

Things Fall apart: Brexit, immigration, crime, health and wages

Danny Dorling is a British social geographer and is the Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography of the School of Geography and the Environment of the University of Oxford and author of a number of books including the recent 'Peak Inequality'. This short article is expanded on further in: Dorling, D. and Tomlinson, S. (2019) Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire, London: Biteback, published January 15th.

As Bobby Duffy explained in November 2018, when it comes to Brexit and our understanding of what is going on, we live in a remarkably divided society today where people now see the same facts in utterly different ways.

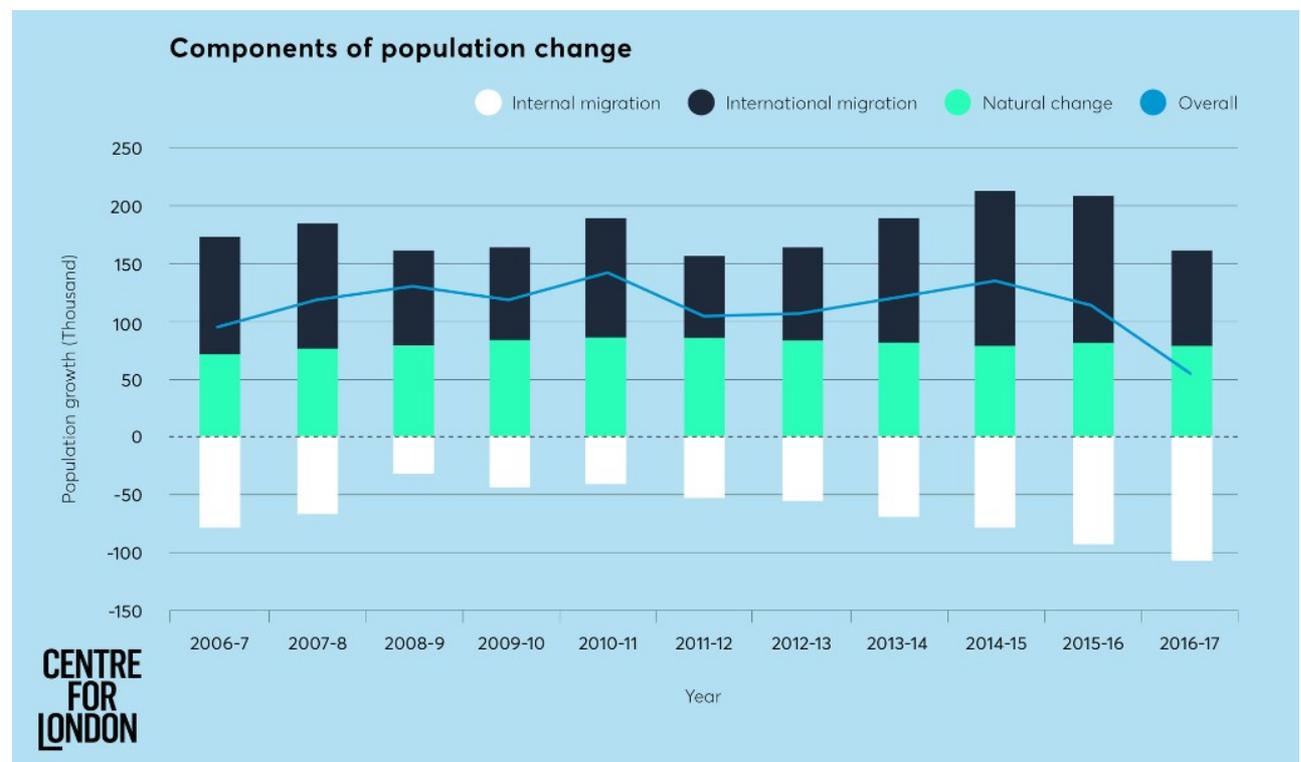
The differences are most stark when it comes to crime. A majority of people in Britain (and three quarters of all Leave supporters) believe that immigration from the European mainland into the UK has increased crime levels. This is despite the best evidence from the Migration Advisory Committee finding no link. And a great deal of other evidence suggesting that the economic boost migrants provide, and their contribution to keeping health and educational services running, actually makes it far easier to run cities in ways where more people do not feel they need to resort to crime.

But most adults in the UK when surveyed doggedly continue to say that immigration has increased crime, that it costs the country money, uses up precious scarce resources in housing, education and health and is, overall, to the detriment of the people of the UK, or at the very least to the people of Wales and England. As Bobby Duffy goes on to explain:

“...these misperceptions are not just about us being misled by politicians or the media – they are more emotional than that. We exaggerate what we worry about, so what we get wrong is as much a reflection of our concerns as a cause of them. Attempting to change people’s views of Brexit solely with a more evidence-based description won’t land, because it misses a large part of the point: our allegiances affect our view of reality as much as the other way round. Our misperceptions are, in the end, an incredibly direct measure of how divided the country is: that groups of fellow citizens can see the same realities so differently shows the monumental task we face in finding any common ground.”

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International migration shrunk dramatically in the year from June 2016 to June 2017



Source: The London Intelligence - Issue 5 8 August 2018 by Silviya Barrett, Tom Colthorpe, Erica Belcher
<https://www.centreforlondon.org/reader/the-london-intelligence-issue-5/demography/>

What will be most interesting as the Brexit process rumbles on is how people in the UK react to the rapid and large drop in in-coming migrants that has already started. In August 2018 we learnt that international migration to London had collapsed in magnitude, almost halving in just one year. On top of that there has been a continued increase every year since 2010 in London residents leaving the capital. More people are leaving the London to live somewhere else in the UK than are coming in from elsewhere in the UK. Back in 2008-9 three times fewer (net) were leaving, despite the banking crash of that year. It was only once salaries fell after the 2008 crash that London became just too expensive for more and more people. So fewer migrants are now coming to the capital and more residents are also leaving it. The net result is more empty homes in London. As a young London banker told me in 2009 “The party’s over”. Sometimes it takes up to a decade for people to realise that.

So, what about the most recent trends in health? On the 23rd of October 2018 ONS released their latest recent data on age-sex adjusted mortality ratios which showed that in 2017 they remained below, in other words worse, than the levels attained in 2014. There is a direct relationship between these measures and life expectancy. When life expectancy figures are released in the coming weeks they will show that falls in many areas of the UK are continuing. Nothing like this has been seen since the Second World War.

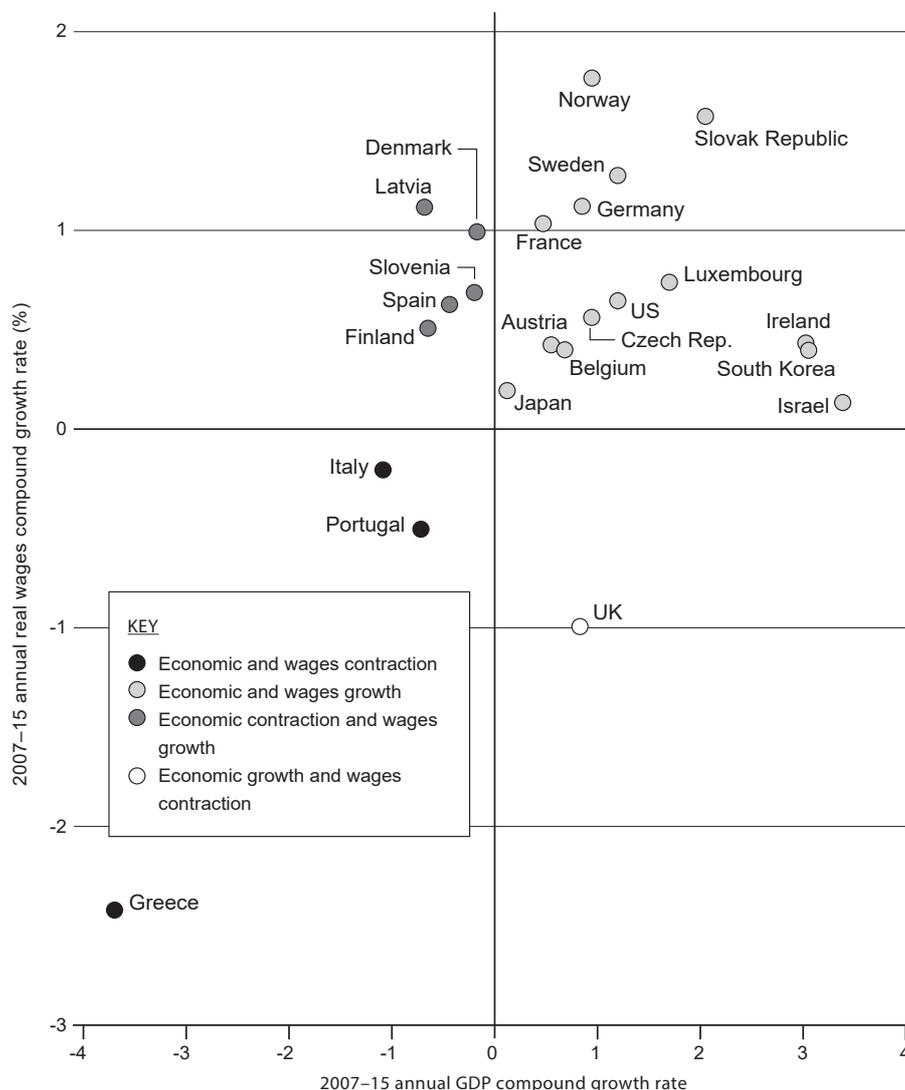
Age-sex-standardized mortality rates 2010 - 2017 (mortality rate per 100,000 people), E&W.

	Persons	Males	Females
2017	965.3	1,124.0	836.8
2016	966.9	1,128.4	838.2
2015	993.2	1,156.4	863.8
2014	953.0	1,121.3	821.9
2013	985.9	1,158.3	852.6
2012	987.4	1,159.4	856.1
2011	978.6	1,159.6	842.1
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Source ONS (2018): Deaths registered in England and Wales (series DR), 23rd October, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/dataset/deathsregisteredinenglandandwalesseriesdrreferencetables/>

The UK was very unusual even before the vote to leave the EU was taken. In 2015 it was the only country in Europe that was suffering from falling wages, despite GDP then growing. It was almost as if those in charge of wage setting wanted to punish the population to annoy many in the middle enough to vote Leave. All the net rise in GDP that year, the year before the Brexit vote, went to those who owned companies and shares. Furthermore, they took a little bit more than that even, by reducing the wages of their workers despite not needing to.

Figure 9.1: The UK was alone among advanced countries in the world in 2015



How the UK differed from all other affluent countries in 2015, growth but falling wages.

Source: Romei, V. (2017) How wages fell in the UK while the economy grew, the Financial Times, March 2nd.

Source: Dorling, D. and Tomlinson, S. (2019) *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire*, London: Biteback, published January 15th. See www.dannydorling.org

Things fall apart when empires crumble. The value of housing in Amsterdam fell for more than two hundred years, in real terms, after the peak was reached there. The idea that what is currently happening in Britain is 'just a blip', is wrong. You have to travel back in time to the collapse of the Soviet Union to find the last sustained series of mortality rises in Europe, outside of war.

We fail to see what is worse and imagine other ogres that are not there: ever rising numbers of criminal immigrants, profligate minorities taking 'our' homes, 'our' jobs and 'our' schools. Soon we will be able to look around and ask why they have stopped coming, and helping, and then try to work out what it was that really went wrong in Britain at the start of the 21st Century.

Note – this short article is expanded on further in: Dorling, D. and Tomlinson, S. (2019) Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire, London: Biteback, published January 15th

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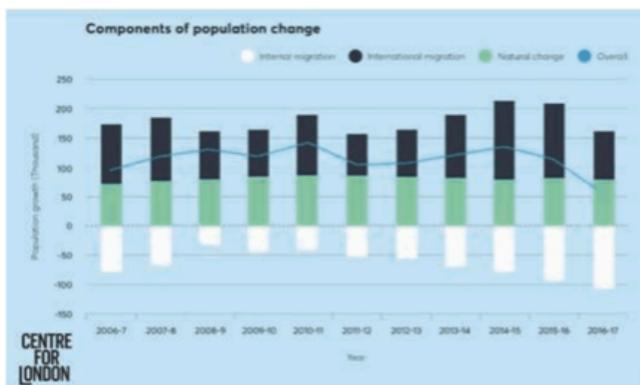
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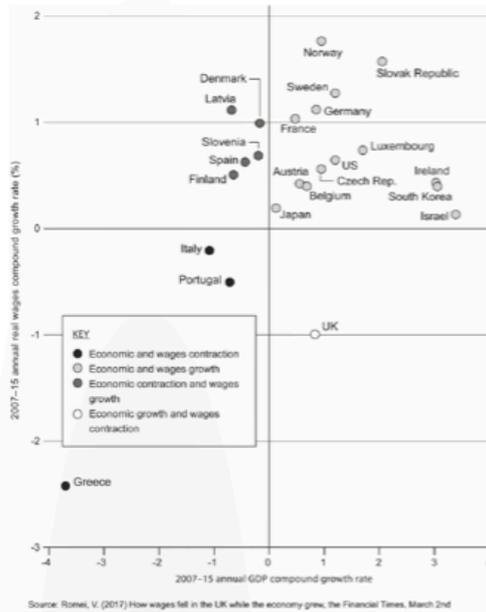
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