

A Second EU Referendum

By Hazel Wand 26 Feb 2019

Remember this?

Referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union	
Vote only once by putting a cross <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in the box next to your choice	
Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?	
Remain a member of the European Union	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leave the European Union	<input type="checkbox"/>

That was the 2016 EU referendum ballot paper. Now we have many Remainers and Remainder MPs calling for a second referendum, claiming that “there’s lots of youngsters now who were not allowed to vote last time” and “Now that people know the *truth* about how disastrous this would be for the UK, let them choose again”. There has been much talk on this issue, but no effort seems to have been made on what the questions should be.

The questions and layout have to be absolutely impartial with no bias towards any of the potential results, but first we have to tackle the problem that a very large number of voters and MPs did not accept their democratic duty to implement the majority decision of the 2016 referendum. If the ballot form is similar to the above 2016 ballot form, there exists significant risk that the minority voters will again claim that the result is ‘wrong’ and that there should be yet another referendum. So this time their duty should be clearly spelled out and affirmed by the voter on the ballot form.

So the new form should begin with something like:

2019 Referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union	
Put a cross [X] in your answer to the following question affirming that you understand the democratic principles used in the United Kingdom. Any ballot paper that does not contain a cross in the [YES] box or does contain a cross in the [NO] box will be discarded and will not count towards the result, because the voter either does not understand UK democracy or is wilfully rejecting UK democratic principles.	
Do you agree that you will accept the majority decision of the voters in this referendum and will employ your best efforts to implement that decision and will not be asking the government to hold any more public referenda on EU membership, until at least two general elections have occurred in the UK.	
YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

On the actual questions that are the real meat of the referendum, the various alternatives have been aired many times and boil down to 3 or 4 options. Remain in the EU, Leave (on the expiry of the Article 50 time agreed) on the basis of Theresa May's Withdrawal Agreement, Leave (on the expiry of the Article 50 time agreed) with no agreement and revert to basic WTO rules or arrange an Article 50 time extension to negotiate a different Withdrawal Agreement.

On the method of voting, it is clear that there could be two alternative methods, a simple single vote for one of the options or a priority scale of most favoured to least favoured options. The Institute for Government has pointed out that for the simple single vote with more than 2 choices, the 'winning' option might have less than 50% of the total votes, which would result in much disagreement, so their proposal for a three-way choice would be the priority system and counted such that: "The least popular first choice would be eliminated, and its votes reallocated based on second preferences." In the case of four options, I presume that if this action did not produce a greater than 50% vote then this would be repeated for the second least popular result. "This would ensure that the successful option gained over 50% of first and second preferences."

In the USA, the position of questions on a polling form has been shown to produce some bias in the results and in some cases, they have chosen to randomise the positions, however that is perhaps easier for the USA as it uses polling machines rather than paper forms. Our only equivalent option in the UK would be to print 24 variations of the question sequence and to randomly shuffle them into the piles used by the polling staff to issue to the voters. This may get deemed too expensive or too complicated and get dropped.

So let's make a try at composing the actual questions section of a second EU referendum.

Write the numbers 1,2,3 or 4 in the answer boxes below, where number 1 is for your most favoured option, number 2 is for your second favoured option, number 3 is for your third favoured option and number 4 is for your least favoured option.	
Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or what should be the method of leaving the European Union	
Arrange an Article 50 time-extension with the EU to negotiate a different Withdrawal Agreement.	
Leave the European Union on expiry of the Article 50 time limit, on the basis of the Withdrawal agreement as presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister.	
Revoke Article 50 and remain a member state of the European Union	
Leave the European Union on expiry of the Article 50 time-limit, with no prearranged Withdrawal Agreement and revert to basic WTO trading rules..	

So now we have a possible complete Ballot Form.

2019 Referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union	
Put a cross [X] in your answer to the following question affirming that you understand the democratic principles used in the United Kingdom. Any ballot paper that does not contain a cross in the [YES] box or does contain a cross in the [NO] box will be discarded and will not count towards the result, because the voter either does not understand UK democracy or is wilfully rejecting UK democratic principles.	
Do you agree that you will accept the majority decision of the voters in this referendum and will emply your best efforts to implement that decision and will not be asking the government to hold any more public refererenda on EU membership, until at least two general elections have occurred in the UK ?	
YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Write the numbers 1,2,3 or 4 in the answer boxes below, where number 1 is for your most favoured option, number 2 is for your second favoured option, number 3 is for your third favoured option and number 4 is for your least favoured option.	
Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or what should be the method of leaving the European Union ?	
Arrange an Article 50 time-extension with the EU to negotiate a different Withdrawal Agreement.	
Leave the European Union on expiry of the Article 50 time limit, on the basis of the Withdrawal agreement as presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister.	
Revoke Article 50 and remain a member state of the European Union	
Leave the European Union on expiry of the Article 50 time-limit, with no prearranged Withdrawal Agreement and revert to basic WTO trading rules..	