



ST PAUL'S
GIRLS' SCHOOL

Year 12 Entrance Examination
Politics Question Paper November 2025

Time allowed: 45 minutes

Instructions:

There are **TWO** questions on this paper: Please answer both questions.

You are strongly advised to spend 20 minutes on the first question (20 marks) and 25 minutes on the second question (25 marks).

Total marks: 45

The Economist

30th August 2025

The polycrisis theory of Brexit

An unfashionable view of why the divorce happened

Parliament has lost interest, but Britons still devour books about Brexit. Those books tend to belong to one of two schools. One is the Great Man—or rather, inadequate boys—theory of history, exemplified by “All Out War”, by Tim Shipman. It argues that the divorce was propelled by the betrayals, blunders and petty feuds at the court of David Cameron, whose campaign was hopelessly focused on warning of economic disaster.

A second school takes the long view. In “Between The Waves”, a rich and incisive new history of British Euroscepticism to be published next month, Tom McTague begins the journey with Enoch Powell, a Tory imperialist, driving through the Algerian desert in 1943. From the very birth of the European project, he argues, the British dilemma between sovereignty outside the club or influence within it was acute. The break of 2016, if not inevitable, was foretold many times.

Both schools have merit, but Bagehot finds a third view compelling: Brexit was a matter of inept timing. Mr (now Lord) Cameron made the risky gambit of a referendum near-suicidal by asking Britons to pass judgment on the European Union after its most perilous year. Jean-Claude Juncker, then the European Commission’s president, called it the polycrisis: an era in which the prospect of Brexit combined with a euro-zone debt crisis, a migrant crisis and Islamist terrorism to threaten the foundations of Europe. With such a context, perhaps the only surprise is that Leave’s victory, with 52% of the vote, was so narrow. That crisis forms the backdrop to the last quarter of Mr McTague’s account. In the public debate, it has been largely forgotten.

Revisit the continent that Lord Cameron, fresh from an election victory, toured in the summer of 2015 as he hawked his renegotiation plan. In Brussels, the mood was leaden—like the eve of the first world war, as Donald Tusk, the Polish prime minister and an EU bigwig, later put it.

Greece’s prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, called a referendum to defy the austere terms of a bail-out by his bankrupt country’s creditors. As cash machines ran dry, Grexit loomed—until, in an all-night summit, Mr Tsipras cracked, “waterboarded” by his fellow leaders, as one diplomat put it. For the British left, the breaking of his Syriza party left a foul taste. “It’s time to reclaim the Eurosceptic cause,” wrote Owen Jones, a *Guardian* columnist.

Greece was also the entry point for many of the 1m migrants who arrived in Europe in 2015, often in dinghies over the Aegean. The largest group were Syrians displaced by war. [*“Wir schaffen das!”*](#) said [Angela Merkel](#) in August, declaring Germany up for the challenge. Her European colleagues were not. Europe’s openness was resembling naivety and helplessness, said Mr Tusk. Eurosceptics crowed: Nigel Farage unveiled a poster of bedraggled migrants, entitled “Breaking point”.

The migrant crisis fused with another fear. In the 18 months before the British referendum, European citizens, some trained in Syria, inflicted atrocities at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a French

newspaper, in the Bataclan nightclub in Paris and on the Brussels metro. Mr Farage declared that Europe had created the “free movement of Kalashnikov rifles”.

The polycrisis, Mr Juncker observed, fed on itself and weakened Europe’s resolve. It also heightened the pressure on Lord Cameron’s renegotiation. But European leaders resented being asked to sort out the Conservative Party’s neuroses as they battled to save their project. At summit after summit, the British question fell to the bottom of the agenda, after the coffee and *petits fours*.

And it inverted the terms of the referendum. Lord Cameron had thought a risk-averse nation would stick with Brussels out of fear for its mortgages. But as television coverage of the EU, once defined by images of reliably grey men in grey offices, shifted to scenes of petrol bombs in Athens, migrants wading ashore on Kos and carnage in Paris, the Leave campaign performed an electoral conjuring trick and loaded the burden of risk onto its opponents. Brexit, it claimed, was the last lifeboat to preserve the status quo; staying in a crisis-riven bloc was the real danger. That was the meaning of “Take back control”. Or as the campaign’s less-well-remembered slogan put it: “Vote Leave is the safer option.”

I can see clearly now Remain has gone

Amnesia is understandable. It suits both sides of the referendum to inflate the supposed hypnotic genius of Dominic Cummings, or to endlessly relitigate the dubious claim emblazoned on the side of a bus. The reality, that running against the EU as the euro burned was playing politics on easy mode, is awkward for everyone. The Great Man theory is more flattering than dumb luck.

But amnesia distorts the debate about Britain’s future in Europe. Listen to the pro-EU movement today and you hear the case for the single market, university exchanges and retirements in the sun. It is a charming vision of Europe, but one cast in the early 1990s. The polycrisis marked the end of this innocent age. It put iron in the blood: the harshness meted out to Mr Tsipras would be visited on British ministers in the Brexit years. Brussels became a lot less about farm regulations and more about flexing geopolitical muscle: a Europe of events, not rules, as Luuk van Middelaar, a Dutch historian, puts it. New crises as a result of the pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine meant new forms of integration, far beyond the comfort zone of British governments.

And so the dilemma that Mr McTague traces to Algeria in 1943 grows sharper. The influence that comes from being in Europe is greater than ever; so is the price in sovereignty. Any attempt to reverse Brexit would need to embrace this new reality. Europe’s *annus horribilis* made Brexit unstoppable; the changes it brought may make rejoining unthinkable. ■

1.

- a) **According to the article, explain the two different views put forward in books about the causes of Brexit? (5)**
- b) **Summarise the third view of the cause of Brexit. (5)**
- c) **Explain two aspects of the ‘polycrisis’. (5)**
- d) **Why does the article think rejoining may be ‘unthinkable’? (5)**

(20)

The Guardian Website 5 July 2024 (edited)

UK general election 2024: five key points

Keir Starmer's Labour is heading for power with a large majority as voters punish Rishi Sunak's Conservatives

1. Labour on track for record-breaking election victory in the UK

Starmer's Labour was on course to achieve a remarkable turnaround from a disastrous result for his party 2019, with a landslide victory forecast to be roughly on a par with Tony Blair's first election win in 1997.

... Five years ago, few politicians or commentators expected Labour could recover so quickly, but the winning party was aided by a divided opposition in which insurgent rightwing party Nigel Farage's Reform UK took votes from the Conservatives weakened and tarnished by the unpopular premierships of Sunak predecessors Boris Johnson and Liz Truss.

2. It was more of an anti-Conservative vote, than a pro-Labour one

The Conservative vote collapsed, while the Labour vote increased only modestly. Sunak's party polled about 22.3% of the vote with more than two-thirds of the seats declared, a catastrophic fall of 20 percentage points from the 42.4% achieved in 2019.

... British voters had clearly not forgiven the Conservatives for a series of disasters, most recently a catastrophic mini-budget from Sunak's predecessor Liz Truss in September 2022, where unfunded tax cuts led to sharp rise in mortgage costs for ordinary Britons as interest rates soared because of concern about the health of the UK's public finances.

3. Scotland's independence movement took a body blow

The previously dominant Scottish National party was knocked back for the first time in a decade, setting back its struggle for independence. The SNP, which won 48 seats in Scotland in 2019, was forecast to win eight. Labour, which had won only one seat in 2019, had won 35 seats by 5am, including every seat in Glasgow.

4. Nigel Farage's hard-right Reform UK wins a handful of seats

The pro-Brexit, anti-immigration Nigel Farage won a seat in the UK parliament, at the eighth attempt, alongside three others, creating a small but potentially noisy bloc at Westminster. Though Farage, now the MP for Clacton, in the east of England, is already a familiar media figure, leading a small party in the Westminster parliament guarantees him more media exposure in the future.

5. British politics has become more volatile

Starmer's victory suggests there was no long-term realignment [as suggested by 2019's result], but rather that old tribal loyalties in British politics, where people vote habitually, are not as strong as they once were. British voters are quite prepared to judge politicians harshly if they are deemed to fail. A landslide victory in one election does not render defeat in the next impossible.

2. Using the source AND your own knowledge, explain why you think the Labour Party won the 2024 UK General Election and the Conservative Party lost. (25)

Please structure your answer clearly, focusing on the question. Conclude on what you think was the most important reason for Labour's victory.

You should spend about 25 minutes on your answer.



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