

gin-and-Dubonnet, are privately aghast at the prospect of a woman of color joining their ranks. But Markle's arrival has not created the sort of crisis that arose in 1936, after Edward VIII fell in love with the twice-divorced Wallis Simpson – 'a pretty kettle of fish', the Queen Mother said...⁷⁶

IMMIGRANTS ARE THINNER AND OFTEN HAVE UNUSUAL NAMES

Shortly after the Brexit vote, a senior lecturer who specialised in competition economics at the Norwich Business School, Peter Ormosi, wrote a somewhat tongue-in-cheek article about the correlation between obesity and voting Leave.⁷⁷ Unsurprisingly, newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* were not amused. Peter published a table of figures (see Table 6.1) showing that while just 13 per cent of people in Oxford were obese and only 30 per cent there voted Leave, more than twice as many were fat in towns such as Great Yarmouth, where more than twice as many voted Leave.

TABLE 6.1: DISTRICTS IN ENGLAND AT THE BREXIT EXTREMES AND RATES OF OBESITY, 2016

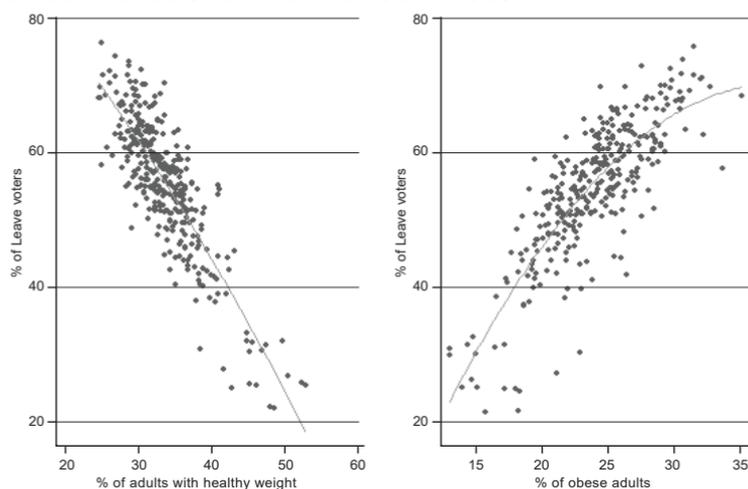
Top 10 districts with largest % of Leave votes			Top 10 districts with smallest % of Leave votes		
District	% Leave	% Obese	District	% Leave	% Obese
Boston	76	31	Lambeth	21	16
South Holland	74	31	Hackney	22	18
Castle Point	73	28	Haringey	24	18
Thurrock	72	30	City of London	25	18
Great Yarmouth	72	31	Islington	25	17
Fenland	71	31	Wandsworth	25	15
Mansfield	71	32	Camden	25	14
Bolsover	71	32	Cambridge	26	15
East Lindsey	71	30	Southwark	27	21
North East Lincs	70	29	Oxford	30	13

Local authority areas, the highest and lowest percentage voting Leave and adult obesity rate estimates.⁷⁸

Could it be that disgruntled fatties voted out? Or might something more interesting be at play? Age and class are part of the story of the geography of body size in Britain, but there is more to it than that.

The graphs below (Figure 6.6) show the correlation between obesity and voting Leave. Where the majority of people were of healthy weight, fewer than one in five voted out.

FIGURE 6.6: REFERENDUM OUTCOME AND BODY WEIGHT, ENGLAND LOCAL AREA PERCENTAGES



Originally titled "The weight of Brexit: Obese adults leading the way out of Europe".⁷⁹

So, what is going on? One predictor of voting Leave that showed up very strongly was the proportion of immigrants in each area, whereby the higher the proportion of immigrants, the less likely people were to vote Leave. Immigrants tend to be thinner and younger and fitter. Furthermore, the presence of thinner people tends to cause others around them to try harder not to get fatter. Being fat in Oxford is not easy because you stand out more, and it is easier to be thin because more people are better off and can afford less-fattening foods. Being fat elsewhere is more normal.

When and where it becomes normal to be overweight, being overweight begins to spread. It has been called the epidemic of obesity. The serious point being made here is that the correlation could well be real, and the reasons for that correlation may be obscure and intermediate, with neither factor directly influencing the other, but both being related to a third factor that is more decisive.

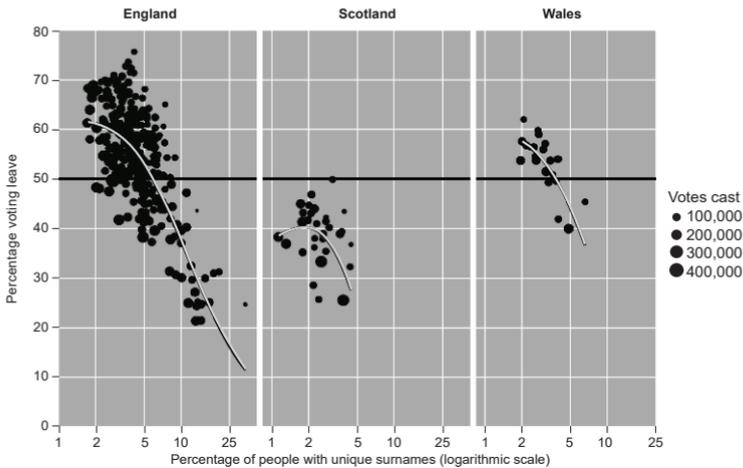
Incidentally, a situation rarely commented on is that the poorer parts of Britain not only have more overweight people, and fewer immigrants, but also more severely underweight children. There has been a rise in underweight children in those local authorities most affected by austerity cuts. This has recently been seen in both school reception classes (when children are aged four and five) and in Year 6 (when aged ten or eleven), despite the overall percentage of underweight children remaining broadly static for England as a whole. Almost 50 per cent more reception-aged children were underweight in the poorest tenth of areas in the UK than in the richest by 2017, and the difference was 15 per cent by Year 6 (when at least they have had school meals). Some 55 per cent and then 69 per cent more children are either obese or overweight at the same ages in the poorest areas compared to the richest.⁸⁰ In the rich world, similar statistics are seen only in the USA.

Karl Pearson, the nineteenth-century mathematician credited with being one of the inventors of the Bell Curve, thought (as we noted in Chapter 3) that it was acceptable for the poorest children to be poorly fed. Even today it is apparently acceptable to allow the poorest children to be poorly fed. Do people still think, as so many of the elite did in the nineteenth century, that they are of a degenerate stock and will never amount to much, or do they consider them just unimportant dross? Today, it is still seen as acceptable for children to have to eat inadequate or cheaper unbalanced diets due to poverty. At the very same time, a £24,000-a-year private school held an 'austerity day' with baked potatoes and beans for lunch (hardly an inadequate lunch).⁸¹ It

was intended to raise awareness among its pupils of the struggles of poorer children, but was much criticised for being ‘tone-deaf’.

All kinds of things correlate well with the relationship between immigration and vote Leave. As early as 18 July 2016, the appropriately named Mario Cortina Borja, Julian Stander and Luciana Dalla Valle wrote a quick paper entitled ‘The EU referendum: surname diversity and voting patterns’. In it, they included the graph shown in Figure 6.7. Apparently, areas with more unusual surnames were less likely to vote Leave. Many people with unusual surnames would not have had a vote in the referendum because they would not have been UK citizens, but the presence of immigrants in an area turned out to be a very good predictor that many people would want to stay in the EU (see Chapter 1).

FIGURE 6.7: ASSOCIATION OF LEAVE VOTE WITH PEOPLE WITH UNIQUE SURNAMES, 2016



A log scale is used, since very few areas of the UK are hyper-diverse.⁸²

For people living in areas where there are many others with unusual surnames, it can be easier to learn that the British were not

as great a force for good as they may have been led to believe at school. Brexit might be the only way to make most of the British see what they really are. Afua Hirsch, who grew up in Wimbledon, explains in her recent book *BRIT(ish): On Race Identity and Belonging* that: ‘The most persistent reminder of not belonging would be The Question. Where are you from? ... They already know the answer which in their imagination is a mythical “darkie” country.’⁸³ And this is how we so often speak when talking to children whose parents or grandparents are immigrants. The first generation to arrive almost always had to deal with much worse.

So, why have we been treating immigrants so badly? Events revealed that many of those who most wanted Brexit were prepared to say and do anything to get what they wanted. This included dehumanising immigrants, presenting them as sub-human, and attempting to scare the British about them. As a recent *Guardian* article noted, ‘Researchers found immigration to be the most prominent issue in the 10 weeks running up to the vote, leading 99 front pages. Of those, more than three-quarters were from the four most virulently Leave newspapers: the *Sun*, the *Mail*, the *Express* and the *Telegraph*.’⁸⁴ The proprietors of those newspapers thought salvation lay in following the divisiveness and economics of the USA, not the solidarity and policies of Europe. They were prepared to treat immigrants as badly as they possibly could to try to get what they wanted.

One great irony is that the USA is hardly to be envied. What bigots like about the USA is that the melting pot never melted. As Matthew Stewart, who has written widely on the origins and future of the USA, explains:

As of 2016, it took \$1.2 million in net worth to make it into the 9.9 per cent; \$2.4 million to reach the group’s median; and \$10 million to get into the top 0.9 per cent. (And if you’re not

there yet, relax: Our club is open to people who are on the right track and have the right attitude.) ‘We are the 99 per cent’ sounds righteous, but it’s a slogan, not an analysis. The families at our end of the spectrum wouldn’t know what to do with a pitchfork. We are also mostly, but not entirely, white.⁸⁵

Britain has been looking towards the wrong nation for guidance – the USA, a country whose rulers have largely hated immigrants for some time, despite hosting an economy that always required more labour, and despite now being made up almost entirely of the descendants of immigrants. This hatred has existed ever since the first slave was vilified and the second wave of immigrants arrived, but it was covered up by pretending to be a melting pot.⁸⁶

In Britain in 2016, as Will Hutton and Andrew Adonis made clear in their 2018 analysis of the vote, ‘it was immigration that decisively swung opinion. On the eve of the referendum, 63 per cent believed that refugees were one of the most important issues facing the country, compared to just 39 per cent saying the same for the NHS, or 33 per cent the economy.’⁸⁷ Treat immigrants so badly and eventually you begin to believe your own lies. And then you don’t just severely harm them. You begin to damage yourself.

Once you realise how lucky you are to live in a country of immigration, you begin to realise that what actually holds Britain together, especially in its London heart, are the immigrants. Or, as Robbie Shilliam puts it in a very recent book, dedicated to the people of Grenfell: ‘This detritus of empire has rarely been considered the material from which to build new publics, and certainly not in the metropolitan core. But the stone which the builders rejected shall become the chief cornerstone.’⁸⁸ Today we are all the detritus, the debris of empire, and we have to build a new raft from that.