'The referendum was clear: the British people voted to leave the single market and to take back control of our borders.'

Nigel Farage

'There must be no attempts to remain inside the EU, no attempts to rejoin it through the back door, and no second referendum.'

Theresa May

'My role as the Labour prime minister would be to ensure that [another referendum] is carried out in a fair way, that the offers put are fair, and that I will carry out the result of that referendum.'

Jeremy Corbyn

'Every day we let this Brexit mess go on means less money being invested in the UK, fewer jobs being created and less tax revenue to pay for our public services.'

Jo Swinson

'We've got the deal. It's oven ready. Vote Conservative tomorrow to get Brexit done'.

Boris Johnson

'I think … that we can turn the tide within the next 12 weeks and I’m absolutely confident that we can send the corona virus packing in this country.'

Boris Johnson

'The return of the virus and the return of restrictions were not an Act of God. They are a failure of government.'

Keir Starmer
In June 2016, more than 17 million people voted for Britain to leave the European Union. The fallout of this momentous referendum has been tumultuous and unpredictable. Now, from the authors of the highly acclaimed *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), comes the definitive guide to the transformation of British politics in the years following the Brexit vote. By charting the impact of Brexit on three major elections – the 2017 and 2019 general elections as well as the 2019 European Parliament elections – this book reveals the deeper currents reshaping modern Britain. The authors draw upon many years of unique and unprecedented data from their own surveys, giving key insights into how and why Brexit has changed British electoral politics. The book is written in a clear and accessible style, appealing to students, scholars and anyone interested in the impact of Brexit on Britain today.

Paul Whiteley’s research interests include electoral behaviour, public opinion, political parties, political economy and methodology in the social sciences. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. He is the author or co-author of some twenty books and more than 100 articles in academic journals and a frequent blogger on British and comparative politics.

Harold D. Clarke was Ashbel Smith Professor in the School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences at the University of Texas at Dallas. His significant contributions to knowledge about people’s political support and their valence (performance)-based evaluations informing electoral choice, and about research methodology applications were enabled by multiple research awards as well as numerous research publications. These include the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada), the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), and the National Science Foundation (US), as well as Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press and other major publishers and professional journals.

Matthew Goodwin is the author of several books including *Revolt on the Right*, which won the 2014 Political Book of the Year award, and *National Populism*, which was a *Financial Times* book of the year and a *Sunday Times* bestseller. He also won the PSA Richard Rose Prize and has a strong following on social media @GoodwinMJ
Marianne C. Stewart is a Professor in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences at the University of Texas at Dallas. Her research contributions to knowledge about people's political attitudes and their political participation have been facilitated by multiple research awards and professional publications. These include the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) and the National Science Foundation (US), the university presses of Cambridge and Oxford, and the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *American Political Science Review* and the *British Journal of Political Science*. 
Brexit Britain

The Consequences of the Vote to Leave the European Union

Paul Whiteley
University of Essex

Harold D. Clarke
University of Texas, Dallas

Matthew Goodwin
University of Kent, Canterbury

Marianne C. Stewart
University of Texas, Dallas
Contents

List of Figures ix
List of Tables xiv
Foreword xvii
Acknowledgements xxii
Part I The Short Term 1
1 Welcome to Brexit Britain 3
2 Getting Brexit Done 24
3 Political Paralysis: The 2017 General Election 45
4 The Collapsing Party System: The 2019 European Parliament Election 75
5 The Johnson Breakthrough: The 2019 General Election 104

Part II The Long Term 137
6 Time and the Fragmenting Party System 139
7 Space and the Fragmenting Party System 179
8 Who is Responsible? The Dynamics of Accountability 217

Part III The Future 247
9 A Disaster or a Damp Squib? The Economic Effects of Brexit 249
10 Brexit Britain, Covid Britain: The Political Fallout 278
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>viii</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postscript – Brexit Britain: Retrospect and Prospect</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Survey Methodology</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Statistical Methodology</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures

1.1 Percentages Thinking Britain Was Right or Wrong to Leave European Union in Sixty-Five National Polls, August 2016–December 2021

3.1 Trends in Conservative and Labour Vote Intentions in 257 Polls, 9 May 2015–7 June 2017

3.2 Parties’ Vote Shares in the 2015 and 2017 General Elections

3.3 Seats Won in the 2015 and 2017 General Elections

3.4 Percentages of People in Various Age Groups Joining the Electoral Register by Day during the 2017 General Election Campaign

3.5 Probabilities of Conservatives or Labour Winning Seats by Percentage of 18–29-Year-Olds in Constituencies

3.6 Conservative and Labour Vote by Age Group in the 2015 and 2017 General Elections

3.7 The Ten Most Important Issues in 2017

3.8 Top Three Important Issues for Younger and Older People in 2017

3.9 Party Best on Most Important Issue by Age Group in 2017

3.10 Feelings about Theresa May, Jeremy Corbyn and Tim Farron on 0 to 10 Scale by Age Group in 2017

3.11 Percentages Rating Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn ‘Very’ or ‘Fairly’ Competent by Age Group in 2017

3.12 Attitudes Towards Brexit by Party Identification in 2017

3.13 Party Identification by Socio-Demographic Characteristics in 2017

3.14 Factors Affecting Probability of Voting Conservative in the 2017 General Election

3.15 Factors Affecting Probability of Voting Labour in the 2017 General Election

3.16 Factors Affecting Probability of Voting Liberal Democrat in the 2017 General Election
List of Figures

3.17 Probability of Voting Labour in the 2017 General Election by Feelings about Jeremy Corbyn, Two-Group Binomial Logit Finite Mixture Model
4.1 Trends in Leave and Remain Support, 2016–2019
4.2 Forecast Effects of Leaving the European Union
4.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of European Union Membership
4.4 Perceived Risks and Support for Leaving the European Union
4.5 Emotional Reactions to Prospect of Leaving the European Union and Support for Leaving or Remaining
4.6 Probability of Approving the Government’s Handling of Brexit Negotiations by Attitudes Towards European Union Membership
4.7 Evaluations of Theresa May’s Performance as Prime Minister, 2017, 2018, 2019
4.8 European Parliament Election Vote Intention Trends, 28 March–22 May 2019
4.10 Vote in 2019 European Parliament Election by Attitudes Towards European Union Membership
4.11 Brexit Party Vote in the 2019 European Parliament Election by Socio-Demographic Characteristics
4.12 Significant Predictors of Voting in the 2019 European Parliament Election
5.1 Trends in Vote Intentions in 236 Polls, 4 November 2018–8 December 2019
5.2 Vote Shares in the 2019 General Election
5.3 Seats Won in the 2019 General Election
5.4 Top Three Important Issues Facing the Country
5.5 Vote in the 2019 General Election by How Would Vote If Another European Union Referendum
5.6 Vote in the 2019 General Election by Evaluations of the Economy
5.7 Vote in the 2019 General Election by Evaluations of the NHS
5.8 Party Identification, 2016–2019
5.9 Feelings about Party Leaders
5.10 Images of Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn
5.11 Trends in Evaluations of Jeremy Corbyn’s Job Performance in Fifty-Two Polls, September 2015–December 2019
List of Figures

5.12 Most Important Predictors of Vote in the 2019 General Election 129
5.13 Most Important Predictors of Feelings about Party Leaders in the 2019 General Election 134
6.1 The Relationship between Reported Turnout in Election Surveys and Actual Turnout in General Elections, 1964–2019 144
6.2 Turnout in General Elections by Age Groups (Periods), 1964–2019 145
6.3 Turnout in General Elections by Age Cohorts, 1964–2019 (Percentages within Cohorts) 151
6.4 Hierarchical Age Cohort Model of Turnout with Period Controls, 1964–2019 159
6.5 Hierarchical Age Cohort Model of Labour Voting with Period Controls, 1964–2019 162
6.6 Hierarchical Age Cohort Model of Conservative Voting with Period Controls, 1964–2019 163
6.7 Hierarchical Age Cohort Extended Model of Turnout with Cohort and Period Controls, 1964–2019 173
6.8 Hierarchical Age Cohort Extended Model of Voting for the Governing Party with Linear Period Controls, 1964–2019 175
7.1 Vote by Country and Region in the 1964 General Election 184
7.2 Vote by Country and Region in the 2019 General Election 185
7.3 Difference between Conservative and Labour Vote Shares in the 1964 General Election, Great Britain 187
7.4 Difference between Conservative and Labour Vote Shares in the 2019 General Election, Great Britain 187
7.5 Conservative Vote Share by Social Class (Managerial Occupations) in 1964 and 2019 188
7.6 Labour Vote Share by Social Class (Semi-Skilled and Unskilled Workers) in 1964 and 2019 191
7.7 Labour Vote Share by Percentage Younger People in 1964 and 2019 192
7.8 Conservative Vote Share by Percentage Retired in 1964 and 2019 194
7.9 Conservative Vote Share by Home Ownership in 1964 and 2019 196
7.10 Labour Vote Share by Percentage Unemployed in 1964 and 2019 198
7.11 Impact of Human Development Index, Age, Brexit Vote and Population Density on Turnout in the 2019 General Election 206
List of Figures

7.12 Impact of Human Development Index, Age, Brexit Vote and Population Density on Labour Voting in the 2019 General Election 207
7.13 Impact of Human Development Index, Age, Brexit Vote and Population Density on Conservative Voting in the 2019 General Election 208
8.1 Conservative and Labour Vote Intentions, 1974Q1–2020Q1 230
8.2 Economic Growth, Inflation Rate and Unemployment Rate, 1974Q1–2020Q1 232
8.3 Consumer Confidence Index, 1974Q1–2020Q1 233
8.4 Causal Links between Government Voting Support, Consumer Confidence, Inflation, Unemployment and Economic Growth 238
8.5 Causal Links between Consumer Confidence, Stock Prices, the Bank Rate, the Exchange Rate and the Yield Curve 244
9.1 Total Factor Productivity Growth in Real Terms in Britain, France, Germany and Italy, 1950–2019 257
9.2 The Effects of Predictor Variables on Total Factor Productivity in Britain, 1950–2019 264
9.3 The Effects of Predictor Variables on Total Factor Productivity in Britain Including Innovation in the EU and the US, 1950–2019 268
9.4 The Effects of Pandemics and Economic Shocks on Total Factor Productivity in Britain, 1761–2016 273
9.5 Multi-Factor Productivity in Britain, 1995Q1–2021Q1 275
10.1 Vote If Another Referendum on European Union Membership 2017–2021 280
10.2 Vote Intention if Another Referendum on European Union Membership by Vote in 2016 European Union Referendum 281
10.3 Perceived Consequences of Leaving the European Union, 2016 and 2021 282
10.4 Predictors of Perceived Positive Consequences of Leaving the European Union, March 2021 National Survey 285
10.5 Reported Personal Problems Caused by Covid-19 Pandemic, March 2021 National Survey 288
10.6 Most Important Issues, March 2021 National Survey 289
10.7 Party Best on Most Important Issues, March 2021 National Survey 290
List of Figures

10.8 Conservative and Labour Vote Intentions in 416 National Polls, January 8, 2020–December 12, 2021 291
10.10 Average Levels of Trust in Government and Parliament by Vote if Another European Union Referendum, 2019 Pre-General Election and March 2021 National Surveys 297
10.11 Satisfaction with Democracy in Britain, 2015–2021 298
10.12 Satisfaction with Democracy in Britain by Vote if Another European Union Referendum, 2019 and 2021 299
10.13 Satisfaction with Democracy in Britain by Likelihood Covid-19 Pandemic Will Be Brought Under Control Over Next Year 301
10.14 Probability Dissatisfied with Democracy in Britain by Vote if Another European Union Referendum and Likelihood Covid-19 Pandemic Under Control in Next Year 303
10.15 Trends in Support for Scottish Independence, August 2016–October 2021 304
10.16 Support for Scottish Independence Among National Identity Groups 305
## Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>The Sequence of Events Leading Up to the 2019 General Election</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Binomial Logit Analysis of Factors Associated with Conservative and Labour Constituency Victories in Great Britain in the 2017 General Election</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Models of Factors Influencing Attitudes Towards Leaving the European Union</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Voting in the 2019 General Election by Socio-Demographic Characteristics</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Voting in the 2019 General Election by Political-Economic Beliefs and Values</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Rival Models of Voting in the 2019 General Election</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Turnout by Periods and Cohorts, 1964–2019</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Party Vote Shares by Periods, 1964–2019</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Party Vote Shares by Cohorts, 1964–2019</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics for Socio-Demographic Correlates of Labour and Conservative Voting in 1964 and 2019</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Socio-Demographic Correlates of Labour and Conservative Voting in 1964 and 2019</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Factor Loadings from Principal Components Analysis of Income, Education and Health Defining the Human Development Index</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Spatial Autoregressive Models of Constituency-Level Turnout and Party Support in the 2019 General Election</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Effects of Voting in the 2015 General Election on Voting to Leave in the 2016 European Union Referendum</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Major Worldwide Pandemics and Major Economic Shocks, 1761–2016</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

10.1 Predictors of Conservative Vote Intentions, March 2021 National Survey 293
10.2 Predictors of Feelings about Boris Johnson, March 2021 National Survey 294
10.3 Predictors of Dissatisfaction with Democracy in Britain, March 2021 National Survey 302
Foreword

*Brexit Britain* is a book is about the choices that people, parties and politicians make, and the consequences that follow from these in turbulent times. More precisely, the book is about the choices that people make as voters, and that parties and leaders make as vote seekers and policy-makers in turbulent times. This book builds on the previously published book *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* by Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley.¹

In the *Brexit* book the authors explored what led more than 17 million people, in 2016, to vote to leave the European Union. It showed why many of the factors that led people to vote for Brexit, and that delivered the surprising success of the Leave campaign, had been ‘baked in’ long before the referendum campaign even began. It also showed how these Brexit voters had clear and coherent motives for voting to leave, including their concerns about national sovereignty and immigration.

However, at the time of its writing, neither the authors – nor anyone else for that matter – had the prescience to see what was to come. Leaving the EU would become a difficult and tortuous process that plunged the country into one of the most serious and protracted political and constitutional crises in modern history. Leaving the EU would also lead to the United Kingdom adopting a ‘hard’ version of Brexit that will continue to stoke controversies for years to come. These controversies include the potential independence of Scotland, where people voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union, and forging a new relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU with ongoing concerns over security and peace in Northern Ireland.

For these reasons, it became clear, in the time between the vote for Brexit in 2016 and Boris Johnson’s electoral triumph in 2019, that a sequel to the *Brexit* book was in order. This sequel, *Brexit Britain*, has three principal and related objectives. First, it examines the long-running process of Brexit, particularly the years of turmoil which followed the

¹ Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley (2017).
Foreword

The referendum vote and witnessed many twists and turns in the negotiations between the UK and the EU. Second, we study how the political turmoil that was unleashed by the Brexit vote shaped all three of the major nationwide elections in 2017, the spring of 2019 and the winter of 2019, producing major changes with significant consequences.

As we show in this book, this sequence of elections brought about the rise and fall of Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party, and the success of Boris Johnson and the pro-Brexit Conservative Party. As a result, they helped to produce what Members of Parliament had been unable to achieve— an outcome to the negotiations between the UK and the EU, with the final departure of the UK from the European Union on 31 January 2020. Thus, the country has been pushed in a fundamentally different direction, namely out of the European Union and into a so-called ‘Global Britain’. In sum, the bases of electoral politics, political geography and political behaviour have changed in fundamental ways, while British politics has become increasingly polarized.

The third objective of Brexit Britain involves investigation of how the themes of change, choice, consequence and performance play in explanations of how short-term and longer-term forces have been at work during these tumultuous years. As we show, these choices have dynamic properties, that is, they change in the short—and longer-terms, as events and issues evolve, and as new information becomes available.

These choices are also influenced by, as we will see, what is known among political scientists as ‘valence politics’. Valence politics involves issues about which there is widespread agreement among people and parties about what the policy goals are, but disagreement about how to achieve them. Thus, people form evaluations of how well or badly an issue has developed and how the party-in-government has handled it, and these evaluations shape electoral choices. Typical examples of valence issues are economic growth combined with low inflation and unemployment, high-quality and accessible healthcare, protection from threats to physical security posed by rogue regimes, terrorists and criminals, and environmental quality. In the British case, several such issues have come to the fore in the time period covered by this book, that is, the period bracketed by the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. In this book, we show how valence politics has had a profound impact on the country’s politics.

We approach these three objectives by organizing the book in three parts. The first part focuses on short-term effects during the period from

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2 On valence politics theory, see Stokes (1992) and especially Clarke, Sanders, Stewart and Whiteley (2004) and Whiteley, Clarke, Sanders and Stewart (2013).
the referendum up to and including the 2019 European and general elections. The part consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 examines the political events which followed the shockwaves generated by the vote to leave the EU through to Theresa May’s loss of her majority in the 2017 general election.

Chapter 2 continues the story by charting the major events during the Brexit negotiations from the aftermath of the 2017 general election through to the outcome of the 2019 general election. These propelled Boris Johnson into power and set the stage for the delivery of Brexit. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 then drill down into detail about each of the three elections that involved: the 2017 general election, the Spring 2019 European Parliament election and finally the December 2019 general election.

Part II takes a step back to examine three major and related developments involving longer-term changes and their effects, both across time and space, which have helped to produce the Brexit outcome. This has three chapters. Chapter 6 focuses on the decline of social class as a determinant of electoral choice and the rise of age-related politics. Ever since the path-breaking study by David Butler and Donald Stokes in 1969,\(^\text{3}\) the ‘class cleavage’ has dominated much research on voting in Britain. This cleavage typically has been measured by support for Labour among voters in working-class occupations and support for the Conservatives in middle-class occupations. However, the influence of social class measured in this way was never as strong as Butler and Stokes claimed, something clearly revealed by their panel surveys which re-interviewed the same voters at multiple points in time. That said, there is a broader conception of class, described as the Human Development Index, which includes additional measures going beyond narrowly defined occupational status. This does have a considerable impact on electoral support at the constituency level. However, and as we show in this chapter, narrowly defined class politics has largely disappeared at the level of the individual voter. It has been replaced by the new age/education cleavage whose origins and effects are explored in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 examines a second development of importance, the geographic fragmentation of electoral choice at the level of the different countries that form the United Kingdom, and in particular the specific context of England. This fragmentation is well illustrated by the fact that Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU referendum whereas England and Wales voted to leave. Similar divisions also are apparent across the English regions. Since the referendum,

\(^\text{3}\) Butler and Stokes (1969).
fragmentation and polarization have been sharply exacerbated by Brexit and the continuing controversies it has caused.

In Chapter 8, we take a look at how these two and other developments pose a threat to government accountability. Accountability means that voters form evaluations of how well or badly a government delivers the policies that people want, and these evaluations inform electoral choices. Accountability is a critical part of the process of democratic governance, and it is closely linked to the theory of valence politics. A number of developments in politics and the economy suggest that the ability of governments to deliver on key valence issues is now at risk. In an especially fragmented polity and society, accountability can be difficult to achieve.

In addition to the two longer-term developments described above, there are other developments. There is a large number of people who feel left behind in the economy and society, and many of them voted to leave the EU in the referendum. The capacity of governments to satisfy voter expectations has also been challenged by the forces of globalization, European integration, the marketization of public services and growing social inequality. In Chapter 8, we look at government accountability for management of the economy, which is a key valence issue. Our finding that accountability is ‘alive and well’ in British politics challenges pessimistic views expressed by the critics of the processes associated with contemporary democracy.4

Part III looks to the future by exploring the economic and political fallout from the Brexit vote. Chapter 9 broadens the analysis by considering the impact of Brexit on the economy more generally. We address whether Brexit has the potential to reduce innovation and economic growth in the future. A key issue in evaluating this possibility is to try to untangle the effects of Brexit from the effects of the Covid pandemic, and this is done by looking at data over a long period of time. The conclusion is that the pandemic really overshadows the effects of Brexit, although this may change in the future.

In Chapter 10, we investigate the effect of Brexit, together with the pandemic on changes in support for the Conservative Party and for Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The chapter also looks more broadly at the effects of Brexit on the political system. This involves investigating citizen satisfaction with the performance of democracy, and also their trust in political institutions such as Parliament and the political parties. A third issue examined in the chapter is the threat to the unity of the United Kingdom posed by Scottish independence.

4 See, e.g., Achen and Bartels (2016).
The Postscript at the end of the book summarizes our central conclusions. In brief, we show that, although Brexit has had and will continue to have disruptive consequences, it is not the disaster claimed by many commentators. The previously published Brexit book showed that, if Britain had not joined the European Union in the first place, it would have made little difference to the country’s economic prosperity, its international influence, and the longer-term trends shaping electoral politics. This conclusion is largely reinforced by the findings in this book. And, although Brexit has been a highly divisive and occasionally traumatic experience for many, leaving the EU will not affect the reality that Britain’s future continues to hinge on the choices made by its people, parties and politicians.

This is particularly true in a situation in which further European integration has stalled. The European Union currently faces a serious threat to its fundamental values, such as the rule of law, from its own member states in Eastern Europe, and an economic divide which is growing between northern and southern states. The EU is limited in what it can achieve, because of the heterogeneity of the countries that comprise it, and the fact that these countries are unlikely to cede significant sovereignty to Brussels in the foreseeable future. The EU’s accomplishments in terms of economic prosperity and general security are also limited by the fact that it remains largely a regulatory entity, rather than a sovereign state.

Finally, for all readers, including those not familiar with the theories and methods used in this type of research, the book has been written with the general reader in mind. The figures and tables are presented in a very accessible way that allows readers to follow the arguments without having to know technical details. For those readers who want details about the survey methodology and the statistical methods used in the analyses, they can consult the two appendices.
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Paul Whiteley
Harold D. Clarke
Matthew Goodwin
Marianne C. Stewart

Note to Readers: Harold made enormous contributions to this book in terms of its design, data collection and analysis, and writing, and he strongly wished its completion. We are very pleased to fulfil his wish and, since his death on 11 January 2022, we have much missed his humour, intellect and perseverance. Throughout his professional career, Harold, either individually or collaboratively, made significant contributions to knowledge and understanding of the contingent nature of public support in a representative democracy, and to the performance evaluations that many people bring to their electoral choices in Britain, Canada, Taiwan and the United States.

Paul, Matt, and Marianne