

Nigel Farage

British politician

Nigel Farage, in full Nigel Paul Farage, (born April 3, 1964, London, England), British politician who served as a member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2020. He led the populist libertarian United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) from 2006 to 2009 and again from 2010 to 2016. In 2019 he launched the Brexit Party.



Early life and the rise of UKIP

Farage was born into a prosperous family—his father was a stockbroker—and attended Dulwich College, a prestigious private school in London. At age 18, instead of pursuing a university education, he became a commodities trader. Initially a Conservative, he joined the newly formed UKIP when it was created in 1993 in order to support the Euroskeptical party’s campaign for Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union. He was elected to the European Parliament in 1999 and was re-elected in 2004 and 2009.

After becoming party leader in 2006, Farage campaigned for UKIP to stop focusing on a single issue and to develop policies on a broad range of economic and social issues, including immigration. He was helped by an engaging personality and (for many voters) by his reputation as someone who defied “political correctness” by smoking and drinking and enjoying both. Under his leadership UKIP became the first British party in modern times to propose nationalist policies without being labelled neofascist (branding that had prevented such parties as the National Front and the British National Party from advancing from isolated and short-lived electoral success to a more prominent role in national politics).

Farage and the Brexit vote

Ahead of the June 23, 2016, “in or out” EU referendum, Farage cited Europe’s ongoing migrant crisis and terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels as evidence for Britain’s need to “go it alone.” Polling ahead of the contest indicated a tight race, and both Cameron and Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn made the case for continued EU membership. In the event, 52 percent of voters supported a “Brexit” from the EU, a result that Farage heralded as Britain’s “independence day.” Two weeks after the referendum, Farage again announced his resignation as UKIP leader, saying that his “political ambition has been achieved.”

The Brexit Party

Farage’s Brexit Party reaped enormous gains from the ruins of UKIP, and it claimed nearly one-third of the votes in the EU Parliament elections, winning 29 seats. The Conservatives won just four seats, and May’s domestic political situation looked hopeless. The day after the elections, she announced that she would resign as Conservative Party leader. Boris Johnson succeeded her as prime minister in July 2019.

During the December 12, 2019, general election, while the Brexit Party failed to claim a single seat, winning just 2 percent of the vote, the Conservatives won a landslide victory, a result that virtually guaranteed the passage of Johnson’s Brexit plan. While the votes were still being tallied, Farage announced that he planned to travel to the United States to speak at rallies for the 2020 reelection campaign of U.S. Pres. Donald Trump. On January 29, 2020, two days before the United Kingdom’s scheduled departure from the European Union, Farage concluded his two-decade tenure in the European Parliament with an address attacking that body and cataloging the supposed benefits of populism. His speech was cut off prematurely when he and the rest of the Brexit Party delegation began waving Union flags, a violation of parliamentary rules, and a jovial Farage led his group from the room.