

Tutorial

The UK's EU referendum: All you need to know

What is happening?

A referendum is being held on Thursday, 23 June to decide whether Britain should leave or remain in the European Union.

What is a referendum?

A referendum is basically a vote in which everyone (or nearly everyone) of voting age can take part, normally giving a "Yes" or "No" answer to a question. Whichever side gets more than half of all votes cast is considered to have won.

Why is a referendum being held?

Prime Minister David Cameron promised to hold one if he won the 2015 general election, in response to growing calls from his own Conservative MPs and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), who argued that Britain had not had a say since 1975, when it [voted to stay in the EU in a referendum](#). The EU has changed a lot since then, gaining more control over our daily lives, they argued. Mr Cameron said: "It is time for the British people to have their say. It is time to settle this European question in British politics."

What is the European Union?

The European Union - often known as the EU - is an economic and political partnership involving 28 European countries. It began after World War Two to foster economic co-operation, with the idea that countries which trade together are more likely to avoid going to war with each other. It has since grown to become a "single market" allowing goods and people to move around, basically as if the member states were one country. It has its own currency, the euro, which is used by 19 of the member countries, its own parliament and it now sets rules in a wide range of areas - including on the environment, transport, consumer rights and even things like mobile phone charges.

What will the referendum question be?

"Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?"

What does Brexit mean?

It is a word that has become used as a shorthand way of saying the UK leaving the EU - merging the words **B**ritain and **e**xit to get Brexit, in a same way as a Greek exit from the EU was dubbed Grexit in the past.

Who will be able to vote?

British, Irish and Commonwealth citizens over 18 who are resident in the UK, along with UK nationals living abroad who have been on the electoral register in the UK in the past 15 years.

How do you vote?

It will be a similar system to that during other elections. Firstly, if you have registered to vote, you'll be sent a card telling you when voting takes place and where you should go to vote on 23 June. On that day, when you go to the polling station you will be given a piece of paper with the referendum question on it. You then go to a booth, which will have a pencil in it for your use. You then put a X in the box which reflects your choice and put the paper into a ballot box. Alternatively you will also be able to opt to vote by post.

Didn't David Cameron try and change the rules of the UK's EU membership?

Yes. This was the big news back in January and February as David Cameron sought an agreement with other European Union leaders to change the terms of Britain's membership. He says the deal, which will take effect immediately if the UK votes to remain in the EU, gives Britain "special" status within the 28 nation club, and will help sort out some of the things British people say they don't like about the EU, such as high levels of immigration and giving up the ability to run our own affairs.

Critics say his deal will make little difference and falls well short of what he had promised when he announced his plan for a referendum.

The main points of the deal are:

- **Child benefit** - Migrant workers will still be able to send child benefit payments back to their home country - Mr Cameron had wanted to end this practice - but the payments will be set at a level reflecting the cost of living in their home country rather than the full UK rate
- **Migrant welfare payments** - Mr Cameron says cutting the amount of benefits low paid workers from other EU nations can claim when they take a job in the UK will remove one of the reasons people come to Britain in such large numbers (critics say it will make little difference). He did not get the blanket ban he wanted. New arrivals will not be able to claim tax credits and other welfare payments straight away - but will gradually gain the right to more benefits the longer they stay, at a rate yet to be decided.
- **Keeping the pound** - Mr Cameron has said Britain will never join the euro. He secured assurances that the eurozone countries will not discriminate against Britain for having a different currency. Any British money spent on bailing out eurozone nations that get into trouble will also be reimbursed.
- **Protection for the City of London** - Safeguards for Britain's large financial services industry to prevent eurozone regulations being imposed on it
- **Running its own affairs** - For the first time, there will be a clear commitment that Britain is not part of a move towards "ever closer union" with other EU member states - one of the core principles of the EU.

Who wants the UK to leave the EU?

The British public are fairly evenly split, [according to the latest opinion polls](#).

Why do they want the UK to leave?

They believe Britain is being held back by the EU, which they say imposes too many rules on business and charges billions of pounds a year in membership fees for little in return. They also want Britain to take back full control of its borders and reduce the number of people coming here to work. One of the main principles of EU membership is "free movement", which means you don't need to get a visa to go and live in another EU country. They also object to the idea of "ever closer union" and what they see as moves towards the creation of a "United States of Europe".

Who wants the UK to stay in the EU?

Prime Minister David Cameron wants Britain to stay in the EU, now he has got some powers back from it. Sixteen members of his cabinet also back staying in. The Conservative Party has pledged to be neutral in the campaign - but the Labour Party, SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Lib Dems are all in favour of staying in. US president Barack Obama also wants Britain to remain in the EU, as do other EU nations such as France and Germany. As mentioned above, according to polls, the British public seems pretty evenly split on the issue.

Why do they want the UK to stay?

Those campaigning for Britain to stay in the EU say it gets a big boost from membership - it makes selling things to other EU countries easier and, they argue, the flow of immigrants, most of whom are young and keen to work, fuels economic growth and helps pay for public services. They also believe Britain's status in the world would be damaged by leaving and that we are more secure as part of the 28 nation club, rather than going it alone.

What about businesses?

Big business - with a few exceptions - tends to be in favour of Britain staying in the EU because it makes it easier for them to move money, people and products around the world.

So who is leading the rival sides in the campaign?

- [Britain Stronger in Europe](#) - the main cross-party group campaigning for Britain to remain in the EU is backed by key figures from the Conservative Party, including prime minister David Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne, most Labour MPs, including party leader Jeremy Corbyn and Alan Johnson, who is running the Labour In for Britain campaign, the Lib Dems, Plaid Cymru, the Alliance party and the SDLP in Northern Ireland, and the Green Party.
- [Vote Leave](#) - A cross-party campaign that has the backing of senior Conservatives such as Michael Gove and Boris Johnson plus a handful of Labour MPs, including Gisela Stuart and Graham Stringer, and UKIP's Douglas Carswell and Suzanne Evans,

Has any member state ever left the EU, or would the UK be the first?

No nation state has ever left the EU. But Greenland, one of Denmark's overseas territories, held a referendum in 1982, after gaining a greater degree of self government, and voted by 52% to 48% to leave, which it duly did after a period of negotiation.