingdom’s formal departure from the EU. We then compared these to media coverage in the month preceding our focus groups, June 2024. The qualitative evolution of the tone and the extent of the emotional heat in media discourse surrounding the EU–UK relationship at these three points is discussed, and we provide some

¹Nevertheless, we acknowledge that a focus on legacy print media also carries the limitation of overlooking increasingly important social and digital medias as arenas for issue contestation and politicisation, particularly for younger demographics. We therefore encourage future complimentary research to explore whether similar, or contradictory, media politicisation dynamics are observed in emerging media landscapes.

representative example headlines that highlight a clear tonal shift in media coverage of the EU and Brexit.

To analyse (de)politicisation at the micro-level, we collected data via a focus group analysis, following a trend of studies using this method to examine how salient and polarised the EU is for citizens, and what individuals think and feel about Europe (Beaudonnet et al., 2022, 2023; Duchesne et al., 2013; Houde, 2024, 2025; Hurrelmann et al., 2015; Van Ingelgom, 2014; White, 2011). Our original focus groups consisted of an average of four to five participants, conducted in the Spring and Summer of 2024 in Oxford, UK. Focus groups are particularly well suited to capturing the everyday, affective and relational dimensions of politicisation that often elude more individualised or quantitative methods, especially with a size chosen to ensure meaningful interaction without overwhelming individual contributions. Our approach aligns with that of Beaudonnet et al. (2022), who also use focus groups to examine citizens' spontaneous discourse on the EU across diverse social contexts.

Oxford was chosen for both pragmatic reasons and because it provides access to a demographically diverse population, including students, pensioners and workers from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that focusing exclusively on one location risks overrepresenting certain regional dynamics, and future studies would benefit from comparative focus groups in Scotland, Northern Ireland and other English regions. Recruitment was conducted via local Facebook groups, community centre bulletins and email lists, aiming to diversify beyond academic or student networks. Still, self-selection bias remains a limitation, and we do not claim representativeness but rather narrative depth. To cover a range of demographics, the groups consisted of undergraduate students, individuals with higher socio-economic status (participants holding a university diploma and a higher status job), individuals with lower socio-economic status (participants without a university diploma and a lower status job) and citizens over 60 years old. When forming the focus groups, we ensured that roughly half of the participants had either voted for Brexit or would vote to remain out of the EU if a new referendum were organised, and the other half either voted Remain in 2016 or would vote to rejoin the EU if given the chance.

Whilst we ensured variation across age and socio-economic status, we did not systematically control for other demographic dimensions, such as gender, race or region. However, we acknowledge that these factors likely shape politicisation dynamics and remain important avenues for future comparative research. In particular, the group of undergraduate students, most of whom were too young to vote in the 2016 referendum, offered a distinct perspective. Their views and narratives were less anchored in the act of voting itself (see Fieldhouse and Prosser, 2018) and more shaped by retrospective interpretation and second-hand memory. This contrast between direct participation and retrospective meaning-making enriches our analysis of how Brexit continues to resonate across generational lines.

The participants, who did not know each other, were asked a range of questions about their understanding and perception of the United Kingdom's situation in Europe following Brexit. The questions asked that were particularly relevant to their attitudes on Brexit were the following: (1) If there were a referendum about rejoining the EU tomorrow, would you vote to rejoin, remain out or do something else? (2) When you think about the European project, who do you think are the winners and the losers? Is the United Kingdom winning or losing by being out of the EU? (3) How do you envision the future

of the EU now that the United Kingdom has left? (4) Thinking back to the Brexit referendum, what do you remember from the campaign? How do you feel these promises/visions of a post-Brexit United Kingdom match up to reality? (5) Do you think that Brexit will ever be 'done'? We also asked a standard Most Important Issue question to gauge the relative importance that participants placed on the EU–UK relationship in comparison to other issues: (6) What are the most important issues that we face right now? The discussions lasted 140 min in total.

We first coded all segments that discussed Brexit or the EU, as this was our primary interest. Whilst our media analysis investigates the evolution of the levels of EU politicisation in the United Kingdom since Brexit, our focus group analysis delves deeper into what shape (de)politicisation dynamics are taking at the individual level and what kind of frames are used to discuss the EU in Britain. After collecting segments that pertained to Brexit and the EU, we then refined our codebook by investigating what kind of attitude(s) transpired from each segment, whether they be negative, positive or neutral. We adopted an interpretive coding approach guided by the three core dimensions of politicisation (salience, polarisation and resonance) to analyse the transcripts. We then identified patterns in how participants talked about the issue, focusing on how meaning was constructed, contested or deferred in group settings. The four dynamics we present in the findings emerged from this process as recurring affective and narrative orientations rather than static attitudinal positions. We refer to them as 'dynamics' to emphasise their temporal and relational nature: they reflect how participants made sense of the EU issue across different moments in the conversation, and often in relation to others in the group. Our aim was not to categorise individual participants but to trace common patterns of (de)politicisation across group discourse. This interpretive approach allows us to examine politicisation not just as a set of attitudes but as a situated process of meaning-making. We then coded more precisely for different kinds of attitudes that would indicate manifestations of issue salience and polarisation at the individual level, such as enthusiasm, interest, apathy, boredom, animosity and so forth, along with their antonyms, and observed some common patterns of which two were particularly prominent. We discuss these in the following findings section.

III. Findings: Media Analysis

EU and Brexit Salience

From the yearly salience chart in Figure 1, it is clear that the 2016 Brexit referendum had a highly politicising effect on issues surrounding the United Kingdom's relationship with the EU. Figure 1 illustrates a fourfold increase in the number of headlines about the EU between 2014 and 2016. Furthermore, these heightened levels of politicisation were sustained for several years post-referendum, with mentions of 'Brexit' not peaking until 3 years later in 2019, likely due to the centrality of the Brexit negotiations and debates around a possible second referendum that defined much of the 2019 UK general election, unlike, for example, the 2017 election (Fieldhouse et al., 2023; Prosser, 2020).

Figure 1 also shows a significant decrease in media attention for both Brexit and the EU post-2019, indicating a reduction in the salience of European issues and the United Kingdom's relationship with the EU from 2020 (the year of the United Kingdom's official exit) onwards. It is important to note, however, that these issues have not gone away

entirely and, collectively, mentions of the EU and Brexit are still significantly higher in the UK media than they were pre-referendum. Whilst some of this may be explained by the fact that ‘Brexit’ only entered as a concept into common vernacular in the build-up to the 2015 election, in which David Cameron promised a referendum, media coverage of the EU nevertheless remains notably higher than in the years 2006–2012.

Figure 2 presents a more detailed monthly breakdown of the evolution of the salience of Brexit and the EU in the British media during the post-Brexit period from July 2016 (used as the baseline for an indexed count) to 2024. Once again, a gradual depoliticisation of the United Kingdom’s relationship with the EU post-Brexit is evident, with the total number of EU or Brexit-related headlines decreasing over the 4-year period from 1024 1 month after the referendum in July 2016 to just 126 in July 2024. Importantly, however, Figure 2 shows that this decrease in issue salience over time was not entirely linear, with certain key events over the period seemingly driving flashpoints of (re)politicisation. The impact of the 2019 general election and surrounding Brexit-related social movements such as the People’s Vote campaign is apparent as a (re)politicising moment, followed by a notable decrease in the salience of Brexit and the EU in the early months of 2020, around the time of the conclusion of Brexit negotiations and the United Kingdom’s formal departure. Interestingly, Figure 2 also highlights key moments of (re)politicisation post-2020, most notably in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic from April 2020 to April 2021. Our qualitative analysis of the framing and language of EU and Brexit headlines, discussed below, along with previous studies, suggests that this is a result of the politicisation of the United Kingdom’s strained relationship with the EU during the so-called ‘Vaccine Wars’ (Gellwitzki and Houde, 2025).

Figure 2: Indexed Monthly Coverage of the EU and Brexit in the British Media Post-Brexit (Base = July 2016). [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

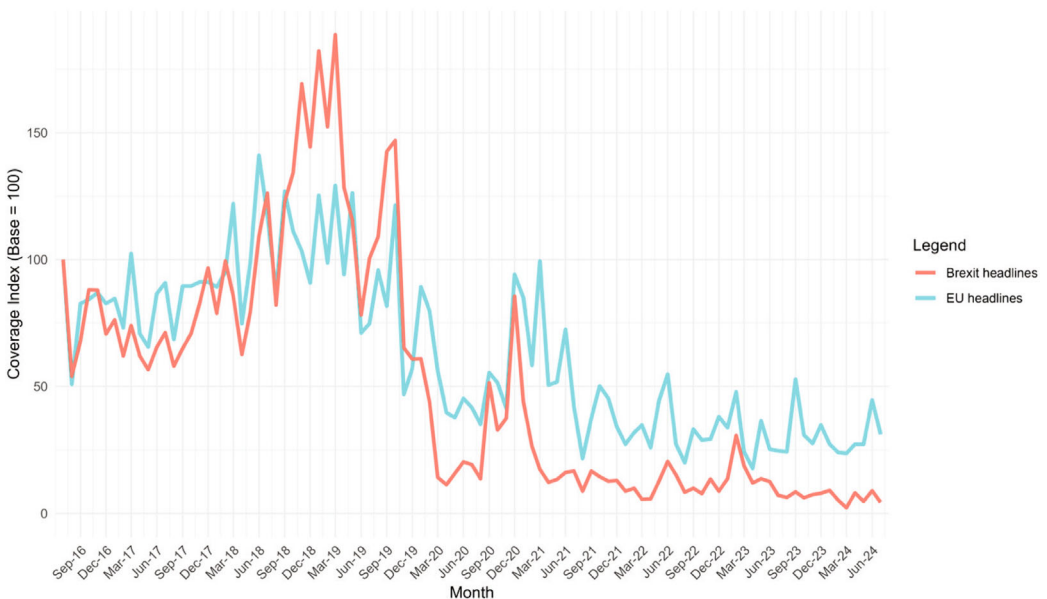
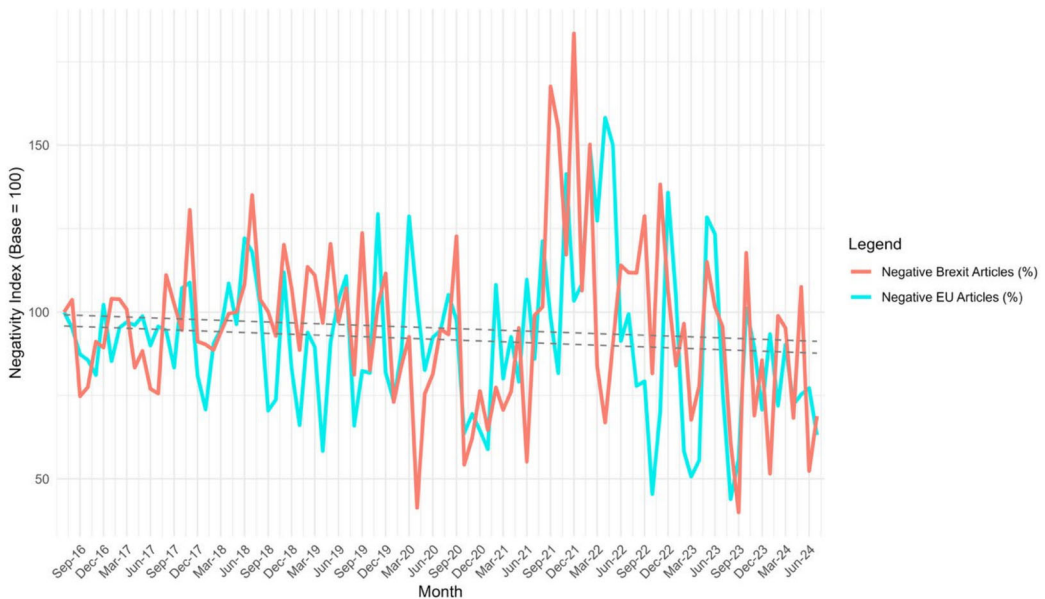


Figure 3: Indexed % of Monthly ‘Negative’ EU and Brexit Headlines in the British Media (Base = July 2016). [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]



Negative News (Polarisation)

Figure 3 captures the polarisation dimension of our analysis by showing the percentage of all articles with EU and Brexit headlines (again indexed using the July 2016 baseline) that were coded as ‘negative news’ by the Lexis database.² Both types of headlines show a slight but significant decrease over time between 2016 and 2024, suggesting a reduction in polarisation and a decreasing emotional ‘heat’ of the discourse surrounding the United Kingdom’s relationship with the EU over the 8-year period post-referendum. Interestingly, however, Figure 3 again suggests that this trend is non-linear and is punctuated by moments of heightened polarisation over EU issues. In particular, there is a notable spike in the percentage of negative news on both the EU and Brexit between 2021 and around the middle of 2022.

A qualitative review of the most relevant articles from each of the four publications during this period suggests that this spike was driven by the heated debate surrounding the (re)negotiation of the Northern Ireland Protocol and the potential invocation of Article 16 during this period. Specifically, there was a significant number of articles in this period that focused on customs friction at the Irish border and the need for renegotiation of the settlement under the Johnson and Truss premierships. These often included highly emotive language such as discussions of potential ‘trade wars’ and numerous references to a ‘Brexit deadlock’. In addition, there were also several articles in this period covering the 2021 Jersey fishing dispute between France and the United Kingdom, as well as articles about food shortages suffered by the United Kingdom that were attributed to Brexit

²See https://supportcenter.lexisnexis.com/app/answers/answer_view/a_id/1099012/.

or, in the more pro-Brexit publications such as the *Daily Mail*, to the EU's punitive attitude towards the United Kingdom. These findings therefore broadly align with our analysis of the saliency trends in Figures 1 and 2 and collectively suggest that, whilst there has been a gradual depoliticisation of the United Kingdom's relationship with the EU in the media over time, this trend is punctuated by moments of (re)politicisation driven by specific flashpoints of renewed conflict between the United Kingdom and EU.

The Evolution of EU and Brexit Headlines 2016–2024

In this section, we present findings from our qualitative analysis of emotion discourse on how the EU was discussed (Koschut, 2018; see also Gellwitzki and Houde, 2024), focusing on the tone and content of EU and Brexit-related headlines from 2016 to 2024. For this analysis, we manually coded the top five pages (most relevant) of Nexis headline results at three critical post-Brexit junctures. We focused on emotionally charged terms and constructions, including, for example, headlines that refer to or evoke affective experiences such as *love, hate, anger, regret, blame, frustration, disappointment, conflict* and *othering*. These were analysed for the periods July 2016, the month following the Brexit referendum, February 2020, the month following the United Kingdom's formal departure from the EU, and June 2024, the month prior to our Oxford focus groups and the campaign period of the United Kingdom's first post-departure general election on 4 July. For each period, we present just a small sample of headlines that exemplify the emotional tone and content of each period's media discourse.

Through this qualitative analysis, we found that the steady decline in both the overall salience and the percentage of negative news surrounding the EU–UK relationship, as highlighted by Figures 1–3, was accompanied by a notable shift in the tone of media coverage. In July 2016, the month immediately following the Brexit referendum, we found that media coverage was characterised in all four publications by a sense of highly emotive uncertainty about the implications of the Brexit referendum, along with the polarisation both within the United Kingdom and between the EU and United Kingdom around the Brexit issue. The *Daily Mirror*, for example, ran a story covering the 30,000 'We Love EU' march against Brexit (Rockett, 2016), whilst both the *Mirror* and the *Daily Mail* ran stories covering the significant rise in the number of hate crimes following the referendum. In the same month, the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* both ran stories on the future of EU citizens' rights in the United Kingdom, with the *Mail* running a headline urging the United Kingdom to 'call time on EU migration rights' (Daily Mail Comment, 2016). Meanwhile, the *Guardian* framed the same issue by focusing on accusations that Theresa May was 'treating EU migrants as pawns in Brexit talks' (Wintour, 2016). Several headlines also centred around the formation of the Brexit negotiation teams of both sides and used language, which hinted at the anticipated animosity between the two parties. In an article covering Michel Barnier's position as leader of the EU negotiation team, for example, the *Daily Mail* ran the headline 'Vain technocrat who made Mervyn King shake with rage to lead EU Brexit team' (Brown and Slack, 2016). Meanwhile, the *Times* ran a story covering Theresa May's claim that she intended to be a 'bloody difficult negotiator' (Waterfield, 2016) on Brexit.

Four years on, our analysis of headlines from February 2020 suggested a slight shift in the media coverage's focus to a greater emphasis on the implications of the newly agreed

trade, customs and travel relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU. Importantly, however, we still observed a significant use of negative and emotive language surrounding Brexit, which centred around the conflict between the two parties, as well as some more trivial stories about the negative impact of the new UK–EU relationship. The *Daily Mail*, for example, ran the headline ‘Boris rips up EU’s Post-Brexit Deal’ (Daily Mail, 2020), whilst commentators in *The Times* lamented that Brexit ‘has ruined my cycling trip’ (Palmer, 2020) and was ‘to blame for a decline in overseas dogs at Crufts’ (Woolcock, 2020). We also observed several headlines which suggested a high degree of polarisation around Brexit at both a mass and elite level, particularly amongst Labour Party politicians in the aftermath of the 2019 general election, in which the party controversially settled on a second referendum policy. The *Daily Mirror*, for example, ran a story on 1 February, the morning after the United Kingdom’s formal departure, discussing how Brexit day was both ‘*CELEBRATED & MOURNED IN UK*’ (Glaze et al., 2020), whilst the *Guardian* ran a story focussing on the split between John McDonnell and Keir Starmer over the Labour Party’s Brexit stance, citing McDonnell who claimed the party was ‘caught in a vice’ (Elliott et al., 2020) over the issue.

Finally, in our analysis of June 2024, we observed a marked shift in the types of stories and tone of articles across all four publications. Specifically, we found that EU headlines largely focussed on technical issues such as new or changed EU regulations or the possibility of relatively minor adjustments to the existing trade relationships under the newly incumbent Labour administration. Much of the emotive and conflict-laden language that characterised stories about the trade relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU between 2016 and 2020 was notably absent. Instead, we found a greater proportion of more technocratic and matter-of-fact headlines. Examples of this include a *Guardian* story covering how EU rules had delayed Apple’s ‘launch of AI-powered features in Europe’ (Montgomery and Agencies, 2024) or *The Times* headline stating that the ‘EU wants fishing access to agree a trade deal with Labour’ (Wright and Waterfield, 2024). We also found that a higher proportion of EU headlines in June 2024 covered what could be considered internal European issues, which, unlike much of the coverage of 2016–2020, were not framed by the United Kingdom’s relationship to such events, such as the *Daily Mail*’s coverage of Macron’s snap election ‘as right surges across Europe’ (Allen, 2024).

Of the articles in this period that included a Brexit headline, we identified a common theme of depoliticisation of the Brexit issue in the United Kingdom and of a desire to ‘move on’, particularly in regard to the issue’s notable absence from political debate in the 2024 general election. The *Guardian*, for example, ran headlines asking, ‘Why is nobody talking about Brexit in the UK election?’ (Sabbagh, 2024), and another citing Keir Starmer’s claim that ‘reopening Brexit debate would bring turmoil’ (Courea, 2024). Importantly, however, these articles contrasted with other headlines that positioned Brexit as an issue that was far from ‘settled’ and which acknowledged that aspects of the UK–EU relationship were clearly still open to political contestation. The *Daily Mail*, for example, ran a headline exclaiming, ‘Surprise! Now he (Starmer) says ALL of Boris’s Brexit deal is “up for negotiation”’ (Churchill, 2024), whilst the *Guardian* ran a story quoting the shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves’ position that ‘Labour would try to improve UK’s post-Brexit trade deal with EU’ (Walker and Rankin, 2024). In the following section, we outline the findings of our focus group analysis and discuss how these trends of the (de)politicisation of the EU–UK relationship translate at the micro level of citizen beliefs and narratives.

IV. Looking Back on Brexit: Focus Group Analysis in the United Kingdom

Analysing our four focus groups, two main dynamics emerge. First, most participants expressed apathy towards Brexit and the EU, not from indifference, but from disappointment (amongst Remainers) or a sense of closure (amongst Brexiteers). Second, both sides felt Brexit would never be fully ‘done’, and that UK–EU relations would remain special. Whether this provoked hope or exasperation depended on participants’ original stance, but in both camps, we observed limited polarisation.

Apathy, Resignation, Disappointment ... but Never Really Out?

Regarding attitudes towards the EU and Brexit in the focus group discussions, four dynamics were consistently prominent, indicating the issue’s emotional politicisation (see Gellwitzki and Houde, 2022). The first dynamic we observed was a kind of apathy or resignation, that is, the sentiment that the United Kingdom can do nothing but accept its fate. Whether it was ultimately good or not, Brexit is now a done deal, and the British people must move on. Participants admitted to feeling ‘definitely more disconnected from Europe, like, since Brexit’ (Nicole, high socio-economic group) and to being tired of hearing about it: ‘[...] there’s so many huge problems in the country, and I don’t want another five years of the only thing we talk about is Brexit’ (Tim, students).

On more than one occasion, the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU was compared to a divorce, implying or explicitly advocating that reversing the decision to part ways would be an unproductive choice. Arguing that the United Kingdom had been part of the EU for several decades prior to Brexit and thus that they had plenty of time to ‘get it right’, pro-Brexit participant Amber from the low socio-economic group pressed that ‘If you were an abusive marriage, you wouldn’t say [...] work within the marriage to improve it, you might just say leave it’. This metaphor was also used by Jude, a fervent Remainer, who also felt that although he would be keen to rejoin the EU, ‘you can’t wake up in the morning and ask for a divorce and then be like, “Oh, I’ve changed my mind”’.

Most participants expressed some fatigue regarding the EU issue and emphasised the need to focus on the future and move forward, rather than dwelling on the past and rebuilding the United Kingdom. This was illustrated by a claim from Emily, a participant from the high socio-economic group, who suggested that ‘if we’re gonna stand alone [...] well people in charge have to think that way in terms of making us strong, protected and have the money and stuff in place to be able to exist independently’. In the 60+ group, participants were clear that, although the EU and the United Kingdom share some common problems, including illegal migration, they chose to focus on the United Kingdom.

Carla: So, their problems are the same as ours, like illegal migrants.

Simon: Absolutely. But I’m not interested in their illegal migrants, I’m interested in our illegal migrants. So, I don’t watch the news, I try not to watch the news at all. And what I do watch would obviously be what I’m fed or what I’m interested in looking at, so the people coming over on the boats to our country are very much of importance to me. I don’t want them here. They should be turned round and shoved back onto France. But the illegal migrants coming over the borders and everything into France and Germany or wherever doesn’t interest me; that’s their problem.

The second dynamic present in the data was the realisation, for many participants, that the concrete consequences of Brexit have been challenging to assess. Indeed, whether the situation was considered better or worse now, participants found it almost impossible to determine whether these changes were due to Brexit or to other circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation or simply coincidence. For example, Emily says that ‘it doesn’t correlate to my history and experience, but I don’t know, [...] I feel like I’ve not felt [...] anything negative from [Brexit] ...’ (Emily, high socio-economic group).

Further in the discussion, Leave-voter Emily and Remain-voter Nicole continued to ponder the legacy of Brexit. Coming from different perspectives, both agreed that things had gotten worse for the United Kingdom, but that pointing to Brexit as the sole culprit would be unfair: ‘it would be nice to have more opportunity I guess to choose where you want to live in the future and things, especially since it’s not going so well. But I don’t know if it’s because of Brexit, it just feels like everything’s gone worse since Brexit but it’s probably not because of that, maybe partially because of it, but yeah’ (Nicole); ‘I think [things] got worse but I couldn’t say if it was because of Brexit, like we said, I think there’s been so much that’s happened over the last few years to alter the economy that it’s hard to pinpoint’ (Emily). To this, Jude added that ‘to be fair, things were going quite poorly around 2008, right?’, emphasising that the current situation could not solely be attributed to Brexit.

In other groups, like the low socio-economic group, participants showed some apathy regarding the consequences of Brexit, arguing that the ‘winners’ of the referendum’s outcome were rich people and people in power, who were ‘already the winners and it doesn’t matter if we stay or leave the EU, they’re going to stay winning’ (Emmanuel). In the same discussion, Amber made the argument that the United Kingdom’s economy was thriving more than other European countries, which she deemed to be a benefit of Brexit, but Emmanuel countered her claim by stating that ‘we were thriving already before Brexit anyway. [...] That statement, although true, credit to the UK for thriving compared to other EU countries, but they were already thriving beforehand, I think’. Thus, Brexit is not credited for the good or the bad of Britain’s current situation and is dismissed as merely one factor amongst many. This was echoed by Tim from the students’ group, who explained that ‘I think I haven’t also seen any benefits from Brexit. I feel like we have exactly the same laws that we had in the EU[...] honestly, I feel like nothing’s changed; things have just got a bit worse’.

Meanwhile, the question of whether the EU is better off or worse off without the United Kingdom was more contested amongst the participants. Some thought the EU is worse off [‘I think the EU is basically now and in the future just going to be worse off now that the UK has left [...] maybe if it was a different country, the EU would have been better off. But I think the EU is gonna be worse off’ (Emmanuel, low socio-economic group)]. Some, meanwhile, thought that the United Kingdom’s departure would not change much for the EU [‘I don’t think it’s particularly damaged. I think it misses our trade relationships, but it has enough of its own [...] I think they were quite indifferent to us leaving...’ (Elijah, low socio-economic group)]. Others thought it was now better off [‘I think they might be better off without us a bit to be honest. Because, like, it just felt like a really unhappy marriage right. It was just like this constant complaining from us about the EU, and then the EU about us. And honestly, maybe they are able to have better conversations now that they are not talking to us’ (Tim, students)].

The third dynamic observable in the discussion was the apathy many participants felt about the EU issue, stemming from a sense that they had been misinformed – and possibly lied to – when it came to choosing the future of the United Kingdom. This led to some disappointment and a fatalistic approach, present in all the different groups and amongst both pro- and anti-Brexit participants, as participants felt they had not received all the information and were victims of their politicians' decisions, without having had an informed say on the matter. Robert, a participant in his seventies who voted for Brexit, thought that 'it was generally sold to us as being a rather straightforward and simple operation, and the hugely complex issues and problems were sort of buried; they were never highlighted'. Similarly, Emily deplored that 'there was lots of basically false PR being put out during Brexit, and [...] so many people I think were voting under false [information]'.

The question of misinformation was salient in all groups but was particularly important for the students, regardless of their stance on Brexit. For instance, Zane, one of the most Brexit enthusiasts of the whole dataset, admitted that

I guess as someone who is kind of pro-Brexit and believes that it's been the right thing I'm still more than happy to say that the Leave campaign, the stuff that was being talked about, didn't really bear much resemblance to what's actually happened and what the strongest arguments were, and that actually Brexit as a whole process has been massively poorly handled, even though I agree with it so I kind of, I'd be happy to turn around and say that regardless of kind of the views of Brexit in of itself, the referendum wasn't necessarily the most representative argument and favour of it.

In a similar way, Marwa, another student, added that 'much of it wasn't actually any information though, it was so much rhetoric, "we've got to deliver Brexit" [...] What are you doing? No one ever actually really said, there were so many blanket claims...'. Tim agreed but suggested that he felt like he 'was lied to quite significantly by both sides' and was 'told if we leave the EU the sky's going to fall down and there's going to be a huge economy crash' but 'it hasn't been a kind of cataclysmic thing that was promised, and there wasn't any kind of one big bang moment that I thought would happen'. Jude, from the high socio-economic group, was disappointed in the result of the vote and deplored that people were misinformed when voting and that 'it was won on lies and I think like straight after one of the big things on Google was "what is the EU?." Like, I don't know, I think it was mis-sold to us. I understand why people voted to leave, I get it, but I do think if you're gonna print a lie on a bus and drive it around town, people are being slightly mis-sold, and you know, maybe that's just politics'. Thus, most participants agreed they had been misled. Some responded with apathy or fatalism, whilst others expressed disappointment and the sense that Brexit could have (and should have) turned out differently if the public had been better informed.

Finally, the fourth dynamic observed in the focus groups hints not at depoliticisation per se but at the shape it takes. The United Kingdom, unlike countries like Norway or Switzerland, which maintain strong connections with the EU whilst keeping a distance and experiencing low levels of politicisation, seems unable to afford complete apathy. Indeed, for participants, even if Brexit happened and it is unlikely to be reversed, the EU issue is not a closed case and might never be. Although participants admitted that Britain's relationship with the EU was likely to change and evolve, they also believe that

‘we’ll always have a relationship with the EU, whether we’re in or not’ (Elijah, low socio-economic group).

Some participants, especially those like Jude, Nicole and Carla, who were most ardently anti-Brexit, held little hope for a new referendum or a reversal of the decision, arguing that ‘the best-case scenario there is that there is a more flexible relationship between the UK and the EU’ (Jude, high socio-economic group). Catherine, a Remainer participant from the older citizens’ group, echoed this sentiment, stating that

You talk about gut instincts, that would be my gut instinct. I think we need to be in partnership with those countries closest to us. I think we need to be able to because we are a very small country, we need to be able to work together with other countries, with other democracies to maintain our democratic ideals across the world. That sounds a bit grand and a bit pompous, but that is how I feel about it.

Finally, our focus groups demonstrated a pervasive feeling across the different demographic groups that, despite the United Kingdom being officially out of the EU, Brexit will never be completely ‘done’ – at least not anytime soon.

Emily: [...] I think, maybe in about 50 years’ time [Brexit will be done]. [...] it will be treated as a stark event that will never stop being spoken about and blamed [Emily laughs]. Nicole: Yeah, I think, I do agree. I think it’s one of those things that will take forever, especially if like the country’s not doing well now so, everything will get blamed on Brexit. And in the future when things aren’t going well, like obviously like some people will tie it back to Brexit and always be like a product of Brexit and things even though it might not be ...

Jude: Didn’t we do it though? In terms of like, [...] now we’re out and all those things have been done.

Emily: Technically on paper it’s done, I guess. Like the process is done, but I think there were still loads left undecided. Wasn’t there? Like in terms of trade deals and the Northern Irish borders and things like that and I think things like that will be ongoing and changing until they all figure out some sort of equilibrium.

Jude: Well, yeah. I suppose it’s a massive thing to do, to disentangle yourself from something you’ve been a part of for 50 years[...] it was so divided about it I think you know; it wasn’t like a clear-cut result. I think there will always be a bit of a, be a big bit of a sticking point between people for a long, long, long time because it wasn’t like a super like clear and happy result so you know [...] And probably will be the scapegoat.

In summary, our focus group study offers an everyday perspective on politicisation by examining how De Wilde’s (2011) three dimensions – salience, polarisation and resonance – manifest in focus group discourse in a manner that differs slightly from their manifestation at the macro-level. In this context, high salience would manifest as repeated, unsolicited references to Brexit, a tendency to steer conversations back to it, or a sense that it remains a pressing political concern. Low salience, by contrast, appears when Brexit is mentioned only in response to prompting, when participants express fatigue or irritation at the topic, or when they struggle to identify its relevance to their current lives. High polarisation would be evident in emotionally charged and heated

exchanges or sharply opposed group positions. Instead, we found low polarisation: participants from different political positions often agreed on their disillusionment or avoided conflict even when they disagreed. Finally, high resonance would involve Brexit shaping how participants interpret other political issues, serving as a lens through which to discuss immigration, governance or democracy. In the discussions, however, low resonance emerged: Brexit was decoupled from wider political meaning and discussed more as a past event that had failed to deliver on its emotional or political promises. These patterns suggest that whilst Brexit once animated strong affective and identity-based alignments, it now appears to have been absorbed into narratives of detachment – a form of everyday depoliticisation that differs from outright disengagement, yet also from sustained politicisation.

Conclusion

Nearly a decade has passed since the United Kingdom's referendum on EU membership. Yet our study suggests that Brexit remains far from 'settled', with UK–EU relations still markedly more salient and contested than before 2016. Still, our analysis shows that this politicisation has different stories behind it both from the media's perspective and the citizens'. In 2024, we find evidence in both arenas that the intense politicisation of 2016–2019 has significantly declined. Our media analysis reveals a sharp decline in Brexit/EU coverage since the United Kingdom's formal departure in 2020, accompanied by a shift from conflict-driven to more technical reporting on the EU.

Examining four focus groups conducted in Oxford in the Summer of 2024, we explain this phenomenon of depoliticisation by a growing sense of disconnection between the EU and the United Kingdom. We observe that this sentiment is especially prominent amongst younger citizens who were too young to participate in the Brexit vote. Participants expressed apathy towards the EU issue, often saying they were tired of hearing about it. Several likened Brexit to a divorce, implying finality. They also felt it was hard to assess Brexit's consequences, citing misinformation during the campaign that clouded public judgement. The depoliticisation of the EU in the United Kingdom thus resembles less a lack of interest and more a sense of fatigue and disappointment about how it was dealt with. Interestingly, this phenomenon was not limited to the 'losers' of the referendum (Nadeau et al., 2021). In fact, Leavers and pro-Brexit participants also expressed tiredness and disappointment regarding Brexit and the management of the EU issue, as well as a willingness to let go of the polarising Leaver versus Remainer cleavage and rather to focus attention on other more salient issues like the cost-of-living and climate crises.

Nevertheless, our findings suggest the EU may never be entirely depoliticised in Britain. Indeed, our media analysis shows politicisation spikes during UK–EU crises, such as the Covid-19 'vaccine war'. In post-Brexit Britain, we, therefore, find something approximating the inverse of what Grande and Kriesi (2016) termed the 'punctuated politicisation' or 'intermittent politicisation' of the EU for its member states. In Britain, the first major country to be a former member state, we observe an overall trend of depoliticisation post-departure, but which is punctuated by moments of renewed politicisation of the EU in times of crisis or tension. Focus group sentiments reinforce this, suggesting that whilst apathy is increasingly widespread, the EU is unlikely to ever be a 'settled' issue and may always be just a crisis away from (re)politicisation. Whilst

these findings may indirectly relate to existing accounts, such as the authority transfer hypothesis or elite-driven models, these dynamics were largely absent from the narratives we analysed. People did not talk about authority or institutional shifts in everyday terms, and these frameworks were not how politicisation was explicitly articulated in either focus group discussions or media coverage. Since our study focused on these two arenas, the role of political elites in shaping or sustaining politicisation lay outside our scope, and we suggest this would be a fruitful avenue for future research. Instead, we observe emotional disengagement and narrative fatigue: depoliticisation driven not by indifference, but by disappointment and the wish to move on.

In sum, whilst the intense contestation of 2016–2020 has clearly diminished over time, the United Kingdom is not back to pre-Brexit levels of EU politicisation at either the macro or micro levels and, based on our findings, might never be. Future research should assess whether this trend of punctuated depoliticisation continues or whether future events may drive a reversion to higher salience, polarisation and resonance. Future research should also explore how politicisation levels vary by policy area, since spikes are often domain-specific. For the time being, though, as illustrated by this quote from one of the focus groups analysed in this article, Brexit and the EU will likely persist in being an important, if intermittently peripheral, issue in UK politics for the foreseeable future.

Simon: ... there can't be any defining end to the Brexit story, there's always going to be lingering on of some areas.

Catherine: And new issues arising, things needing to be changed.

Robert: We can't operate without links to Europe and quite strong ones. We live in a dynamic world where goodness knows what will happen in the future. We'll need to cooperate with Europe in many, many ways.

Moderator: And you think that cooperation will essentially mean discussions of Brexit will continue?

Robert: Maybe discussions on what it means will continue. (60+ group)

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Jessie Oghenegweke for her invaluable support in the co-ordination and organisation of the focus groups that enabled this study, as well as Ben Roshier for his involvement in their design. We are also grateful to the participants in the focus groups and to the Blavatnik School of Government of the University of Oxford for their financial support.

Correspondence:

Anne-Marie Houde, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, Woodstock Road, Oxford, OX2 6GG, UK.
email: anne-marie.houde@bsg.ox.ac.uk

References

Allen, P. (2024) 'Macron Calls Snap Election as Right Surges Across EU; Europe Goes to Polls He's Humbled at Ballot Box by Le Pen Germany's Ruling Socialists Finish Third'. *Mail on*

- Sunday (London)*, June 10. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C75-DK71-DYTY-C2R6-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Antoine, E., Atıkcın, E.Ö. and Chalmers, A.W. (2023) 'Politicisation, Business Lobbying, and the Design of Preferential Trade Agreements'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, pp. 1–30.
- Atıkcın, E.Ö., Nadeau, R. and Bélanger, É. (2020) *Framing Risky Choices: Brexit and the Dynamics of High-Stakes Referendums* (Montreal, Canada: MQUP) Accessed 8th April 2021.
- Beaudonnet, L., Belot, C., Caune, H. *et al.* (2022) 'Studying (De-)Politicization of the EU From a Citizens Point of View: A New Comparative Focus Group Study'. *Politique Européenne*, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp. 100–122.
- Beaudonnet, L., Belot, C., Caune, H. *et al.* (2023) 'Narrating Europe: (Re-)Constructed and Contested Visions of the European Project in Citizens' Discourse'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 161–178.
- Börzel, T.A. and Risse, T. (2018) 'From the Euro to the Schengen Crises: European Integration Theories, Politicization, and Identity Politics'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 83–108.
- Brown, L. and Slack, J. (2016) 'Vain Technocrat Who Made Mervyn King Shake With Rage to Lead EU Brexit Team'. *Daily Mail (London)*, July 28. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5KB7-JFD1-JCBD-D3VJ-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Churchill, D. (2024) 'Surprise! Now He Says All of Boris's Brexit Deal Is 'Up for Negotiation''. *Scottish Daily Mail*, June 14. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C80-NFP1-DYTY-C42C-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Courea, E. (2024) 'Reopening Brexit Debate Would Bring 'Turmoil', Says Keir Starmer'. *The Guardian (London)*, June 22. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6CB5-5RF1-DY4H-K3JC-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Daily Mail Comment. (2016) 'We Must Call Time on EU Migration Rights'. *Daily Mail (London)*, July 27. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5KB3-7281-JCBD-D35T-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Daily Mail. (2020) 'Boris Rips Up EU's Post-Brexit Deal'. *Mail on Sunday (London)*, February 16. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5Y71-WGF1-JCBD-D4D0-00000-00&context=1519360>
- De Wilde, P. (2011) 'No Polity for Old Politics? A Framework for Analyzing the Politicization of European Integration'. *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 33, No. 5, pp. 559–575.
- De Wilde, P. and Zürn, M. (2012) 'Can the Politicization of European Integration Be Reversed?' *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 50, pp. 137–153.
- Duchesne, S., Fraser, E., Haegel, F. *et al.* (2013) *Citizens' Reactions to European Integration Compared: Overlooking Europe* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Dür, A., Hamilton, S. M. and De Bièvre, D. (2023) 'Reacting to the Politicization of Trade Policy'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2258157>
- Elliott, L., Proctor, K. and Partington, R. (2020). 'McDonnell and Starmer Show Split on Labour's Brexit Stance; Shadow Chancellor Says Party Was Caught in a 'Vice' While Starmer Insists Policy Was Right'. *The Guardian (London)*, February 16. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5Y74-NX91-JCJY-G39R-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Fieldhouse, E. and Prosser, C. (2018) 'The Limits of Partisan Loyalty: How the Scottish Independence Referendum Cost Labour'. *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 52, pp. 11–25.
- Fieldhouse, E., Evans, G., Green, J., Mellon, J., Prosser, C. and Bailey, J. (2023) 'Volatility, Realignment, and Electoral Shocks: Brexit and the UK General Election of 2019'. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 4, pp. 537–545. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096523000422>

- Gellwitzki, C. N. L. and Houde, A.-M. (2022) 'Feeling the Heat: Emotions, Politicization, and the European Union'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 5, pp. 1470–1487.
- Gellwitzki, C.N.L. and Houde, A.-M. (2024) 'From *Realpolitik* to *Gefühlspolitik*: Strategically Narrating the European Union at the National Level'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 403–427.
- Gellwitzki, C.N.L. and Houde, A.-M. (2025) 'EU–UK Relations After Brexit: The Emotional (De) politicization of the 'Oxford' COVID-19 Vaccine'. *International Affairs*, Vol. 101, No. 4, iiaf068.
- Givens, T. and Luedtke, A. (2005) 'European Immigration Policies in Comparative Perspective: Issue Salience, Partisanship and Immigrant Rights'. *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1–22.
- Glaze, B., Bartlett, N. and Bloom, D. (2020). 'It's Time to Deliver; Brexit Day: New Era Is Celebrated & Mourned in UK'. *Daily Mirror*, February 1. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=um:contentItem:5Y3W-H2D1-DYTY-C01V-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Grande, E. and Hutter, S. (2016) 'Beyond Authority Transfer: Explaining the Politicisation of Europe'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 23–43.
- Grande, E. and Kriesi, K. (2016) 'Conclusions: The Postfunctionalists Were (Almost) Right'. In Hutter, S., Grande, E., and Kriesi, H. (eds) *Politicising Europe: Integration and Mass Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 279–300.
- Green-Pedersen, C. (2012) 'A Giant Fast Asleep? Party Incentives and the Politicisation of European Integration'. *Political Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 1, pp. 115–130.
- Hix, S. and Bartolini, S. (2006) 'Politics: The Right or the Wrong Sort of Medicine for the EU?'. *Notre Europe*.
- Hobolt, S.B. (2009) *Europe in Question: Referendums on European Integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hobolt, S.B., Leeper, T.J. and Tilley, J. (2021) 'Divided by the Vote: Affective Polarization in the Wake of the Brexit Referendum'. *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, No. 4, pp. 1476–1493.
- Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2009) 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus'. *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 1–23.
- Houde, A.-M. (2024) 'Navigating Anxiety: International Politics, Identity Narratives, and Everyday Defense Mechanisms'. *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 18, No. 1, olad028.
- Houde, A.-M. (2025) 'Emotions, International Relations, and the Everyday: Individuals' Emotional Attachments to International Organisations'. *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 504–522.
- Houde, A.-M., Laloux, T., Le Corre Juratic, M. et al. (2023) *The Politicization of the European Union: From Processes to Consequences* (Bruxelles, Belgique: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles).
- Hurrelmann, A., Gora, A. and Wagner, A. (2015) 'The Politicization of European Integration: More Than an Elite Affair?' *Political Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1, pp. 43–59.
- Hutter, S. and Grande, E. (2014) 'Politicizing Europe in the National Electoral Arena: A Comparative Analysis of Five West European Countries, 1970–2010: Politicizing Europe in the National Electoral Arena'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 5, pp. 1002–1018.
- Hutter, S., Grande, E. and Kriesi, H. (2016) *Politicising Europe: Integration and Mass Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) <http://ebooks.cambridge.org/ref/id/CBO9781316422991>

- Kiousis, S. (2004) 'Explicating Media Salience: A Factor Analysis of New York Times Issue Coverage During the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election'. *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 71–87.
- Koschut, S. (2018) 'Speaking From the Heart: Emotion Discourse Analysis in International Relations'. In *Researching Emotions in International Relations* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 277–301.
- Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Dolezal, M. et al. (2012) *Political Conflict in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Lim, J. (2010) 'Convergence of Attention and Prominence Dimensions of Salience Among Major Online Newspapers'. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 293–313.
- Montgomery, B. and Agencies. (2024) 'Apple Delays Launch of AI-Powered Features in Europe, Blaming EU Rules'. *The Guardian (London)*, June 21. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6CB6-GK71-DY4H-K0TG-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Moss, J., Robinson, E. and Watts, J. (2020) 'Brexit and the Everyday Politics of Emotion: Methodological Lessons From History'. *Political Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 4, pp. 837–856.
- Nadeau, R., Bélanger, É. and Atikcan, E.Ö. (2021) 'Emotions, Cognitions and Moderation: Understanding Losers' Consent in the 2016 Brexit Referendum'. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 77–96.
- Palmer, K. (2020) 'Brexit Has Ruined My Cycling Trip'. *The Times (London)*, February 1. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5Y3W-5P01-JCBW-N2KK-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Prosser, C. (2020) 'The End of the EU Affair: The UK General Election of 2019'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 450–461.
- Rockett, K. (2016) '30,000 Say 'We Love EU' at March Against Brexit'. *Daily Mirror*, July 3. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5K50-9071-JBVM-Y13N-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Sabbagh, D. (2024) 'Why Is Nobody Talking About Brexit in the UK Election?'. *The Guardian (London)*, June 12. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C7K-HJ81-DY4H-K3VG-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Schranz, M. and Eisenegger, M. (2016) 'Organizational Crisis and the News Media'. In *The Handbook of International Crisis Communication Research* (Chichester, UK Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell), pp. 165–174.
- Stockwell, L. (2025) 'Contesting Regional Sovereignty From Below: The Unsettling Effect of Unilateral Independence and Autonomy Referendums'. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, pp. 1–24.
- Van Der Eijk, C. and Rose, J. (2021) 'Winner–Loser Effects in Contentious Constitutional Referenda: Perceptions of Procedural Fairness and the Brexit Referendum'. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 104–120.
- Van Ingelgom, V. (2014) *Integrating Indifference: A Comparative, Qualitative and Quantitative Approach to the Legitimacy of European Integration* (Colchester, UK: ECPR Press, University of Essex).
- Walker, P. and Rankin, J. (2024) 'Labour Would Try to Improve UK's Post-Brexit Trade Deal With EU, Says Reeves'. *The Guardian (London)*, June 17. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C8N-CFR1-DY4H-K1WG-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Waterfield, B. (2016). 'EU Welcomes 'Difficult' Negotiator'. *The Times (London)*, July 12. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5K6V-W9D1-DY9P-N2N6-00000-00&context=1519360>

- White, J. (2011) *Political Allegiance After European Integration* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Springer).
- Wintour, P. (2016) 'Theresa May Accused of Treating EU Migrants as a Pawn in Brexit Talks; Home Secretary and Tory Leadership Frontrunner Pressured to Assure EU Citizens in UK Won't Be Used as Bargaining Chip'. *The Guardian*, July 3. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5K51-F5B1-JCJY-G130-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Woolcock, N. (2020) 'Brexit Blamed for Decline in Overseas Dogs at Crufts'. *The Times (London)*, February 10. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5Y5S-WTW1-DYTY-C3DK-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Wright, O. and Waterfield, B. (2024) 'EU Wants Fishing Access to Agree Trade Deal With Labour'. *The Times (London)*, June 18. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C8V-CHX1-DYTY-C3T7-00000-00&context=1519360>
- Zürn, M. (2016) 'Opening Up Europe: Next Steps in Politicisation Research'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 164–182.
- Zürn, M. (2019) 'Politicization Compared: At National, European, and Global Levels'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 7, pp. 977–995.