UK votes for Brexit: What just happened -- and what could be next?

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**London (CNN)**As dawn broke over the UK Friday, Britons woke to the tremors of a political earthquake the likes of which most had never felt before.

After one of the bitterest political campaigns in recent UK history, voters backed a British exit -- a "Brexit" -- from the European Union, turning their back on decades of peaceful cooperation with neighbors across the English Channel in favor of isolationism.

Respected political commentators and regular Joes were quick to flag up the revolutionary mood as the country faced up to a stunned "morning after" that left many on social media, over breakfast tables and around office water coolers asking "WTF?"

"This is as close to a revolution as we've experienced in my lifetime. And it's only just begun," tweeted Westminster correspondent turned presenter Nick Robinson.

The referendum was the climax of months of angry posturing over its future inside or outside of the EU. Arguments became increasingly heated in the weeks leading up to the vote as the "Leave" and "Remain" teams traded barbs about immigration and racism, wealth and privilege.

News of the "Vote Leave" win was greeted with jubilation by those who have fought long and hard for a rethink of Britain's links to the current 28 member bloc, and who argued it was time to "take back control" from the bureaucrats in Brussels.

Addressing "Leave" supporters at a results party in London as UK broadcasters began to call the referendum results in their favor, UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader Nigel Farage said the country was marking its "Independence Day."

"Ladies and gentlemen, dare to dream that the dawn is breaking on an independent United Kingdom," he said. "I hope this victory brings down this failed project ... Let's get rid of ... Brussels and all that has gone wrong. Let June 23 go down in history as our Independence Day."

But for those who had campaigned in favor of remaining in the EU, the referendum result -- which the "Leave" campaign won by a narrow -- but wider than predicted -- majority was a profound shock.

Green MP [Caroline Lucas tweeted that the verdict was "devastating"](https://twitter.com/CarolineLucas/status/746212643761885190) and a "massive wake-up call to Westminster," urging all concerned to "find ways to heal our broken democracy."

For some there was genuine fear over what the final tally said about Britain in 2016, and about the country's apparent decision to close its doors to anyone it considers "outsiders."

Historian Simon Schama described the results as a "catastrophe," and warned of bleak times ahead if the UK does formally split from the EU.

"It's a catastrophe ... for Europe," he told CNN. "We're on a very dangerous knife edge about the integrity and coherence of Europe.

"[We're] at one of those moments, my historian's nose tells me, [that] if this result stays and Britain does leave the union we're entering a very dark and exceptionally dangerous period in European and world history too."

For others, there was concern over what it is likely to mean for the country's future.

"I think people are going to wake up and think 'Oh my god, what's happening now?'" said Alastair Campbell, former communications adviser to Tony Blair. "There are so many unknowns."

The final results map highlights a telling split between London and the rest of England and Wales.

That gap was also apparent during the referendum campaign, with members of the "Leave" team accusing the capital's "elite" of being out of touch with what Nigel Farage called "real people ... ordinary people ... decent people."

Faced with an ever growing list of prominent personalities, captains of industry, world leaders and famous figures backing the "Remain" cause, Conservative MP Michael Gove, seen as the brains behind the "Vote Leave" campaign, told Sky News: "[I think people in this country have had enough of experts](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/06/eu-referendum-who-needs-experts-when-weve-got-michael-gove/)."

"London is a very distant place, a different country at times," Blackpool North MP Paul Maynard told CNN before the referendum, warning that voters' feelings of disempowerment was likely to impact on the result. "If supposedly 'important' people in London are telling them to do something, it may make them do the opposite."

The seismic difference of opinion between voters in England and Wales and those in Scotland and Northern Ireland has led to concerns that the United Kingdom may not be "united" for very much longer.

"If this result holds, it's the end of Britain, it's as simple as that," said Simon Schama.