

# The implication of Brexit on Africa's regional integration: The case of the African Union

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## Abstract

Brexit in contemporary International Relations has noticeable implications that Africa and other relating states should tentatively be on the lookout, as such the study contends that Britain leaving the European Union (EU) not only imposes negative attributes to African states, economically, politically, structurally and socially, but draws questionable attributes to the advocacy of Africa's integration processes. Because of the diverse and multiple regional organizations, the study utilizes the African Union (AU) as an example to illustrate the impact Brexit will bear on regional institutions and equally impact on individual states' quest to continue integrating with other states. Numerous scholars have paid sufficient attention to the economic, geopolitical, structural, and social implications on both Europe and Africa. However, little scholarly interest has been directed to the perceptions held by Africa regarding Brexit and its multi-dimensional implications on Africa's regional integration project on the auspice of Britain leaving the EU. The qualitative study utilises secondary data to describe the perception solely held by Africa on the continuation of its integration while one of its funding states on integration projects is preparing itself to exit its supranational organization. The study gives lessons to sovereign states to learn either to advance their regional institutions or to advocate for national autonomy just as Britain is endeavoring. In examining Africa's perception amidst Brexit, the study argues that Britain's endeavor for national autonomy threatens the principles and confidence of 'deep' regional integration processes, as such, contributing significantly to the studying of Brexit's multi-dimensional implications on Africa.

**Keywords:** Brexit, AU, Regional Integration, National Autonomy, Perceptions

## Introduction

The phrase "Brexit" is simply understood throughout the study as a shorthand word that signifies the United Kingdom (UK) exiting the European Union (EU), according to Hunt and Wheeler (2017). The phrase is a combination of the words Britain and exit, which results in Brexit. A snapshot of the various incidences that caused the uproar of Brexit is provided particularly to set the scene and to contextualize the issue that the study attempts to understand and untangle in order to provide insight for states which would attempt to avoid the same mistakes or however, to assimilate the endeavors of the UK. Brexit has profound geopolitical, economic, and social implications for Africa. On the European continent, structural implications, in addition, can be noted for the process to manifest. Cutting across the European continent, the leave referendum has ignited studies that specifically focus on the consequences of Brexit and the impact on the theoretical study on regionalism; its practicality, and its promotion in the global community, more fundamentally in the case of Britain as EU's major actor and promoter for Africa's integration projects.

Since the inception of Brexit into world politics, the hurried scholarship on Britain preparing itself to exit the EU has majorly focused on economic, social, and political implications. Ansorg and Haastrup (2016) confirm this by stating that Brexit has profound geopolitical, economic, and social implications for Africa. Numerous scholars have paid sufficient attention to the economic, geopolitical, structural, and social implications on both Europe and Africa Troitiño, Kerikmäe, and Chochia (2018); Bulmer and Quaglia (2018); Kohnert (2018); Mold (2018); Wincott, Peterson, and Convery (2017); Ansorg and Haastrup (2016) and; Riley and Ghilès, (2016). However, little scholarly interest has been directed to the perceptions held by Africa regarding Brexit and its multi-dimensional implications on Africa's regional integration project on the auspice of Britain leaving the EU. The study intends to qualitatively assess the perception solely held by Africa on the continuation of its integration while one of the funding states on integration projects is preparing itself to exit the supranational organization. Africa's reality amidst Brexit possesses numerous questions central to regional studies as such the study aims to provide comprehensive insight into the perceptions held by African states on integration in the midst of Brexit.

The paper focuses on the literary work that various scholars have examined and documented on the multi-dimensional implications Africa is yet to brace itself for in the predicament of Britain leaving the EU. Despite the multifaceted implications that African states and the AU are yet to encounter, the study explores what Mold (2018) describes as an overlooked consequence of Brexit for Africa that could undermine the confidence of 'deep' regional integration processes.

### Theoretical Approach

The study adopts Andrew Moravcsik's (1993) contention of Liberal Intergovernmentalism theory to contextualize the significance of regionalism and integration as counteracted by the contention of anarchy and processes of negotiations and bargaining of Britain to exit the EU.

Moravcsik's (1993) argues that liberal intergovernmentalism views states as the main actors, and sees the EU as an international institution that can be studied by viewing states as the main actors in a situation of anarchy, where each state achieves its goal through negotiations and bargaining. Liberal intergovernmentalism specifically studies the process of these negotiations and bargaining between EU member states. The suitability and applicability of the theory to explaining Brexit are provided in the context of the AU's prospects in the 21st century.

### Theory vis-à-vis prospects of the African Union

Brexit poses a threat to the ideal perception held by African states in their continuous integration processes, projects and prospects of the integrated AU. On the other hand, the arguments held by Britain in leaving the EU arguably is anticipated to entice the integrated states to withdraw themselves from their respective organizations to strengthen their national autonomy. In this regard, rendering the advocacy of regionalism and integration impractical to their national interests. In how Troitiño *et al.*, (2018) explains the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) that the organization proposes a different model uniting Europe, one that is mainly based on trade and common agreements, however without integration or any loss of national independence, allows the UK to participate in various beneficial trade agreements without committing to integration.

Liberal intergovernmentalism theorists in their advocacy for states in an anarchic system argue for states to achieve their goals through negotiations and bargaining, however not compromising their national independence. This is because not many states are as readily willing to subordinate their national autonomy and independence. States are in the pursuit of advancing their economy. For instance, in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), South Africa is a regional

hegemon (Draper, 2016; Aldena and Schoeman, 2015 and Habib and Selinyane, 2006) and by far is the largest economy, with advanced technology and a population of 56 million, (Louw-Vaudran, 2018). The leave referendum may entice South Africa to exit SADC in an attempt to strengthen its national autonomy and its independence. Even so, South Africa as an unchallenged hegemonic leader in the SADC region is disputably less willing to subordinate its narrowly defined interests to the larger objective of maintaining a liberal international economy.

### Methodology and Significance

The study relied on secondary available materials that address the consequences of Brexit on Britain and Africa relations, and the multi-dimensional implications that African countries are yet to embrace themselves. The paper employed a descriptive analysis technique to qualitatively describe the perceptions held by Africa regarding Brexit and its multi-dimensional implications on Africa's regional integration projects on the auspice of Britain leaving the EU. In constructing and developing the paper; books, accredited journals, and online materials particularly on the multi-dimensional implications of Britain's exit from the European Union on Africa were analyzed in line with the aim objective of the study, paying specific attention to Africa's regionalism and integration (Thomas and Hodges, 2010). It is important to note that the exit of Britain from the EU undoubtedly questions the general perception of regional integration. The study sheds light on the vast knowledge of the multi-dimensional implications of Britain exiting the European Union on Africa, as such contributes significantly to the studying of Brexit and its diverse relations to Africa. The study further highlights Brexit as a threat to the principles and confidence of 'deep' regional integration processes that are encouraged across the globe. Regional integration may be achieved through economic ambitions, peace, and security as well as a for more political interconnectedness in the region.

### Understanding Brexit

In understanding Brexit, the paper takes an imperative attempt to provide a snapshot of various incidences that caused the uproar of Brexit. Various acts and incidents have ignited and compelled the UK to take this drastic decision of leaving the major supranational institution. The study reflects briefly on the causes of Brexit to shed light on other states to take note of as an advisory attempt to avoid the same mistakes or however, to assimilate the endeavors of the UK.

The reflection on the causes of Brexit is important because any discussion of Brexit would not be complete without discussing the factors that ignited the leave notion of Britain from the EU. According to Arnorsson and Zoega (2018), the advocates for Brexit claim that the arguments for Britain to leave the EU are centered on immigration and national autonomy. Norman (2005), explains that the concept of national autonomy means the self-governing of a particular state concerning its local and internal affairs. Riley and Ghilès (2016) explain that the idea of the UK being able to ultimately look after itself has accorded the country to set itself apart from the other European nations. Kohnert (2018) confirms this by stating that this deep-rooted sense of self-reliance by the UK leads to the country not being sympathetic to the European ideal.

The decision of the Blair government in 2003 that permitted the full freedom of movement rights to all the 2004 accession states had a significant impact on the deliberations of Britain to leave the EU (Riley and Ghilès, 2016). The scholars argue that the decision rested with only three states, the UK, Ireland and Sweden. The outcome of such a decision provided for full free movement, consequently leading to people seeking work in the UK from the European Economic Community (CEE) and Baltic States. As a result of this drastic increase in influx, the economic crisis intensified.

Due to the failure of the Eurozone in delivering growth across its 19 members, scholars such as Wincott *et al.* (2017); Riley and Ghilès (2016) argue that the consequence is embedded in the economy of the debtor nations which contracts sharply. Numerous outcomes can be observed, however the most pertinent is an increased number of people arriving from Southern Europe and Ireland. Riley and Ghilès, (2016) explain that since the UK was in control of its currency, debt and could deploy effective fiscal stabilizers, its economy rapidly redressed itself after the Euro-crisis. Although to its dismay, London then discovered that due to the Eurozone's addiction to fiscally rigid economic policies, the UK resulted as the employment shock absorber. It is important to note that the increased volume of people moving to the UK from the CEE states, and Southern Europe appears to have been a major factor in driving the Leave vote (Riley and Ghilès, 2016; Wincott *et al.*, 2017).

Although there exist other factors and attributes that scholars can qualify as having ignited Brexit, the UK given the fiscal policies that European states are subjected to, which crushed their economic outlook and hindered future generation, was not good news to the UK. Riley, and Ghilès (2016) observed the economies of the European states for the last decade and noted the harmful economic effects emanating from the fiscal policies have significantly hindered the legitimacy of the entire European project.

### Africa and UK relations

Although the primary focus is on Africa's perception on regional integration, the study acknowledges other implications that Brexit will bear on African states. Ansorg and Hastrup (2016) and Mold (2018) argue that the result of the leave referendum held on 23 June 2016, inflated multi-disciplinary scholarships illustrating the obscurities awaiting Africa, ranging significantly from geopolitics to economics including social basis.

Paying specific attention to the economic implications such as trade barriers, aggressive inflation, drastic decline in foreign direct investments and hostile budgetary gap, Tetlow and Stojanovic (2018), Mustafa *et al.*, (2020); Mold (2018) on the one hand, explains that African countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Egypt, for instance, which significantly rely on trade with the UK will consequently suffer due to Brexit in any event of an immediate economic recession. African countries will also experience the uncertainty that is perceived to arise due to the re-negotiation of economic partnerships once Brexit materializes. This process may, however, take years to be accomplished, leaving the poor countries to suffer a gradual economic collapse.

Brexit has implications for Africa, on a political basis, Ansorg and Hastrup (2016) posit that the exit from the European Union Common Security and Defence Policy will have detrimental effects on the EU's security practices in Africa. The construction of Peace and Security in Africa is also implicated, this is because the effects will extend to the EU-led support in Africa, and equally affecting the donors' abilities, on the other hand, to continue maintaining the necessary support in this area.

### Brexit on the African Union

Brexit threatens the AU's structure, political, Socio-political, and economic outlook in both direct and indirect ways. The major changes might be felt or are already being felt in a short period. The membership of the UK in the EU has influenced some of the trade agreements which were between the EU and the AU (including with individual AU member countries). The Cotonou Agreement of 2000 defines the trade relations between the EU and Africa, Anderson and Wittwer (2017) explain that Britain played an important role in the agreement.

There are conjectures that the large economies of Africa will suffer due to Brexit. The UK's Minister for Africa has confirmed that relations with the continent will improve without the burden of the EU, nonetheless, agrees that the largest economies of Africa are likely to suffer. South Africa is also experiencing the effects that Africa's largest economies are enduring (Aniche, 2020).

According to Davies (2016), "the most internationally traded African currency; the South African rand is experiencing bumpy rides in the wake of the UK's decision to leave the EU". The South African rand has lost more than 8% against the US dollar because of Brexit. Together with its peers on the London Stock Exchange, a lot of companies in South Africa that are dual-listed in Johannesburg and London are being attacked (Mold, 2018). Nigeria, another big economy in Africa that trades with the UK and EU, is also significantly affected. The bilateral trade relations between Nigeria and the UK are valued at close to 8.3 billion dollars. The data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics show that the UK was Nigeria's biggest source of foreign investment during 2015. The economy of Nigeria on the occasion of a recession in the UK will crash due to Brexit (Haastrup, 2016).

Mold (2018) argues that when it comes to aid, the UK is the largest supporter of the EU aid programs in Africa, both financially and politically. While the UK honors its aid commitments to African states, a different attitude to aid might bring development to African countries bearing in mind that the majority of poverty-stricken African countries depend on EU aid. Concerning the socio-political consequences, various countries look up to Britain regarding independence, the quest for leave referendum provoked and strengthened the call for self-determination in other AU states, especially Nigeria. Following the Brexit pattern, "the pro-Biafra protestors aptly made a coinage #Biafraexit and fuelled the referendum call" (Mude and Chigora, 2017).

### **Absences of the UK in EU negotiations on policy.**

The exit of Britain from the EU will have direct implications on economic relations including development of aid, however, the withdrawal will also be felt indirectly in negotiations of EU's foreign policies vis-à-vis African states. The EU's relationship with developing countries has grown in terms of including former British colonies such as Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Group of States (ACP) since Britain entered the Common Market. It is in this relationship that the EU involved its member states, making the EU the largest aid donor in the whole world (Kordos, 2019). The African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States is a respectable trading bloc and has facilitated a smooth operation between the developing countries. The relationship between the EU and ACP has given all the EU member states an opportunity to benefit better and have access to these markets while also gaining some leverage in the new negotiations of international trades. The EU had negotiations as one bloc with third parties, this meant that every benefit enjoyed by African states in terms of preferential access will not be available for the UK (Bergin and Smit, 2017). Britain's quest to leave the EU pushed for the need to renegotiate its economic agreements with African countries although the process may take years. For the AU, the UK's departure from the EU means a loss of a third partner voice within the EU. For instant, Britain's government has been supporting the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) in negotiations with Africa, it has been advocating for these countries and ensuring that they are compensated where they lost due to a new model of cooperation. Therefore, the departure of the UK means that other European countries will be the ones dominating in these negotiations (Thomson, 2017).

### **Britain's National Autonomy a threat to Regional Integration?**

According to Gilpin (1987), the uncertainty of providing insight to whether any government is willing to subordinate its national autonomy and independence in economic matters in the interest of international economic stability or whether international cooperation is possible for long in a

capitalist world economy gives scholars the impression that undermines the practice of regionalism and integration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gilpin (1987) further probes whether cooperation can be achieved without an unchallenged hegemonic leader willing to subordinate its narrowly defined interests to the larger objective of maintaining a liberal international economy.

In conjunction with Brexit, Troitiño *et al.*, (2018) explains that the United Kingdom during the preliminary negotiations proposed instead of a common market, a common trade area for industrial goods that excludes agricultural production and national autonomy to negotiate trade agreements with other partners in order to protect the British interest in the world and participate in an European market. Arguably, if Brexit is perceived as a failure in the process of regional integration, then it certainly problematizes the continued consolidation of integration on the African continent.

### African Union quest for Regional Integration

According to Asmelash and Henke (2016) the AU in advancing regional integration established frameworks such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2002 and the Millennium Integration Plan, which was launched in 2009 to coordinate convergence and collaboration among the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) towards achieving the ultimate objective of the African Economic Community (AEC). In addition, Asmelash and Henke (2016) explain that the AU adopted Agenda 2063, a framework document that outlines the gradual creation of a continent that is fully integrated, both economically and politically. Other major steps towards advancing and strengthening regional integration in Africa, the AU signed the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (TFTA), the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) negotiations as well as the launching of the AU Passport. Asmelash and Henke (2016) clarify that these efforts by the AU represent positive progress to justify the view that Africa's regional integration efforts are on track.

Despite the fact that Africa's regional integration efforts are on the track, challenges continue to impede the integration developments. This is noted from the slow implementation rates at national levels, security challenges in the form of rebellions, post-electoral violence, resource-induced conflicts that continue to undermine integration efforts on the continent (Asmelash and Henke, 2016). Added to the list, the lack of commitment from African states to cede power to regional communities has continued to hamper the capacity and performance of the RECs in leading the integration processes.

### Brexit vis-à-vis Africa's Integration Projects

Ansorg and Haastrup (2016) are of the view that Brexit defies the European project of integration and the institution's credibility in advocating for regional integration in both Africa and globally. The scholars further suggest that Brexit on the bright side nevertheless provides an opportunistic platform for African states to learn the process and pace of regional integration in the context of Africa. Although having assessed the East African Community (EAC), Mold (2018) confirms this by arguing that possibly as the most fundamental factor for the EAC, Brexit has arguably dealt a serious blow to confidence in the regional integration processes. On the contrary, Troitiño *et al.*, (2018) argue that various governments even though Britain is fostering its preparations to leave the EU, are likely to further embrace intergovernmentalism as protection from domestic populist forces.

Regional integration in Africa is understood as fundamental to increasing intra-Africa trade, peace, sustainability, and inclusion, and to decreasing the violent conflicts that are so devastating for people and states on the continent. Ansorg and Haastrup (2016) argue that if Brexit is perceived as a failure in the process of regional integration, then it certainly problematizes the continued consolidation of integration in the continent.

Furthermore, taking into account the historical context of Africa–EU relations, Brexit is, on the one hand, a sentimental loss. After all, it was the British entry into the European Community that brought about the largest trans-regional initiative in the world via the EU–ACP relationship, a cornerstone of Africa’s relationship with Europe as well as its economic and development agenda (Ansorg and Haastrup, 2016).

The argument held by Mold (2018) provides a more comprehensive understanding of the intricacies and politics of the European Union (EU) as a perceived functional and operational supranational organization. The organization has been a long-standing model of integration, however, Mold (2018) negates the model’s successes and functionality. This disapproval is noted in that the organization has suffered its fair share of setbacks, such as the European exchange-rate mechanism (ERM) crisis of the early 1990s, and the Euro-crisis of 2011. Much of the consideration of this model is rather argued more for the scale of its ambition, rather than operability. As compared to the free-trade deals such as the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), Mold (2018) argues that the European Union (EU) represents a rather bold project of the political and economic union, which he labels as “deep integration”. However, in the predicament of Britain that contends and craves for national autonomy, the exit of Britain from the EU contradicts the intended principles of integration. In this regard, it is not ideal for regional integration processes to be institutionalized elsewhere if the European project begins to be unstable.

Mold’s (2018) evaluation of *The consequences of Brexit for Africa: The case of the East African Community* illustrates that the EAC is commonly recognized as one of the most ambitious programs of regional integration in Africa which contemplates both economic and political union. In conjunction with the perception held by Africa to regional integration, the ambitious EAC may attentively be questioned by the Brexit deal. That is, member states of the EAC may see the need to withdraw from the integration, and equally pursue national autonomy if held strongly by the states or as perceived to be beneficial to Britain after the leave referendum has materialized.

## Conclusion

The perceived continuation of regionalism and integration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cuts across as having various ways in which it is achieved. Britain that is anticipated to exit the EU arguably contests for national autonomy and puts forward a rather different model uniting Europe, one that is mainly based on trade and common agreements, however without integration or any loss of national independence. Various causes that have ignited and propelled Britain to negotiate and bargain with EU’s member states to leave the organization have been discussed noting arguments centered on immigration and national autonomy as major factors in the frontline. The study found that Britain’s quest for self-sufficiency arguably entices integrated states to withdraw from their respective institutions and endeavor on trade and common agreements and selectively not integrating or posing any threats to states’ national independence. The perceptions held by African states towards integrating are challenged by Britain’s leave referendum. On the condition that Brexit is understood as a failure in the process of regional integration, the certainty of regional integration having complications threatens integrated states to continue consolidating their integration on their respective continents.

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