

# BREXIT AND PUBLIC OPINION



The **UK** in a  
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## Foreword

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of public opinion when it comes to Brexit. The decision to leave the EU was itself, of course, the result of a public vote. And as the Brexit process rolls on, both sides anxiously parse every survey for evidence of what the public now thinks. Some people continue to believe that a significant shift in public opinion might allow the decision made in June 2016 to be reconsidered.

In what follows, a team of experts on public opinion considers not only what happened in the referendum itself, but also what has taken place in terms of public attitudes subsequently. I'm delighted that we've been able to bring together some of the best minds working on public attitudes to make this contribution to the debate.

I'm immensely grateful to all those who contributed to this report. As ever, they've tolerated my questions and comments with efficient good humour. Particular thanks to Alan Wager, for whom putting together this report has been something of a baptism of fire. And also to John-Paul Salter, for his fine proofing work.

***Professor Anand Menon***

*The UK in a Changing Europe*

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# Brexit and Public Opinion

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## Contents

Introduction – <i>Anand Menon</i> .....	4
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### **Analysing the Referendum**

Brexit and British politics – <i>Anand Menon and Alan Wager</i> .....	6
Minority ethnic attitudes and the 2016 EU referendum – <i>Neema Begum</i> .....	9
Religion in the EU referendum – <i>Ekaterina Kolpinskaya and Stuart Fox</i> .....	12

### **New Cleavages and Emerging Identities**

Voting in the 2017 general election: a Brexit election? – <i>Geoffrey Evans</i> .....	15
Emerging Brexit identities – <i>Sara B Hobolt, Thomas Leeper and James Tilley</i> .....	18
Brexit and identity politics – <i>Maria Sobolewska and Robert Ford</i> .....	21
The perceived costs and benefits of Brexit – <i>Matthew Goodwin</i> .....	24

### **The Brexit Negotiations**

Party members – <i>Tim Bale, Monica Poletti and Paul Webb</i> .....	27
MPs – <i>Philip Cowley and Alan Wager</i> .....	29
The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit – <i>Alan Renwick</i> .....	32
Should policies be decided at the European, national or sub-national level? – <i>Noah Carl and Anthony Heath</i> .....	35
Sovereignty and cooperation: different dimensions of Brexit – <i>Lindsay Richards and Anthony Heath</i> .....	38
Immigration – <i>John Curtice</i> .....	40

### **Nations and Regions**

Towns and Cities – <i>Will Jennings, Gerry Stoker and Ian Warren</i> .....	43
Scotland – <i>Ian Montagu</i> .....	47
Wales – <i>Roger Scully</i> .....	50
Northern Ireland – <i>John Garry</i> .....	53

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# Introduction

**Anand Menon**

Britain is changing. Not only has Brexit crashed on the political agenda, but the referendum that produced it has disturbed numerous other aspects of public opinion. In what follows, colleagues present their research in an attempt to make sense of this complicated and fluid picture.

There is no shortage of books and articles examining the referendum itself, but there is still more to be learnt. To this end, we begin with some articles looking back at the vote of June 2016. Alan Wager and I emphasize the degree to which the vote laid bare, and in some cases hardened, existing divisions in British society whilst overlaying the Brexit divide upon them.

Neema Begum looks at voting patterns amongst black and minority ethnic voters. Whilst these largely mirror those of the population as whole, questions of race shaped attitudes in contradictory ways. Resentment at the preferential treatment afforded to Europeans induced some people to support Leave, while distaste at what was seen as the anti (non-white) immigrant tone of the Leave campaign (rather than any fondness for the EU) persuaded others to back Remain.

Similarly, whilst the role of religion has been generally neglected, it is worthy of note that Anglicans were more likely to vote Leave than other religions. As far as we can tell, this is due to both historical suspicion of transnational institutions (not least the Catholic Church) and the close identification of the Church of England with national identity. That being said, there remains a riddle to be solved in that even British Catholics seem to have been more hostile to the EU than the non-religious.

But of course it is the impact of the referendum on public opinion thereafter that is of most interest. Geoffrey Evans underlines the way in which Brexit played out in the 2017 election, undermining the traditional social divisions underlying British politics. Education (itself closely related to social and cultural values) emerged as an important driver of electoral choice.

No one knows to what extent these divisions will remain drivers of electoral choice, but Sara Hobolt and her team argue that the new Brexit identities show no sign of dissipating any time soon. Some 35% of people self-identify as Leavers, and 40% as Remainers. And each group seems to be entrenched, with these identities driving animus towards the other group. Their findings are reinforced by those that Roger Scully reports from Wales, where Leavers and Remainers are every bit as divided as they were during the referendum, and are equally divided in terms of what they want Brexit to mean.

These shifting sands of opinion lead to two substantive sets of questions. First, what might these various divisions mean for the Brexit negotiations themselves? Second, what are the implications for the future of our politics and our country?

In terms of the first, research by Tim Bale, Monica Poletti and Paul Webb suggests that both major parties will face some problems in pursuing policies that meet with the approval of their members during the Brexit end game. Some 25% of Conservative members favour staying in the single market,

along with a whopping 87% of Labour members – pitting them against their own party leaderships. Within Parliament itself, the respective leaderships confront MPs that disagree with their stances. 63% of Conservative MPs oppose any role for the ECJ after March 2019, in contrast to the position adopted by Ministers on transition. Meanwhile, Labour MPs overwhelmingly favour continued membership of the single market.

Alan Renwick adds another layer of complexity. The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit revealed a strong preference on the part of participants for minimizing harm to the economy. The majority favoured either remaining in the single market or a comprehensive trade deal to any of the available alternatives. Meanwhile, on immigration, the Assembly came out in favour of a targeted approach, with a majority favouring the maintenance of free movement whilst employing those controls available under its rules.

Turning to survey driven work, Lindsay Richards and Anthony Heath reveal that the public supports combinations of outcomes that are not generally thought to be on the table in the Brexit negotiations. John Curtice, for his part, underlines the continuing importance of controlling immigration for many voters, although ultimately Remain and Leave voters disagree as to whether ending freedom of movement is more important than securing access to the EU single market.

And equally there are differences of opinion on how the British state should deal with the consequences of Brexit. Noah Carl and Anthony Heath highlight striking divergences between the Scots and Northern Irish and the English in particular as to the most appropriate level of decision making – national or subnational – for taxation, immigration, agriculture and fisheries, and the environment.

Yet this does not mean, as Ian Montagu illustrates, that levels of Euroscepticism are all that different between England and Scotland. Nor that the Scots take a markedly divergent stance on what Brexit should look like. In contrast, both Leavers and Remainers in Northern Ireland are united in their desire to avoid a hard border between north and south, a desire that will haunt the negotiations going forwards.

Turning to matters of substantive policy, Maria Sobolewska and Rob Ford illustrate that the 'diversity divide' does not correspond neatly to divisions in public opinion over immigration. Equally, however, they point to the link between views about ethnic equality and those over the Brexit referendum as a warning about the possibility of the kind of 'culture wars' familiar from American political debates. Matthew Goodwin implies something similar with his argument that identity politics loomed large in the referendum.

On top of values we can add geography. Will Jennings, Gerry Stoker and Ian Warren underline the growing divide between towns and cities that became apparent in the referendum outcome and is also reflected in their divergent economic fortunes. This is complicated by the way in which Brexit has altered the outlooks of city and town dwellers, the former becoming more pessimistic and the latter slightly more optimistic about the future.

All in all, the picture that emerges is complex and messy. But we desperately need to get a grasp of it and of its implications, in order that post-Brexit developments enjoy the support of as many people as possible.

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# Analysing the Referendum

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## Brexit and British politics

**Anand Menon and Alan Wager**

It's common to hear that Brexit has changed everything. And as with all such clichés, there is both an element of exaggeration and an element of truth to the claim. The decision of British voters to leave the EU has had a fundamental effect in both revealing and deepening existing cleavages in British public opinion, and opening up new ones.

Studying public opinion is valuable for two reasons. Clearly, it gives an insight into the politics of the here and now. But it also allows for evidenced-based introspection about how we got here. The referendum brought to the fore many of the social, political and economic divides in the UK that had long gone unaddressed or even unnoticed.

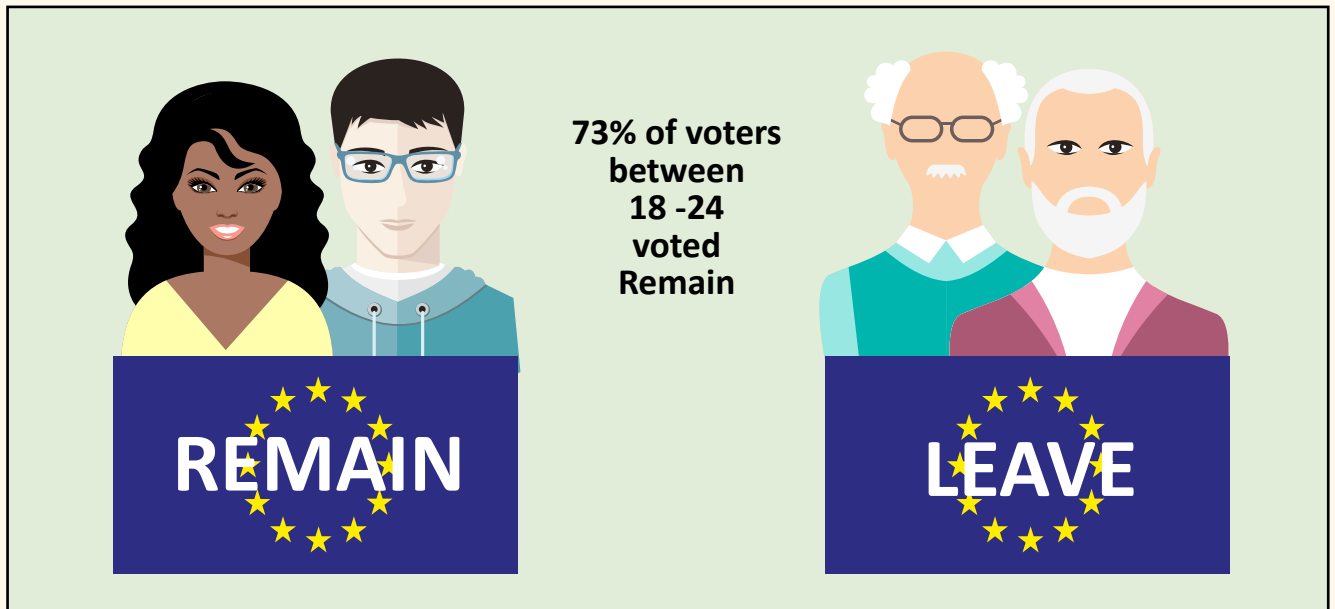
The idea that those who voted for Brexit represented the economically 'left-behind' contains a kernel of truth. Even when accounting for age, region, religion, race, gender and housing, a voter was 10% more likely to vote Leave if they were working class. But the claim also represents an over-simplification. After all, the declining size of the working class in the UK means a substantial number of middle class voters had to have voted Leave. According to the British Election Study (BES), only 21% of Leave votes came from those with 'routine' or 'semi-routine' jobs. Indeed, it was the middle classes whose support was most important for Brexit – they made up 59% of the Leave voters.

Since the referendum, socio-economic class has in fact become a much less obvious driver of electoral support than it once was. Far from happening overnight, however, this was the acceleration of long-term trends. Support among working class and blue collar voters had drifted away from Labour for some time. In 2010, for the first time, middle class Labour voters outnumbered working class Labour voters. In 2015, the working class shift was reflected in UKIP's electoral surge. And, according to [YouGov](#), the Conservative working class vote surged from 32% in 2015 to 44% in 2017. At the recent general election, if you lived in a household where the main breadwinner worked in skilled manual labour, you were more likely, by 47% to 40%, to vote for the Conservatives than the Labour Party.

While these shifts are important, socio-economic background was not the clearest indicator of how people voted. Rather, your age mattered more than your job. Some 73% of 18 to 24 year olds [voted Remain](#). They were also notably less likely to vote than older voters, but this difference in turnout was not decisive. BES surveys have suggested that, in order to have overturned the result, a startling 97% of under 45s would have had to make it to the ballot box, as opposed to the 65% who actually voted.

Since the referendum, this generation gap has continued to mark our politics. The 2017 general election saw the largest gap in how different generations voted that has ever been measured in Britain. What

particularly confounded pollsters was the fact that gap in rates of turnout between young and old narrowed significantly. According to the [British Election Study](#), if you were a registered voter aged 45 to 54 years old in 2005 you were 26.7% more likely to vote than if you were 18 to 24. That gap has consistently narrowed since, and was just 4% in 2017.



These socio-economic and generational factors are both intrinsically linked to education. While 72% of people with no qualifications voted Leave, only 35% of people with a degree did. Over half of the total votes that Remain received were from voters with a degree. Young people and those in higher socio-economic brackets are more likely to have had access to higher education, but a gap of 30% persisted, even when other factors such as age and region were accounted for. This is another trend that extended into the general election campaign: in 2015 YouGov calculated that Cameron's Conservative Party won among graduates by 1%. In 2017 Labour won by 17% among those educated to degree level.

Perhaps the most interesting spatial dimension of the Brexit vote was the sharp contrast between cities and their surrounding towns, especially in the North. For example, Yorkshire and the Humber voted Leave by a 16% margin. A majority of voters in Leeds voted Remain; Wakefield, a 10-minute train ride away, voted Leave by a 30% margin. The referendum revealed a longstanding tension between major cities, at ease with immigration and globalisation, and deindustrialised towns that have suffered most from the effects of economic decline, and political negligence. If the referendum laid bare this geographical division, the general election of 2017 was proof of its persistence. As [Will Jennings](#) has shown, the electoral swing towards the Labour Party was over 10% in cities but less than half that - 4.1% - in small towns.

And, on top of all this, there is identity. [NatCen](#) found that 66% of those with socially conservative views voted Leave, and just 18% of social liberals. It is interesting that, by looking at data from the BES, some 80% of the votes cast in June 2016 could have been anticipated by voters' stance on the EU when asked in 2010.

This has to a degree engendered a post-referendum politics in Britain based on social identity, hinging in part on voters' attitudes to Brexit. Labour gained most strongly in areas – most emblematically, Canterbury and Kensington – that backed Remain. Conservative gains, where they were, were in areas with large Leave votes – most notably, Mansfield, which had voted 70.9% for Leave. Given that, it is unsurprising that the [BES](#) found Brexit was the most important factor identified by voters in the 2017 general election.

And these attitudes may well prove sticky. Opinions about the EU were fundamentally about people's identity. For the moment – as Sara Hobolt, Thomas Lepper and James Tilley show – the referendum has provided each side with a new tribe – Leavers and Remainers. And one thing we know about identities is that they do not easily shift. Eighteen months on from the referendum, its effects on our politics show no sign of dissipating.



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# Minority ethnic attitudes and the 2016 EU referendum

Neema Begum

“I assumed it was a collective wind-up when almost every Asian I met said to me that they would be voting for Brexit.” Such was [Robert Peston’s](#) reaction when confronted in Leicester by a number of ethnic minority voters planning to vote Leave. In fact, ethnic minorities voted overwhelmingly to Remain in the EU, but this obscures significant differences between and within [minority groups](#).

Using Understanding Society’s early-release data we can gain a better understanding of attitudes toward EU membership among ethnic groups. White British were the most pro-Leave, followed by those of Indian background who were almost twice as likely to support Leave as other minority groups. There were much higher levels of support for Remain amongst Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Black Caribbean and Black African groups - on average a quarter being more pro-Leave than Remain. Research by [Martin, Sobolewska et al.](#) also found that controlling for party preference did not affect these differences between ethnic minority groups. Moreover, the [White British respondents](#) in the survey who said their ethnic identity was important to who they are were more likely to be pro-Leave, whereas this had no significant effect for members of the other ethnic groups.



This analysis draws on primary research based on focus groups and interviews with Remain and Leave voters of white and ethnic minority background. The qualitative analysis revealed several complex factors interacting with ethnicity to influence voting patterns.

### **BAME Remainer motivations**

The motivations of those ethnic minority voters who backed Remain were broadly in line with the population as a whole. Support for Remain was strongest amongst younger ethnic minority voters with degrees and in more professional occupations; Remainers also tended to be female and British-born. Though some were ambivalent towards the EU, ethnic minority Remain voters were more likely to be positive about Britain being part of the EU, and to have had more positive contact with EU migrants. They also placed greater emphasis on rights and environmental regulation than did Leave voters, and less on national identity and sovereignty, associating post-war peace in Europe with the EU as an institution. Ethnic minority Remain voters were also more likely to be pro-immigration, and in favour of freedom of movement.

One factor that differentiated ethnic minority Remain voters from their white equivalents was the strength of their reaction to what they saw as the xenophobic and anti-immigrant tone of the Leave campaigns. In this sense, a Remain vote was more a vote against Leave than an endorsement of the EU. Many saw the referendum as unleashing a backlash against diversity that was directed against non-whites. This is consistent with the Runnymede Trust's report, [\*This is Still About Us\*](#), which found that ethnic minorities – even when British-born – felt they were the targets of the immigration debate. Slogans such as 'take back control' and 'make Britain great again' were less appealing to ethnic minority Remain voters, who associated them with nostalgia for empire and a longing for a 'pre-immigration white era' on the part of the Leave campaign. Even the emphasis on sovereignty was interpreted by some as a cipher for postcolonial nostalgia.

### **BAME Brexiteers**

Although fewer BAME people voted Leave, among this group the referendum acted as an outlet for strongly-held grievances. These voters felt Britain was being controlled by the EU. In particular, they were concerned about the EU overriding UK law and imposing 'unnecessary' red tape, while free movement was thought to undermine the UK's ability to govern its borders. Ethnic minority Leave voters were more likely to be male, older, and foreign born. They were also less likely to have taken advantage of the ability to travel to, live or work in EU countries. Some ethnic minority Leavers felt other member states were more racist or Islamophobic, and that minority rights were better protected in Britain. Some female Muslim Leave voters more concerned by the hijab and burkini bans put in place in some member states than they were reassured by EU attempts to promote gender equality.

The ethnic minority Leave participants in this study raised concerns about immigration, particularly Eastern European, which they felt increased pressures on public services and strained community relations. There was also resentment concerning the apparent ease with which European migrants could enter the UK, but also get work and access benefits. For some, this stood in stark contrast to the

situation of immigrants from the Commonwealth, not least when it came to the right to bring spouses or staff from non-EU countries. As such, the referendum revealed [tensions between longer-settled BAME groups and newer Eastern European arrivals](#).

Europe was conceived of by some as a 'white Fortress', permitting white immigration while obstructing the entry of non-whites. Some respondents saw evidence of this in the EU's response to the refugee crisis. There was also criticism of specific EU policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy, which were seen as disadvantaging developing countries in Africa and Asia. Leaving the EU, it was felt, would increase trade and migration between the UK and the Commonwealth.

## Conclusion

The referendum has had significant implications for Britain's ethnic minorities. The [rise in hate crimes following the referendum](#) led many of the respondents in this study to feel their place in British society was being questioned. Some ethnic minority Leave voters said they regretted voting the way they did as a result of the increase in racial violence. BAME support for Brexit has been interpreted as [contrary to their interests](#), and this qualitative research demonstrates a heterogeneity in attitudes toward EU membership which transcend traditional party lines.

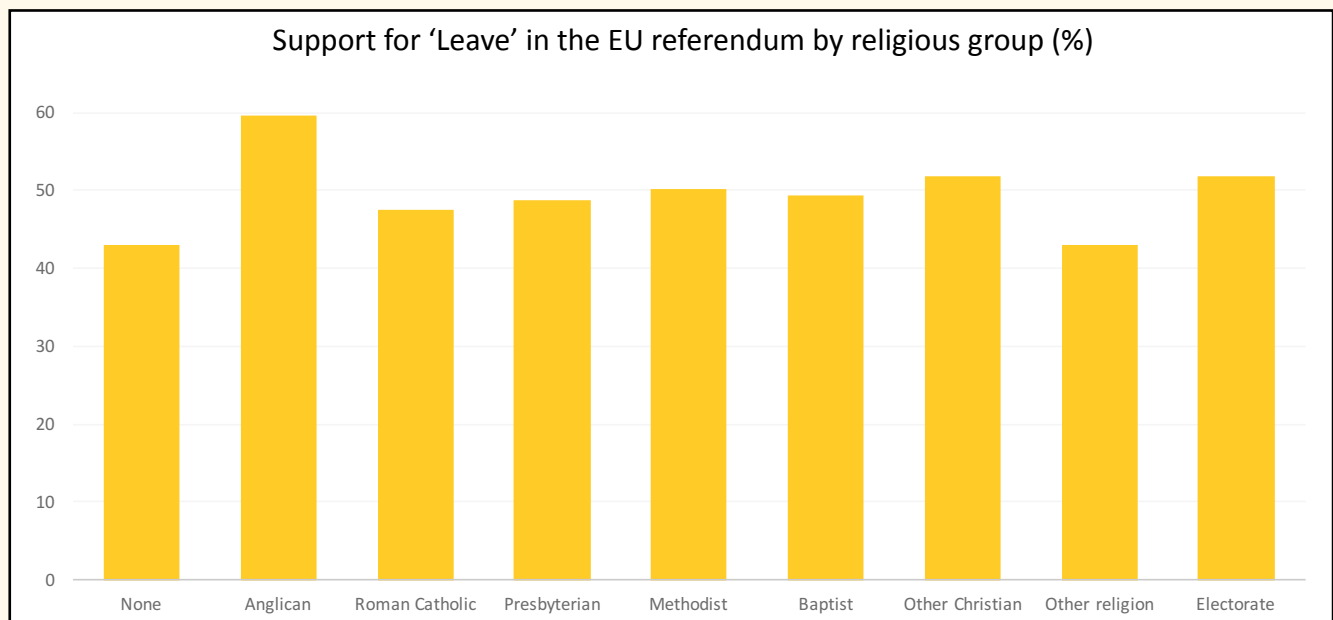
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# Religion in the EU referendum

**Ekaterina Kolpinskaya and Stuart Fox**

Religion is generally assumed to play only a minor role in shaping political behaviour and attitudes in Britain. However, a growing number of studies highlight its continuing importance in explaining vote choices, ideological beliefs and the way we participate in politics - and several have shown that religious affiliation is linked with attitudes to EU membership. Our research shows that not only is this true in Britain as well (our data did not examine Northern Ireland), but also that religion played a small but important role in shaping voters' choices in the EU referendum.

As the table below illustrates, according to the British Election Study (BES) 60% of Anglicans supported Brexit in the referendum, compared to 48% of Catholics, and 43% of those with no religious affiliation. Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists were split more or less evenly, and while there was insufficient data to look at the preferences of specific non-Christian religions, they tended to support remaining in the EU, with only 43% voting for Brexit. Moreover, we found that many of these differences, and particularly the greater tendency of Anglicans to vote Leave, persisted even after accounting for factors more commonly associated with support for Brexit, such as education, economic deprivation, social class, age and party political support.



We traced these differences to the tendency of different Christian groups to be more or less Eurosceptic. We looked at two different dimensions of Euroscepticism: utilitarian Euroscepticism, which is based around voters' negative assessments of the policy performance of the EU and its failures in achieving policy objectives; and affective Euroscepticism, which reflects voters' lack of sentimental attachment to the EU and their perception that it is not a legitimate and worthwhile institution.

We found all of the Christian groups we studied were more likely to rate the EU's policy performance negatively than the non-religious (though not non-Christians), particularly Presbyterians (even after accounting for the fact that they live in the largely pro-EU Scotland) and Anglicans. This was also true, albeit to a lesser extent, for Catholics, who – in studies carried out in other EU member states, and as John Garry in this report has shown on Northern Ireland - are typically shown to be passionately pro-EU.

When looking at affective attachment to the EU, we found that all of the Christian groups tended to have weaker attachments than the non-religious, and once again Presbyterians and Anglicans stood out. The exception was Catholics, who tended to have more positive attachments – though once we accounted for the fact that many Catholics were born and raised in other EU member states, this disappeared. The pro-EU tendency of many Catholics in the UK, therefore, has more to do with them being nationals of other EU member states than with any passionate attachment to the institution directly or indirectly connected to their religion.

When we took account of these differences in utilitarian and affective Euroscepticism (while also controlling for other factors associated with support for Brexit), we found that differences between Christian denominations in the referendum all but disappeared (with the exception of Methodists, who were revealed to be unusually likely to support Remain). In other words, the differences in support for Brexit between the Christian denominations was a result of their differing assessments of the policy performance of the EU, and differing tendencies to develop a sentimental attachment to the EU and perceive it as a legitimate and worthwhile institution.

While differences in utilitarian and affective Euroscepticism are of limited significance to explaining the referendum result as far as Catholics and Presbyterians are concerned (because both groups were fairly evenly split between Remain and Leave), the strong tendency of members of the Church of England to judge the EU's policy performance negatively and to lack any sentimental attachment to it, and consequently their greater likelihood of voting Leave in the referendum, makes this important in understanding why the UK ultimately voted in favour of Brexit.

How can we account for this 'religious effect'? Previous research has linked Catholicism with a more pro-EU outlook because of two factors: the historic association of Catholics with a trans-national institution, whose authority supersedes that of national governments in certain areas; and the fact that the development of the EU has been primarily driven by political parties with a clear Catholic heritage (such as Germany's Christian Democratic Union). Protestantism, on the other hand, is usually linked with Euroscepticism because of its historic distrust of the Catholic Church as a trans-national institution that challenges the sovereignty of national governments, on whose protection from Catholic universalism they have been dependent.

In addition, some Protestant churches (such as the Church of England) identify themselves as promoters of national identity and have close historic links with national governments and political parties, all of which may be challenged and (in the eyes of some) weakened by EU membership. While this explains the relative hostility of British Anglicans and Presbyterians to the EU, our findings that British Catholics were more Eurosceptic than the non-religious, and that some smaller Protestant groups (particularly

Methodists) were unusually supportive of EU membership (even accounting for such factors as education and economic deprivation) pose a challenge to these theories and suggest important avenues for further research.

While religion was unlikely to be decisive in the referendum, and had a less powerful impact on voters' decisions than more commonly studied traits such as education, economic circumstance or age, it was nonetheless significant that the largest religious group in the UK (Anglicans), which includes more than 15% of British adults, have a historic predisposition to be Eurosceptic and so were more likely to support Brexit. They have a lasting distrust of the EU, are less likely to feel that it is a legitimate and worthwhile institution, and tend to be particularly negative in their assessments of its performance in achieving its objectives. This, in turn, pushed them towards voting Leave, and helps to explain why the UK took such a momentous, and unexpected, decision in 2016.

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# New Cleavages and Emerging Identities

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## Voting in the 2017 general election: a Brexit election?

**Geoffrey Evans**

The 2017 general election was remarkable in many ways. The campaign saw a transformation in political fortunes unheralded in modern Britain. What had looked like an inevitable electoral triumph for the Prime Minister became an embarrassment. When the election was called, only around 25% of people intended to vote Labour. By the end of the campaign 40% had done so.

Yet the election saw the Conservatives' vote share increase by 5.5%. Given this, and the 9.6% jump registered by Labour, the smaller parties suffered. Support for UKIP plummeted (down from 12.6% to 1.8%) while the Greens fell from 3.8% to 1.6%. The election produced the highest aggregate vote for the big two parties (82%) since the general election of 1970.

All this came about in two steps. After the EU referendum the Conservative Party adopted a clear pro-Brexit position in an attempt to attract former UKIP-supporting Leave voters. Then in the campaign, Labour recovered some of those who had deserted it temporarily, as well as attracting some 2015 non-voters, Greens and Liberal Democrats.

The outcome of the EU referendum was of course a seismic shock to the British political system. Within a year the political map of Britain had been (partly) redrawn. In 2017 Kensington – arguably the most affluent and cosmopolitan constituency in the country – fell to Labour for the first time ever, while Stoke-on-Trent South, a poor area in a struggling former industrial city, went from Labour to the Conservatives – again for the first time ever.

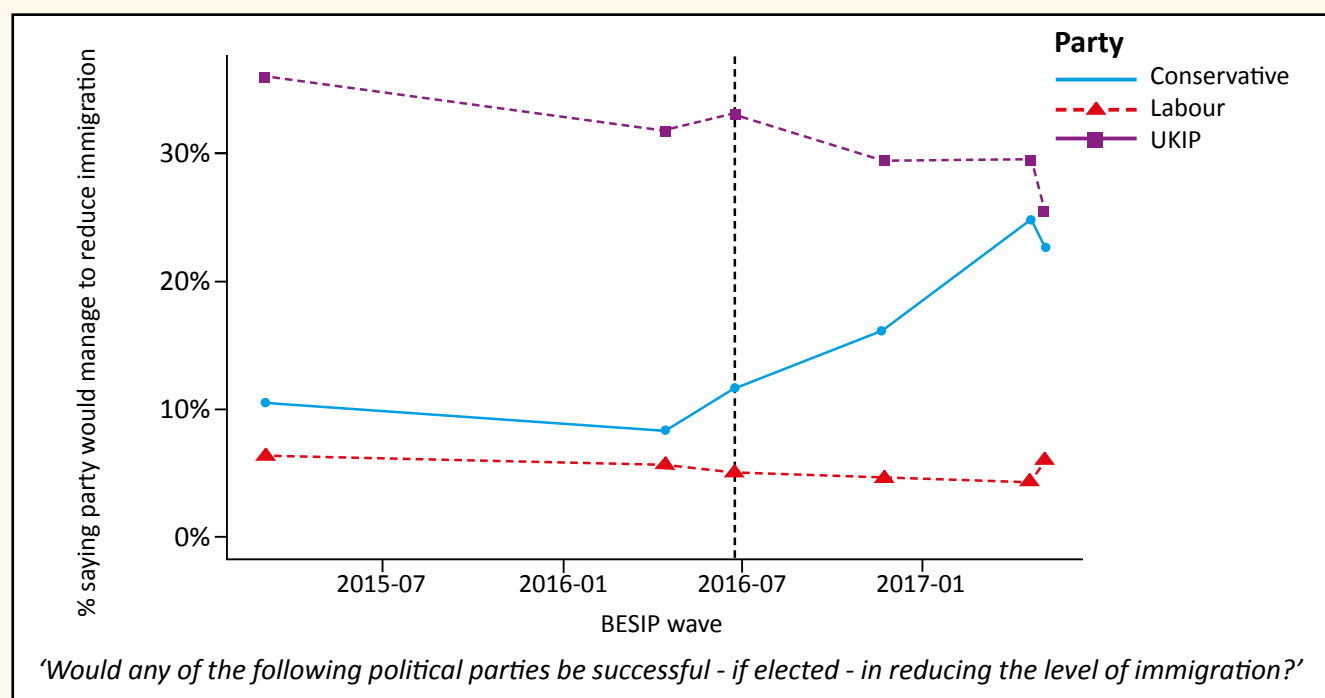
Much of this electoral change is attributable to Theresa May. By autumn 2016 she had made clear that after Brexit the UK would control immigration, make its own laws, and strike trade deals with third countries: Brexit meant hard Brexit. The Prime Minister 'owned' Brexit. The logic of making this a centrepiece of Conservative strategy was clear: given the Prime Minister's stance, UKIP's self-proclaimed role as the 'guard dog of Brexit' was redundant. Labour, for its part, looked ripe for the taking, with its working class base being far more anti-immigration than the party itself. More generally, the Labour leader's popularity amongst his own members seemed inversely correlated with his appeal to the public at large.

So how did this all play out with the voters? British Election Study (BES) surveys tracking movements between 2015 and the start of the 2017 campaign show that the Conservatives won 69% of their new 2017 voters by the start of the general election campaign, more than double the 33% that Labour attracted. Much of this success was linked to a belief that, unshackled by EU membership, the Conservatives would be effective in reducing immigration.

In 2015 hardly anyone believed David Cameron would reduce immigration. The boy had cried wolf

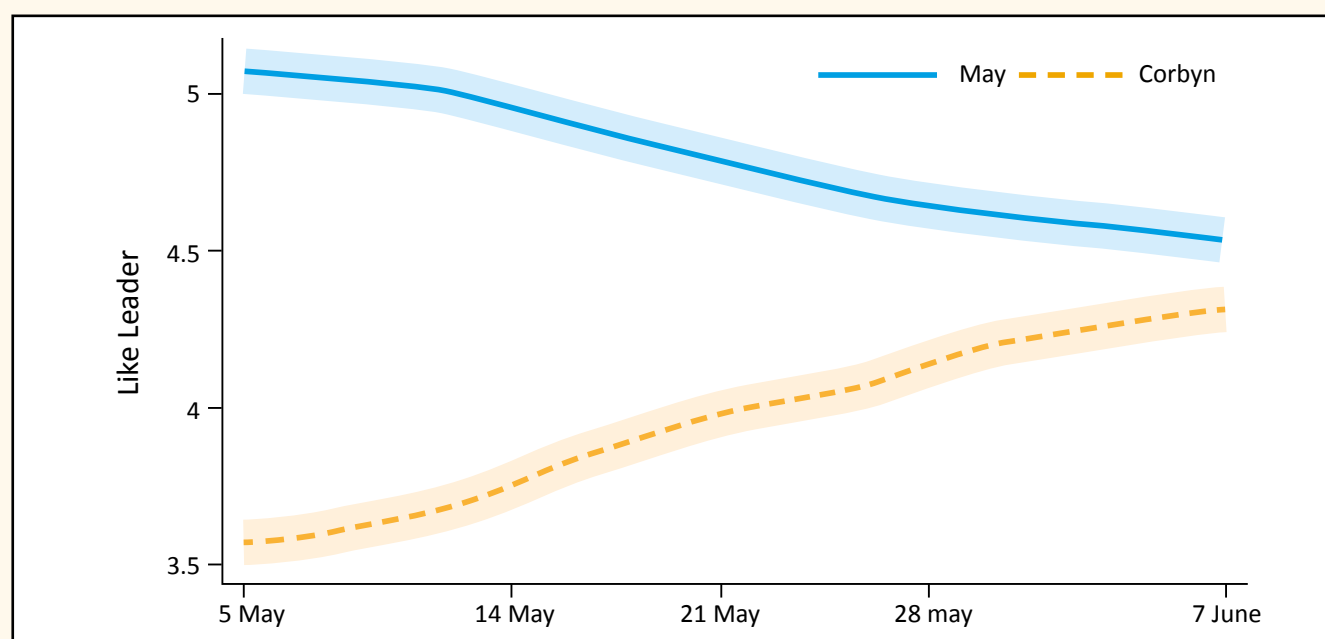
once too often. But the referendum changed things. This new-found credibility on immigration control was the key to their being able to effectively wipe out UKIP: over 80% of 2015 UKIP voters believed the Conservatives would reduce immigration voted for them in 2017.

**Figure 1: Voters' perceptions of parties' ability to reduce immigration.**



When it came to the election campaign itself, however, personality mattered as much as policy. Jeremy Corbyn's easy manner and authenticity stood in stark contrast to Mrs May's 'robotics'. We can again see this from the BES, which followed over 1,000 people a day throughout the campaign, and captured a nose dive in May's popularity more than matched by a rise in Corbyn's.

**Figure 2: The changing popularity of the party leader during the election campaign**





Corbyn's appeal wasn't simply down to personality. After years of austerity, the Labour manifesto tapped into a widely felt desire for change, promising more spending on public services, the NHS, education and an end to university tuition fees. Unsurprisingly, students were particularly keen on Labour – YouGov found that 64% voted for them. But they were also successful at winning the support of people who had not voted in 2015. Over a quarter of non-voters in 2015 voted Labour in 2017, roughly 40% of the votes the party gained.

During the campaign itself, Brexit continued to influence voters. In polls conducted by ICM immediately prior to the election being called, 53% of Leave voters said that they intended to vote Conservative, compared with 38% of Remain supporters. This gap widened during the course of the campaign to 58% and 33% respectively – a 10% increase. A similar pattern in reverse was found for Labour – a 15% difference between Remain and Leave voters at the start of the campaign had grown to 22% by the end. The link between having voted for Brexit and choosing the Conservatives rather than Labour intensified.

These Brexit driven shifts in turn reshaped the traditional social divisions that have underlaid British politics. The Conservatives gained most in predominantly working class constituencies. Ipsos-MORI found Conservative support up 12% amongst working class 'DE' voters compared to 2015, but only 4% higher amongst professional and managerial 'AB' voters. Similarly, the party increased its vote by 9% in the most working class seats in England and Wales but by only 1% in the most middle class seats.

In place of social class, education, with its close relationship to the social and cultural values that were such a crucial determinant of voting patterns in the EU referendum, became a more significant driver of electoral choice. YouGov's post-election survey found that 49% of people with degrees voted Labour, while only 32% voted Conservative.

Overall 2017 was a Brexit election but one that, because of the campaign, also witnessed a Labour renewal under Corbyn's leadership. Whether the Conservative Party can keep its new Brexit supporting voters as it tries to negotiate Brexit against the backdrop of a hung Parliament remains to be seen. Even a year after the referendum, the BES found no sign of a decline in the 'very strong' sense of identification with Leave and Remain camps, which are substantially more important to voters than their party identities (see Hobolt *et al.* in this report). So when problems arise, and they will as the Brexit negotiations progress, we can expect to see voters once again switching to parties that best represent their views on Brexit.

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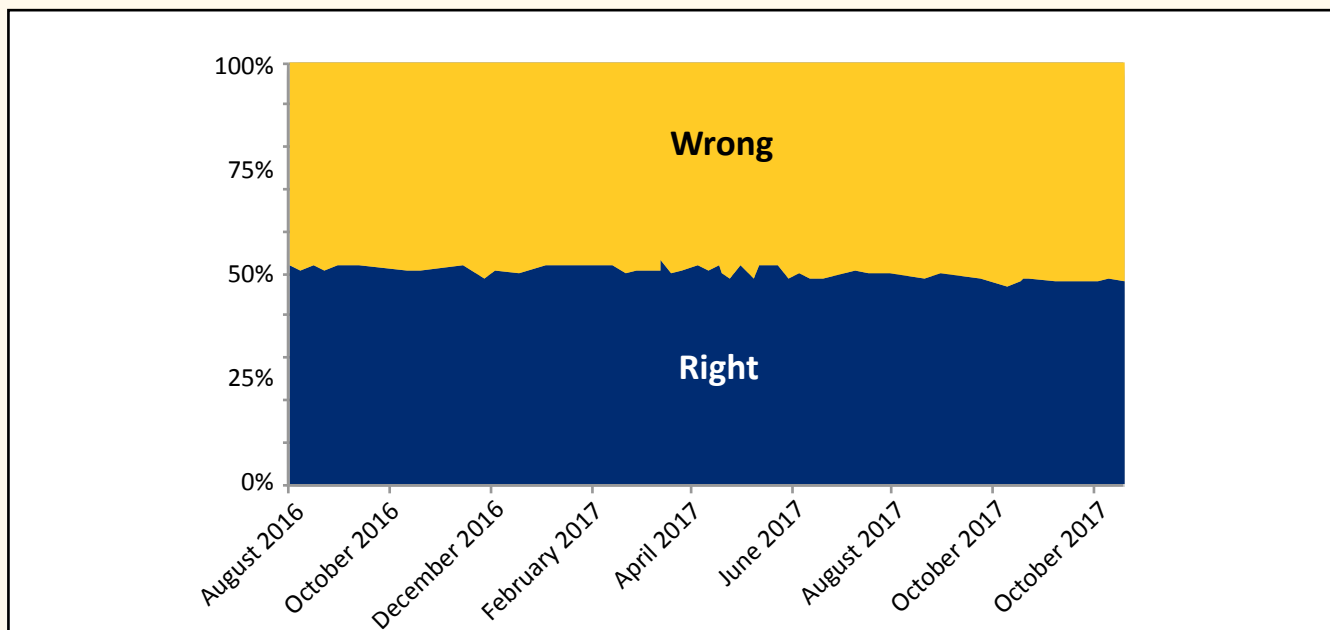
# Emerging Brexit identities

Sara B Hobolt, Thomas Leeper and James Tilley

Much has happened in the 18 months since the EU referendum: a substantial drop in the value of the pound, a new prime minister, a snap general election, and a continuous stream of news coverage of the UK-EU negotiations, now entering their second and crucial stage. But have voters changed their minds since that fateful day in June 2016?

Opinion polls consistently show that these events have done little to change people's minds about Brexit. When asked whether, in hindsight, people think Britain was right or wrong to vote to leave the EU, polls show that the public remains evenly split on the question. Just over half of people (who express an opinion) think it was right for Britain to vote to leave, while just under half think it was wrong.

**Figure 1: In hindsight, do you think Britain was right or wrong to vote to leave the EU?**



Source: YouGov. Don't know responses excluded

## A new political identity

Why have so few people changed their minds about Brexit since the referendum?

One reason is that Brexit has given rise to new political identities. When asked whether they think of themselves as 'Leavers', 'Remainers' or 'neither', we consistently find that, since the referendum, around 35% of people identify as Leavers and around 40% as Remainers. These identities have remained largely unchanged since the referendum, and cut across existing party lines. However, as with traditional

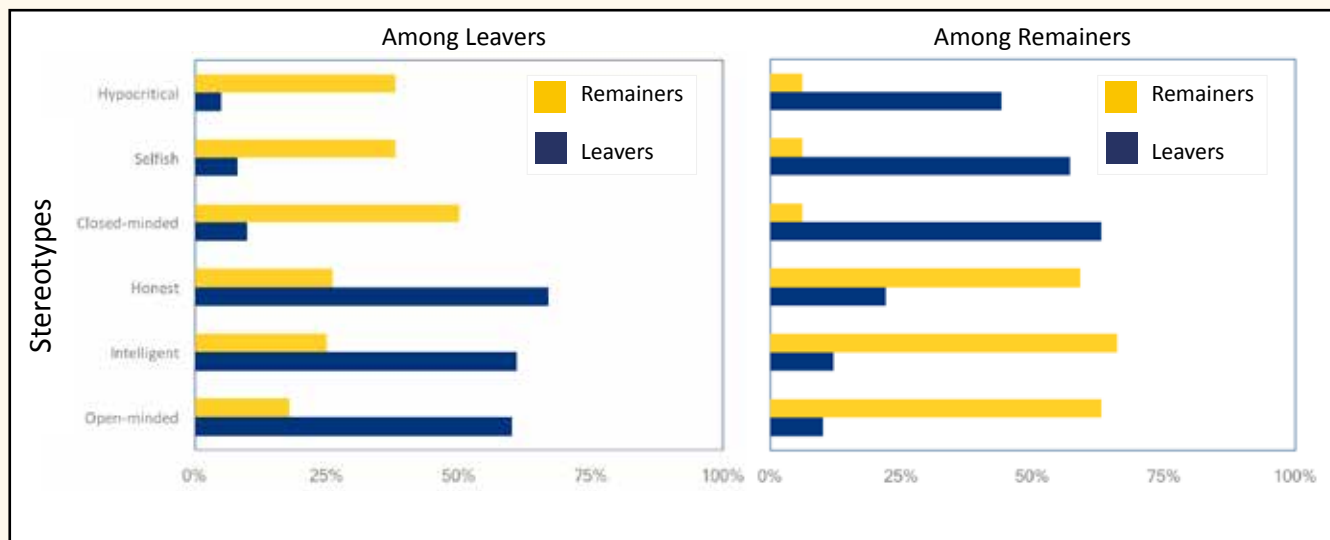
partisan identities, these newly formed Brexit identities have consequences for how people view the world. Unsurprisingly, Leavers are much more likely to think that Brexit will have a positive effect on the country and their own personal circumstances, compared to Remainers who generally have a far more negative view.

These differences are of course part of the reasons why people decided to vote the way they did in the referendum in the first place. However, there is also some evidence to suggest that individual interpretations of any new evidence about Brexit are motivated by these emerging identities. In other words, Remainers are more likely to regard any negative economic news as a direct consequence of Brexit. Leavers, in contrast, are more likely to ignore such news, or blame it on other factors, such as the EU's tough negotiating stance. To the extent that Brexit identities motivate how we view the world, we are also less likely to change our minds about whether Brexit was 'good' or 'bad', even when the facts change. Yet viewing economic well-being and government performance through the lens of these identities puts the very notion of political accountability at risk. To hold governments to account, citizens must be responsive to facts on the ground; these new, stable identities may prevent Leavers from either seeing acknowledging any harm that might come from Brexit and similarly prevent Remainers from seeing or acknowledging any good that might result.

### **Brexit prejudices**

Most worryingly perhaps, such identities also shape how people in Britain view one another. During the referendum campaign, we asked respondents to the British Election Study (BES) to describe characteristics of those intending to vote Leave and vote Remain in positive or negative terms. Regardless of their own vote intentions, most respondents could think of positive and negative characteristics of each. Positive words like "patriotic" for Leave voters and "optimistic" for Remain voters appeared to come quickly and broadly to mind while "scared" was widely reported as a negative feature of both groups. In the meantime, the emergence of new Brexit identities has led to quite divergent views of the two groups in the minds of citizens. Indeed, the Brexit identities appear to be a driver of prejudice towards people who belong to the 'other' group. To examine the extent to which Brexit identities have given rise to such feelings, we asked a standard set of prejudice questions, inviting people to say how well they thought a number of words would describe Leavers and Remainers.

**Figure 2: Words that describe Leavers and Remainers**



Source: Hobolt, Leeper & Tilley (2017) YouGov, October 2017

This figure shows just how polarized the two groups have become. Remainers and Leavers both describe each other as “hypocritical”, “selfish” and “closed-minded”, and their own group as “honest”, “intelligent” and “open-minded”. There is a remarkable symmetry in responses that reflect the animus that people feel towards the other group. There is thus little evidence to support the Prime Minister’s statement that Britain “has come together” to face the challenge of Brexit. Instead it seems that she is presiding over a divided and polarized nation.

It is too early to say whether these identities will persist after Britain leaves the EU, or whether they will be absorbed by more long-standing identifications with political parties. What our evidence does suggest is that the emergence of Brexit identities has had a highly polarizing effect on British society. This may compromise people’s willingness to talk across the political divide and come to mutual understandings in the current debate on the future of Britain’s relationship with Europe.

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# Brexit and identity politics

**Maria Sobolewska and Robert Ford**

Among the various well-known explanations of the outcome of the EU referendum, there are many that promise, or have already proved themselves, to have had a lasting influence on politics. Generational and geographical divisions are some of the more prominent examples of this, as are value divides over the role of globalisation, immigration and social liberalism more broadly. While almost all political commentators use the labels of the 'left behind' or the 'cosmopolitan' voter, little attention is paid to a very prominent feature of these divisions: attitudes towards ethnic diversity, and their impact on the political choices of white voters.

On the one hand, rejection of the racial equality and diversity agenda is a key element in the political agenda of 'left behind' white voters, over and above their views about immigration; on the other, support for diversity, multiculturalism and racial justice are key factors mobilising identity politics among young and university graduate white cosmopolitan voters. While society has become more tolerant of diversity, racial attitudes have become more complex and are beginning to influence policy areas such as welfare that have not previously been obviously related to race. In many ways the growing impact of diversity on British politics parallels similar, but much longer established, divisions in American politics.

## **Ethnic diversity and the referendum**

While the young and university graduates predominantly voted to stay in the EU, the label of 'cosmopolitan voter' that is frequently used to describe them is vague and often poorly understood. What distinguishes cosmopolitan voters, and what kinds of 'value' does the alleged new value conflicts between those who embrace and reject cosmopolitanism involve?

The survey questions used regularly in many existing accounts focus on attitudes towards immigration, and more specifically whether or not it benefits Britain. The answer to this question is indeed a strong predictor of whether someone voted to stay in, or leave, the EU and is related to whether someone qualifies as a cosmopolitan voter. Yet, immigration is not necessarily a permanent social divide, especially if the current post-referendum trend of falling immigration, and thus falling concern about immigration, continues (see Matthew Goodwin's chapter in this report). Nor was it the only explanatory factor in the referendum. A much less studied, but more lasting divide, and one that is growing fast, exists over white British voters' views about the rapidly rising ethnic diversity caused by both recent and historic waves of immigration, and the sharp population growth among immigrant-origin minorities, including exponential growth in the mixed ethnicity population.

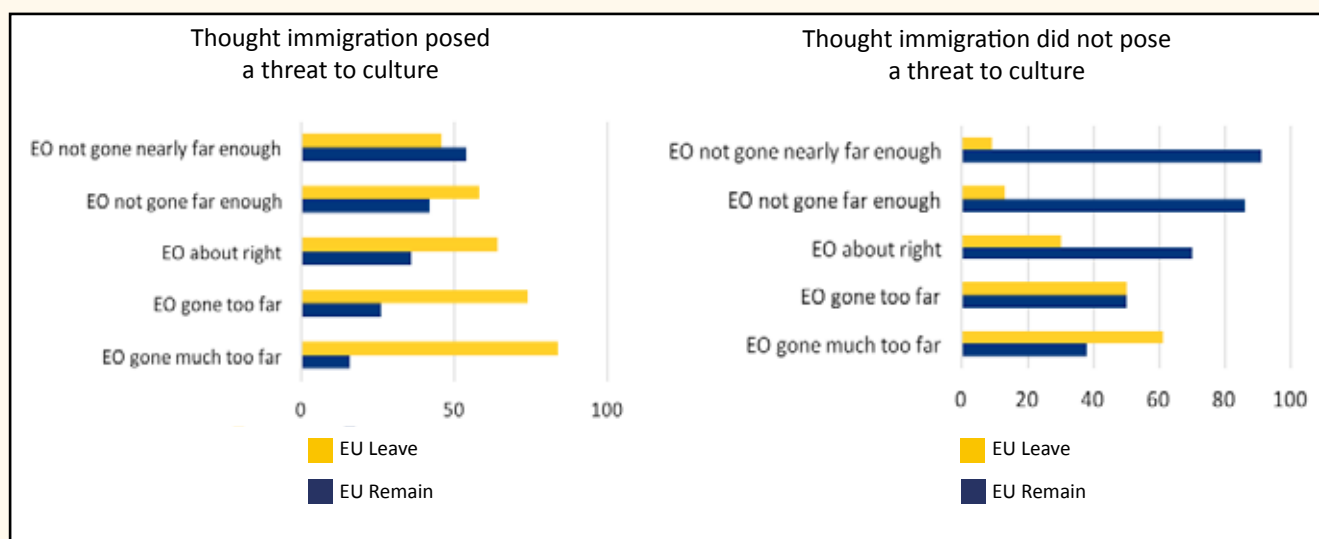
Yet this diversity divide has received far less academic and policymaker attention, and as a result we have fewer survey measures available to study it, and fewer time points to look at, than on higher profile conflicts such as immigration. One of the few regularly asked items examines whether people

think equal opportunities for black and Asian people have gone much too far, too far, about right, not far enough, or not nearly far enough. Analysis of this hitherto neglected item reveals that it captures a crucial divide in the white British electorate, both in terms of how many people express discomfort with equal opportunities and how much this issue is becoming politically polarised.

Our research shows that this attitude does not correspond neatly to opinions on immigration, although it is related to these. For example, only about half the people who stated at the time of the referendum that immigration undermines British culture also thought that equal opportunities for ethnic minorities went too far. The impact of both attitudes on the decision on how to vote in the EU referendum was significant when both are analysed together in statistical models of the vote.

Figure 1 shows that British Election Study respondents who thought that equal opportunity for ethnic minorities have gone too far voted heavily for Leave. Equally, those who felt that equal opportunities have not gone far enough were much more likely to have voted Remain. This is regardless of whether they felt immigration undermined British culture (left hand panel) or enriched it (right hand panel).

**Figure 1: Percentage of Leave and Remain voters by attitudes to equal opportunity for ethnic minorities have gone too far/not far enough and views on immigration**



Source: British Election Study 2016, differences statistically significant.  
(EO: Equal Opportunities)

## Policy making in a diverse society

With ethnic diversity growing fast, we only need to look to the United States for evidence of how attitudes towards it impact upon policy making. There is increasing evidence that attitudes towards ethnic diversity influence political preferences and differential support for policies, notably welfare, but also others ranging from taxation to education. Some of the mechanisms that facilitate this are to do

with perceived beneficiaries of policies that are seen to predominantly benefit minorities. While policies sanctioning racial discrimination are usually not controversial on their own, policies that seek to address racial disparities within their respective sectors might prove much more problematic, particularly if they adopt an 'affirmative action' character, such as quotas. Policies which provide extra assistance or special treatment to ethnic groups based on their ethnicity alone remain widely opposed, even if the existence of the ethnic disadvantages is recognised. What this means is that a policy forbidding discriminatory hiring practices might be popular, while a more interventionist policy obliging employers to hire a certain percentage of minorities is likely to be opposed. Thus, policy framing becomes a pivotal element of policy making, and not just in the area of equality policy: voters tend to be more hostile to any policy that may be interpreted as benefiting one racially or ethnically defined social group over others.

While Britain has not yet seen 'culture wars' over identity, diversity and legacies of prejudice of the kind that have divided and polarised American politics for decades, the robust link between views about ethnic equality and votes in the EU referendum could be a warning signal of how politics is changing. This link highlights that the referendum was not just about the EU, but divided people according to their broader views about the kind of Britain they want to live in. Those who are comfortable with diversity, and keen to address ethnic disadvantage, lined up with Remain. Those who dislike rising diversity, and reject the need for action to combat ethnic disadvantage, voted to Leave. Brexit has thus placed voters who embrace and reject diversity on opposite sides of a major political conflict – if this pattern lasts, it may come to be seen as the first shot fired in a British culture war.

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# The perceived costs and benefits of Brexit

**Matthew Goodwin**

How has public opinion toward the perceived costs and benefits of Brexit shifted over the past eighteen months? As Harold D. Clarke, Paul Whiteley and I argue in our [book](#), how people think about Europe is partly influenced by calculations regarding the perceived costs and benefits of being a member of the EU.

At the time of the referendum, a plurality of voters felt that remaining in the EU would be beneficial in terms of helping to keep the peace in Europe. But a plurality also felt that remaining would encourage terrorism, erode sovereignty, and damage Britain's culture. Leaving the EU, meanwhile, was seen by a plurality of voters as economically costly but beneficial as it would lower immigration.

Clearly, these broad strokes hide big differences between Remainers and Leavers. For Leavers, the benefits of Brexit were more about lowering immigration, reducing the risk of terrorism and regaining control over the national economy.

How have these assessments changed since the referendum? First, voters at large have become a little more pessimistic about the economic effects of Brexit, although this conceals strong differences between Remainers and Leavers.

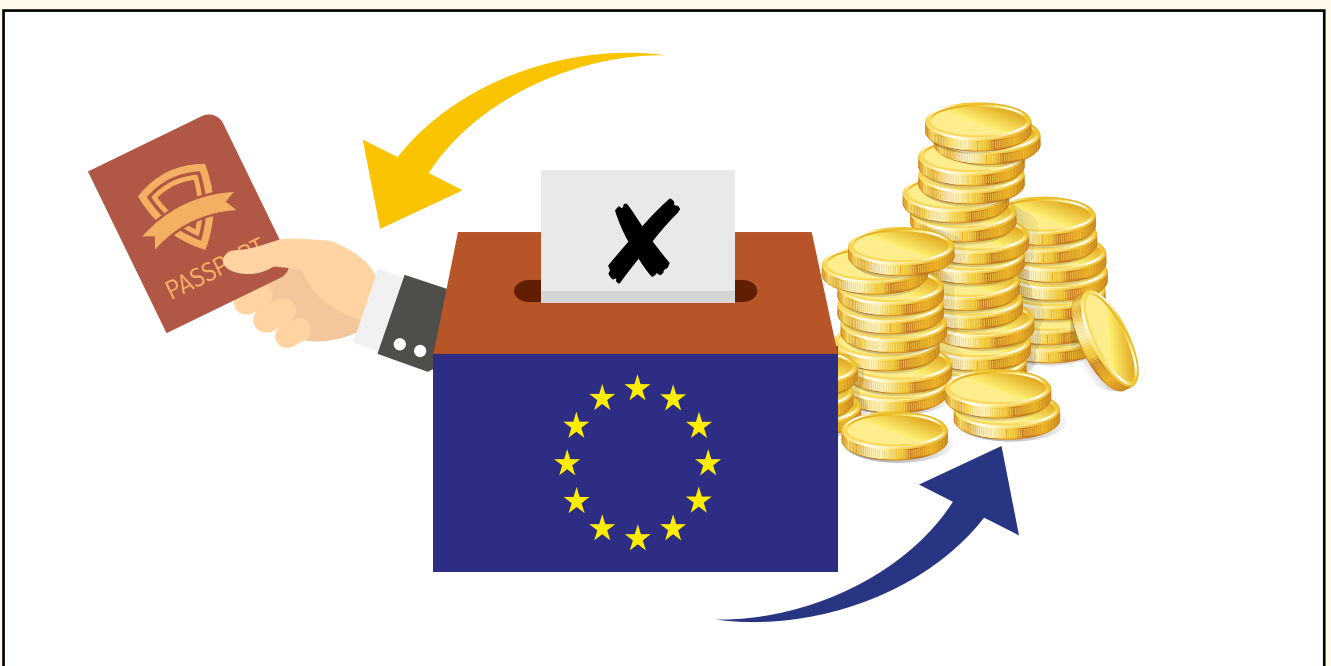
Shortly before the referendum, YouGov asked voters whether they felt that Brexit would leave Britain's economy better off or worse off. Nationally, 22% said 'better off', 37% said 'worse off', 25% said 'no difference' and 15% said 'don't know' (leaving a net score of -15). Yet Leavers and Remainers held very different views; while 78% of Remainers were convinced Brexit would leave the economy 'worse off', Leavers were split evenly down the middle; 45% said 'better off', 43% said 'no difference', while 3% said 'worse off' (excluding don't knows). It is worth underlining that even before the vote a large chunk of Leavers did not expect leaving the EU to improve the economy.

Fast forward eighteen months. In December 2017, YouGov asked the same question. This time, among all voters, 25% expected Brexit to leave the economy 'better off', 42% 'worse off' and 18% 'no difference' (a net score of -17). Therefore, while the headline figures have not changed all that much, there has been a slight increase in pessimism among the electorate at large. Again, Leavers and Remainers hold different views; while 78% of Remainers feel that Brexit will leave the economy worse off, Leavers are actually a little more optimistic than before the vote: 52% now feel Brexit will leave the economy 'better off' (up seven points), only 28% say 'no difference' and 8% say 'worse off' (up five). This leaves a net score of +47 compared to +42 ahead of the vote, suggesting that, on balance, Leavers are actually a little *more* optimistic.

YouGov asked the same question about immigration, namely whether leaving the EU will mean more or less immigration, or make no difference. Overall, before the vote 54% of all voters said 'less immigration', 30% said 'no difference', and 4% said 'more immigration'. Again, Leavers and Remainers held very



different views; while 54% of Remainers said 'no difference', 27% said 'less' and 8% said 'more'. The vast majority of Leavers, 85%, said leaving would mean 'less immigration' and 11% said 'no difference'. How have these figures changed? Today, among all voters, 54% say 'less immigration', 29% say 'no difference' and 3% say 'more', so basically things are unchanged. However, among Remainers 43% now feel Brexit will mean 'less immigration' and 42% say 'no difference', revealing how a larger number have become convinced that leaving will mean less immigration. Leavers, meanwhile, have changed in an interesting way; now only 72% feel that Brexit will mean less immigration while the percentage that think it will make no difference has nearly doubled to 20%. So, while the headline figures have not changed all that much, Remainers have become a little more convinced that leaving will mean less immigration while Leavers have become a little more convinced that it will make no difference.



Given that the fundamental perceived costs and benefits have not (yet) changed all that much, a big swing in public opinion seems unlikely for three reasons. First, people's preferences about EU membership are wrapped up in their underlying values, which are entrenched and unlikely to shift. In Europe more generally, opposition to European integration has been shown to form part of a broader worldview, including hostility to immigration, distrust of established politics and pessimism about the future. These, in turn, reflect conservative and/or authoritarian values, which put a high premium on stability, order, tradition and authority.

Second, while 'confirmation bias' will lead Remainers and Leavers to discount information that does not correspond with these underlying values, many of the gloomy short-term economic forecasts produced during the referendum have since proven inaccurate. Leavers – who, as we have seen, have become slightly *more* optimistic about the economy – can point to the lowest unemployment for four decades, the strongest manufacturing output since the financial crisis and, though lagging behind other countries, continued economic growth.

While this picture may well change as Britain passes through the end of the Article 50 period, and depending on the trading relationship with the EU that emerges, the general picture supports the argument that we made in our book – namely that Britain’s economy would, at least in the short-term, prove to be more resilient than many were arguing.

A third and final reason why we are unlikely to see *major* shifts in public opinion takes us back to the perceived costs and benefits and the fact that, for many Leavers, the benefits of Brexit were far more about identity politics – and, in particular, about lowering immigration. As we have seen, a large majority of these Leavers continue to believe that leaving will mean less immigration, even if they are less convinced than they were at the time of the referendum.

Over the past eighteen months, net migration figures have started to fall against the backdrop of the vote for Brexit and the comparatively strong performance of Eurozone states. Yet comprehensive immigration reform is still absent. Pressure for the Conservative Party to deliver on this – and a hard Brexit more generally – will likely intensify. While Theresa May failed to secure a majority at the 2017 general election, her voters are now more pro-Brexit and more supportive of immigration controls than the electorate that underpinned David Cameron’s Conservative Party. Alongside the general stability of British public attitudes on this issue, this means that a hard Brexit is significantly more likely than Brexit being reversed altogether.

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# The Brexit Negotiations

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## Party members

**Tim Bale, Monica Poletti and Paul Webb**

Party members don't always agree with their party. Indeed, research suggests that disappointment with the direction in which a party seems to be headed is one of the main reasons why some people decide to leave, sometimes years, sometimes sooner, after joining.

For the most part, however, the differences between the line taken on a particular issue by a party's leadership and the views of its grassroots tend to be fairly small – a matter of emphasis and nuance rather than outright conflict.

There are, of course, exceptions – and Brexit may be one of those, both for the Conservatives and Labour. David Cameron's biggest failure, and the cause of his ultimate demise, was that he was unable to persuade the bulk of those who had voted Conservative in 2015 to follow his lead in the EU referendum a year later. Partisan cues aren't everything, but it was striking quite how meagre their effect was in June 2016 – especially for Conservative voters, who, [according to YouGov](#), broke 61-39 for Leave.

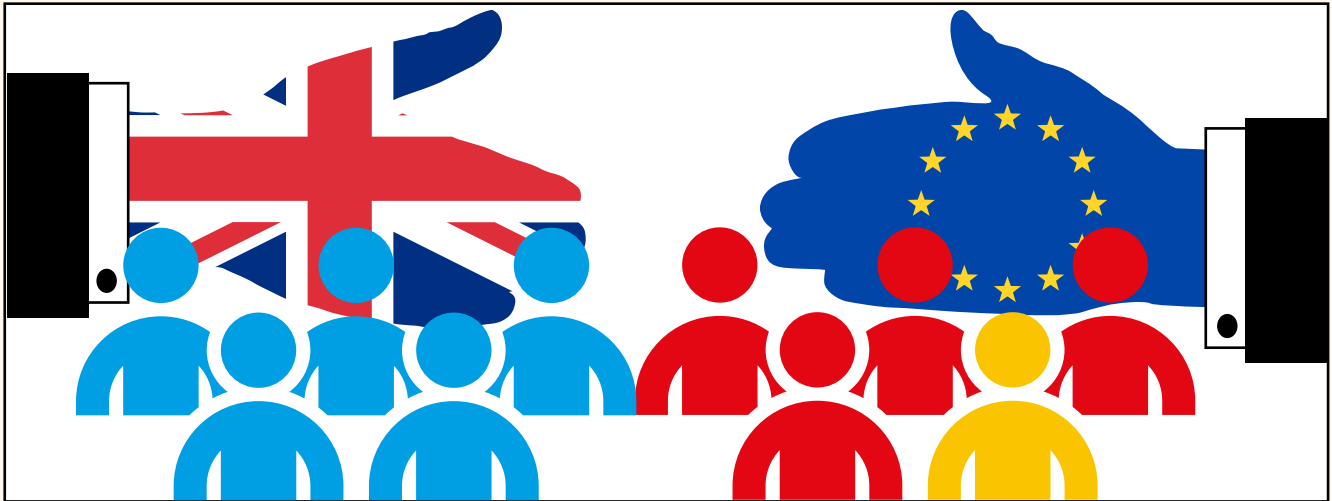
Of course, no party was able to persuade all its 2015 voters to support its position on Brexit in 2016. Research suggests that 35% of Labour voters, 36% of SNP voters, and even some 32% of Lib Dem voters plumped for Leave in the referendum. UKIP and the Greens did rather better, with 95% of UKIP voters and 80% of Green voters voting with their party.

Most parties, however, were far better at persuading their members, as opposed to their voters, to toe the line. Survey research for the ESRC-funded [Party Members Project](#) suggests that there was far less divergence between members and their respective parties at the EU referendum than there was between voters and the parties they had supported the year before.

UKIP was best able to command the loyalty of its membership in June 2016, with 99% of those members who voted in the referendum voting Leave. But it was closely followed by the Greens and the Lib Dems, 97% and 96% of whose members (excluding those who didn't vote or couldn't or wouldn't say) voted Remain. Nor were the SNP and Labour (on 90% and 89%) that far behind. In marked contrast, David Cameron's problem with Conservative voters extended to his party's grassroots members, with some 70% of those who voted in the referendum opting to vote Leave.

This represented a major breakdown in sympathy between, as it were, leader and led. All the more so because a survey of Conservative Party members conducted just after the 2015 general election showed that some 63% agreed at that time that their vote in the referendum 'would depend on the terms of any renegotiations of our membership of the EU.' A mere 15% said they would 'would vote for the UK to leave the EU regardless of any re-negotiated terms of membership.'

Of course, it is possible that back in 2015 loyalty and gratitude to a leader who had just won them an unexpected overall majority somehow obscured their true intentions. On the other hand, the survey evidence does at least hint at the intriguing possibility that, had Cameron returned from Brussels with a convincing package of reforms, or at least one that he could have persuaded influential ‘big beasts’ like Boris Johnson and Michael Gove to sign up to, he might have been able to bring far more Tory members (and – who knows – far more Tory voters) on board.



But that was then and this is now. What is noticeable about the responses of Conservative Party members surveyed immediately after the 2017 general election is that they not only overwhelmingly support leaving (only 7%, for example, claim they’d definitely like to see a second referendum) but that they support a hard Brexit: 69% want out of the single market and 65% want out of the customs union.

On the other hand, the fact that 25% favoured staying in the single market and 27% favoured staying in the customs union leaves around a quarter of all Tory members effectively supporting a soft Brexit. This could lend some encouragement to the ‘mutineers’ on the Tory benches in the Commons who hope to soften, if not derail, Brexit. Indirectly, this might also give some cause for optimism to MPs from other parties who hope to make common cause with these Tory MPs in the coming months.

Lib Dem and SNP members are very much in tune with party policy: over 90% of Lib Dem and SNP members want to stay in the single market and the customs union. Indeed, 87% and 91% respectively would be open to a second referendum. A second referendum is not quite so popular among Labour members, but it’s still pretty popular: 78% seem keen. And support for staying in the single market and the customs union runs at 87% and 85%. This might represent a challenge to Labour’s leadership which, to date, has rejected the idea of staying in either. Conversely, it might help pro-European MPs like Chuka Umunna, Alison McGovern and Heidi Alexander in their attempts to pressure the leadership to come out explicitly for a soft Brexit and even a second referendum.

Watch this space....

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# MPs

**Philip Cowley and Alan Wager**

When Theresa May called a snap general election in April 2017, the Prime Minister argued that it was not the state of public opinion but rather opinion among MPs, and continued opposition to Brexit within Parliament, that had forced her hand. The election outcome did not produce the arithmetic in the House of Commons that the Conservative Party had expected. But it has proven Theresa May right in one key respect: implementing Brexit, and the policy choices involved in the government's interpretation of the referendum, was always going to be problematic without an enhanced majority. With no majority at all, the problems for the government are compounded.

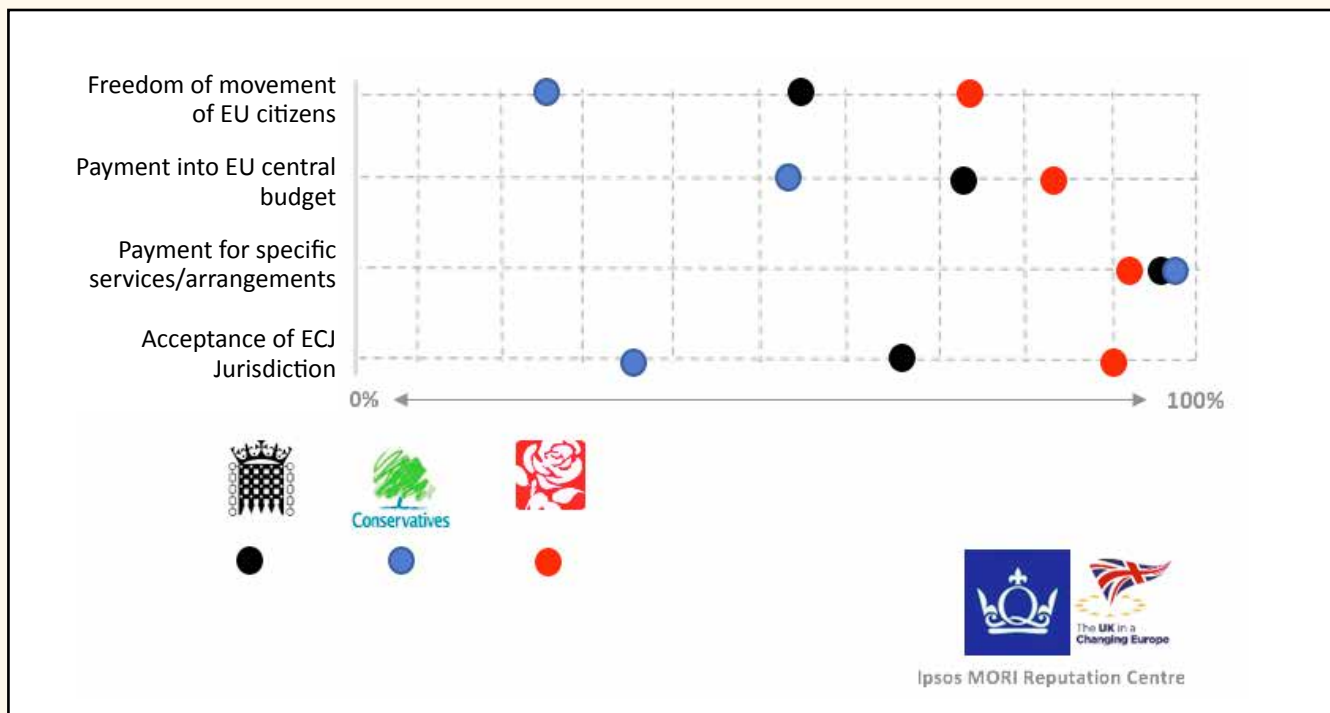
At the UK in a Changing Europe and the Mile End Institute, we have been tracking MPs' attitudes to Brexit for three years. Working with Ipsos Mori's Reputation Centre, we surveyed around 100 MPs in the winters of 2015, 2016, and 2017 – with a further round planned for 2018. This gives us an understanding of where MPs in the parties stand today and how attitudes have changed over time.

This is not just a matter of party size. Both Labour and the Conservatives are fundamentally divided in Parliament over key aspects of how the UK's relationship with the EU should be reshaped. On many of the issues relating to the Brexit negotiations, these divisions are primarily between the front and backbenches of both parties – although in the Conservatives, at least, there are also some significant differences on the backbenches as well.

The problems for the government are clear. Whilst there is majority support for the idea of a transition arrangement between the UK and the EU (73% of Conservative MPs surveyed in Winter 2017 supported this), there is not much flexibility on its length: of those that supported the idea, 75% wanted it to last no more than two years, and just 12% thought it should last as long as needed. Perhaps more importantly, Conservative MPs appear set against the idea that any transition arrangements should involve either continuing freedom of movement for EU citizens, or a continuing role for the European Court of Justice.

As Figure 1 shows, 74% of Conservative MPs surveyed oppose the UK accepting that freedom of movement will continue uninhibited, and 63% say they do not want any role for the ECJ after March 2019. Theresa May has signalled that she could be willing to concede to the EU on both these points. Given that the terms of transition are likely to be one of the key issues determined when Parliament gets the 'meaningful vote' it is promised at the end of 2018, this difference between the Prime Minister's position and her party could become increasingly difficult to sustain.

**Figure 1: Which of these would you consider to be acceptable as part of a transition agreement?**



However, there are also positives for Theresa May from this survey. She has clearly been successful in taking the Conservative Party with her on the preferred end state of UK-EU relations. When asked in the winter of 2016, prior to May's Florence Speech ruling out UK membership of the single market and the customs union, half of Conservative MPs felt single market membership could be compatible with leaving the EU. That figure is now down to 23%, suggesting a significant shift in view within the Parliamentary Conservative Party. Research by Tim Bale, Monica Poletti and Paul Webb in this report shows that 69% of Conservative members are against remaining in the single market. On this, at least, the Prime Minister, the bulk of her MPs, and her members are on the same page.

A further political success for May is that Conservative MPs also appear to have bought into the idea that 'no deal is better than a bad deal': 78% say they agree with this, while only 18% believe that no deal is the worst of all outcomes.

The key tension within the Parliamentary Labour Party is rather different. In contrast to their party leadership, 90% of Labour MPs feel that membership of the single market is both possible outside the EU and compatible with honouring the referendum. When set against the option of an alternative hypothetical trade deal, one that replicates as many of the benefits of current EU trade as possible, 56% of Labour MPs still favoured remaining in the single market. Belief in the viability of the single market as a Brexit end-state has not significantly shifted among Labour MPs in the last twelve months, despite Jeremy Corbyn's continuing opposition.

You see these same divisions when MPs are asked what form of government would make their preferred Brexit outcome most likely: just 38% of Labour MPs believe a large Labour majority is the sort

of government that would produce their optimal Brexit outcome. 33% go for a slim Labour majority, and 23% think a hung Parliament would produce the political conditions that would lead to their preferred outcome. By contrast, 60% of Conservative MPs believe a large Conservative majority would best facilitate their preferred form of Brexit, and just 11% would prefer a hung parliament. The current situation – a hung Parliament with the Conservatives in power – is the preferred outcome of just 11% of Conservative and 4% of Labour MPs.

The balance of cross-party opinion has so far sustained significant majorities for the triggering of Article 50. The government's defeat during the passage of the EU Withdrawal Bill in December created a requirement for a future 'meaningful vote' in Parliament on Theresa May's Brexit deal, and ensured that 2017 ended with a clear symbolic assertion of the power of Parliament. If 2018 is not to end with a similar pushback against the government, then the parliamentary arithmetic means May will be reliant on maintaining support from across Parliament.

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# The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit

Alan Renwick

What kind of Brexit do voters want when they have the chance to learn about the options and arguments and think matters through in depth?

This is an important question for two reasons. First, it gives us valuable information on how public opinion might develop as the Brexit process unfolds and the key choices crystallise. Informed voters might have priorities quite different from those expressed today by respondents to standard surveys. Second, what citizens think when they have had a chance to learn and reflect matters in itself. Democratic decision-making is founded on public opinion. In the democratic ideal, that is considered opinion, not top-of-the head reaction.

The [Citizens' Assembly on Brexit](#) provides unique insights into informed and considered opinion on Brexit. It was a gathering of fifty people randomly selected to reflect the diverse UK electorate. They came from across the UK, including roughly equal numbers of men and women, members of ethnic minorities in proportion to their population share, and broad spreads in terms of age and social class. Crucially, they also included slightly more Leave than Remain voters.

These fifty people met over two weekends in Manchester in autumn 2017. They were charged with developing recommendations on the kind of Brexit that the UK government should seek, focusing on trade and migration. During the first weekend, they listened to each other's views and experiences and probed the issues with some of the country's leading experts. During the second weekend, they deliberated in depth on what they had heard and reached conclusions.

## What the Assembly concluded

In drawing conclusions from their discussions, Assembly members began by developing policy guidelines. They said that trade policy should, above all, minimise harm to the economy, protect the NHS and public services, maintain living standards, take account of impacts on all parts of the UK, protect workers' rights, and avoid a hard border with Ireland. The fact that the last of these points received such attention in September 2017 – well before it hit the headlines in December – illustrates that a citizens' assembly can often foretell issues that will later gain wider attention.

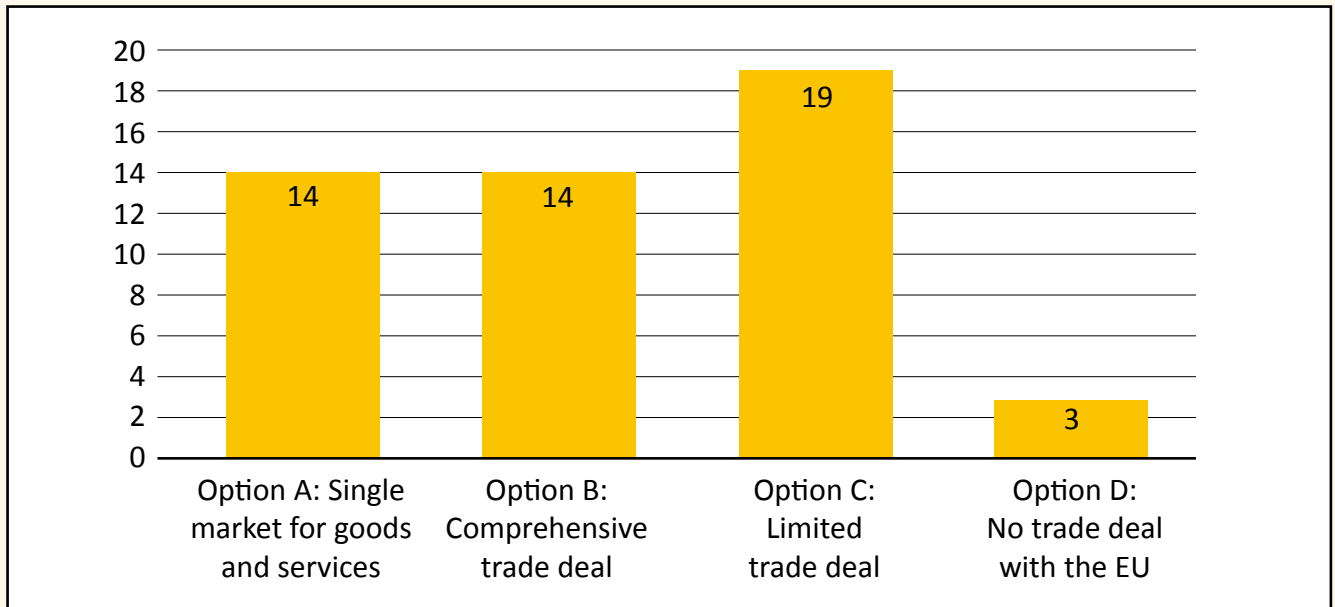
Members said migration policy – which they took to include any policy that might shape migration and its effects – should involve investment in training for UK nationals, keep better data on migrants, enable the UK to sustain public services, benefit the economy, be responsive to regional need, and include better planning of public services.

Members then turned to specific policy options. They considered four options for how the UK trades with the EU after Brexit: within the single market (at least as it pertains to goods and services), through a comprehensive trade deal that seeks to minimise both tariffs and so-called non-tariff barriers (such as differential product standards and professional qualifications), through a limited trade deal focused

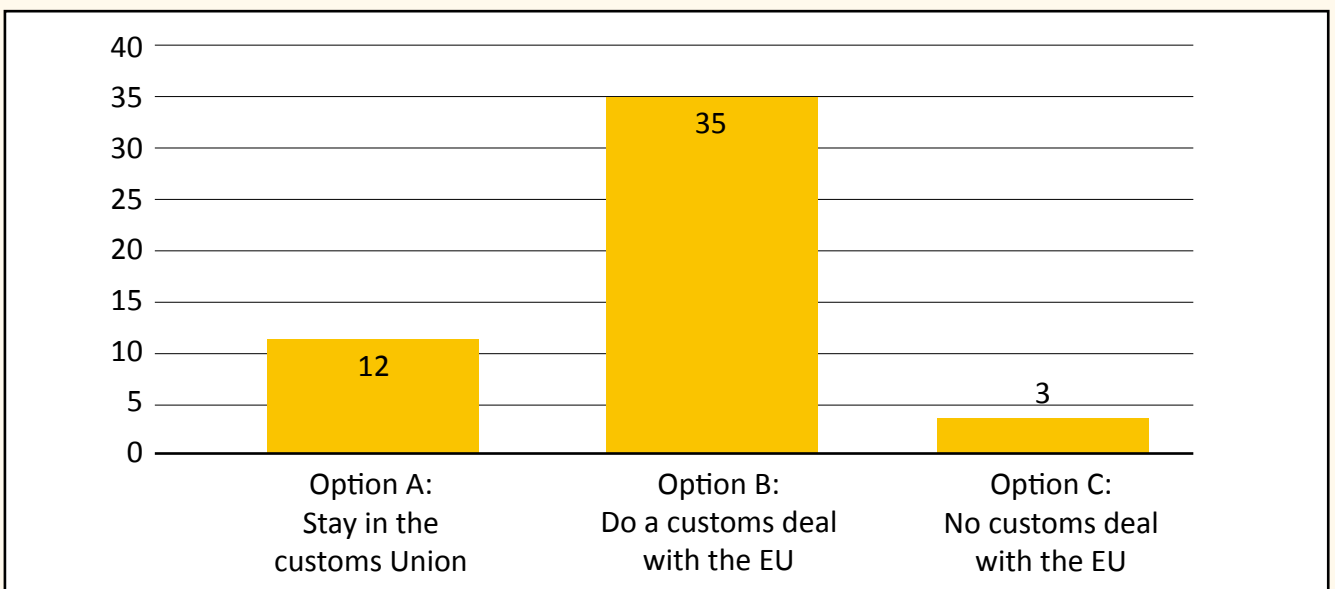


just on minimising tariffs, or through WTO rules (the ‘no deal’ option). Figure 1 shows that members’ first preferences spread widely across the first three options – but that very few supported the fourth. Option C had most first preferences – though if second and lower preferences are also taken account, option B comes out marginally ahead.

**Figure 1: Trade deal with the EU, first preferences**



**Figure 2: Trade beyond the EU: first preferences**



Of course, it may be that some of these options prove unattainable. If the government is unsuccessful in its efforts to secure a comprehensive trade deal, most members favoured a limited deal. If a limited deal isn’t possible either, a substantial majority of members – 31 to 19 – said they would prefer the UK to stay in the single market rather than leave the EU with no deal.

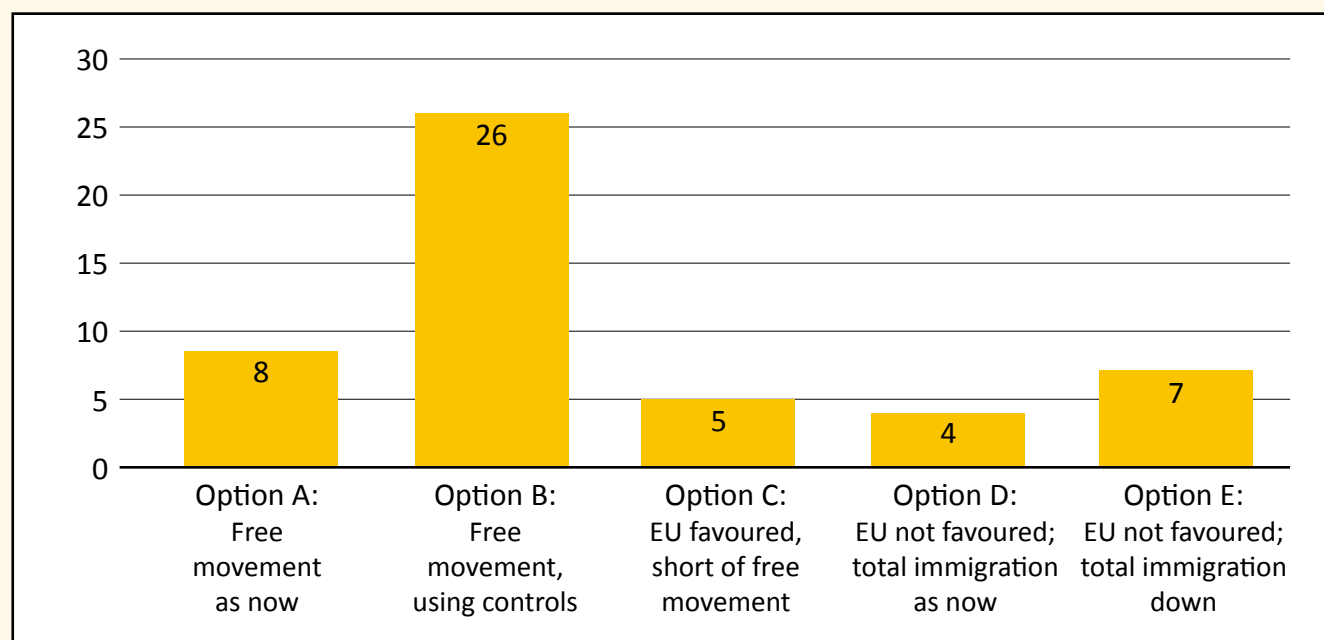
The Assembly also considered how the UK should relate to the EU’s customs union. As Figure 2 shows, a large majority wanted a bespoke customs arrangement with the EU that would allow the UK to conduct

its own international trade policy while also maintaining a frictionless border.

If such a deal proves unattainable, 37 members said the UK should stay in the customs union, while only 13 opted for doing no customs deal. Thus, a large majority of members said the priority should be preserving the frictionless EU border, not freeing the UK to conduct its own international trade policy.

Turning to migration, members considered five options, which varied in terms both of future immigration levels and the degree of preference given to EU over non-EU migrants. As Figure 3 shows, an absolute majority of members chose an option under which the UK government would maintain free movement for EU nationals, but would make full use of controls that are available within the single market to limit migration by those who cannot sustain themselves financially. Members also wanted better training for UK nationals to reduce demand for migrant labour, and they wanted better mechanisms for boosting public services in areas where high immigration stretches them.

**Figure 3: Migration between the UK and the EU: first preferences**



These conclusions give the lie to the idea that most voters want immigration to be cut at all costs. Rather, most Assembly members wanted a targeted approach, reducing immigration of those who do not benefit the UK economy and tackling immigration's specific harmful effects. The Assembly's membership was slightly skewed to a pro-immigration stance compared with the wider population, but not to an extent that alters this conclusion.

### Results that deserve attention

Full details of the Assembly's deliberations and conclusions can be found in its [report](#), available online. The report also demonstrates that the Assembly ought to be taken seriously. Not only did its membership closely reflect the composition of the UK electorate. In addition, its workings showed very high levels of inclusion, balance, and deliberative quality. The Assembly members worked very hard across two weekends. Their voice deserves to be listened to carefully.

# Should policies be decided at the European, national or sub-national level?

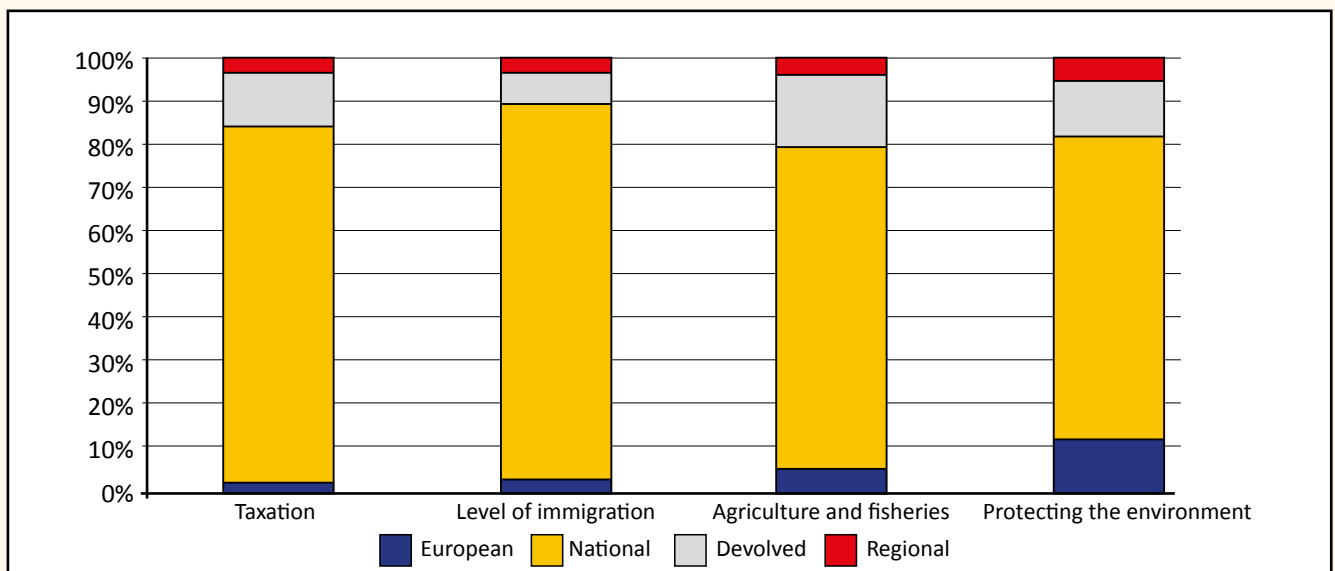
Noah Carl and Anthony Heath

The issue of sovereignty lies at the heart of the debate over Britain's membership of the EU. According to Lord Ashcroft's referendum-day poll, the most [commonly cited reason](#) for voting Leave was "the principle that decisions about the UK should be made in the UK". Likewise, when respondents in the British Election Study (BES) internet panel were asked, "what matters most to you when deciding how to vote in the EU referendum?", the modal [response among Leave voters](#) was 'sovereignty' or one of its various synonyms (e.g., 'control' or 'laws'). In fact, the whole EU debate arguably comes down to whether Britain should continue pooling its sovereignty with 27 other member states, or should reaffirm its national sovereignty by leaving.

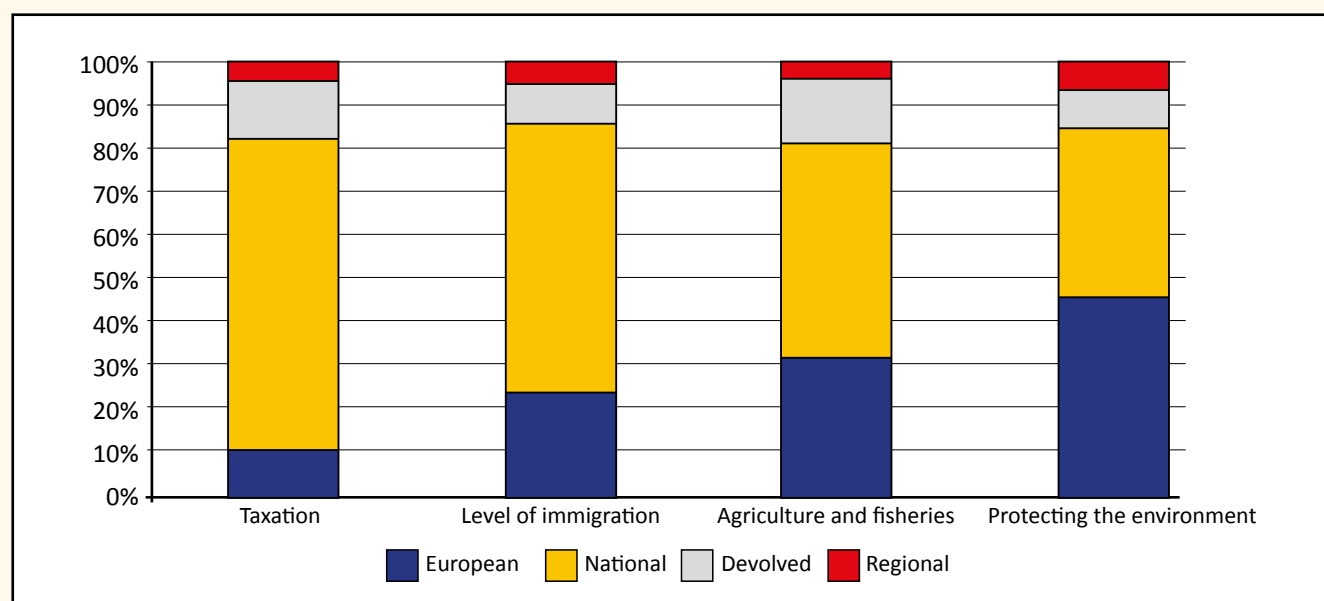
As part of our on-going study of attitudes to the Brexit negotiations, we asked respondents whether each of four policies "should mainly be decided" at the European level, the national level, the devolved level (e.g., Wales or England) or at the regional level (e.g., the North East or London). The four policies were: 'level of immigration', 'taxation', 'agriculture and fisheries', and 'protecting the environment'. Results for Leave supporters (those who voted Leave, or say they would have done so if they had voted) are shown in Figure 1, while equivalent results for Remain supporters are shown in Figure 2.

As expected, the vast majority of Leave supporters think that all four policies should be decided at the national or sub-national levels. More surprisingly, the majority of Remain supporters also think that all four policies should be decided at the national or sub-national levels. The percentage of Remain supporters who support decision-making at the European level is 44% for 'protecting the environment', 31% for 'agriculture and fisheries', 23% for 'level of immigration' and only 10% for 'taxation'.

**Figure 1: Support for decision-making at different levels among Leave supporters**



**Figure 2: Support for decision-making at different levels among Remain supporters**

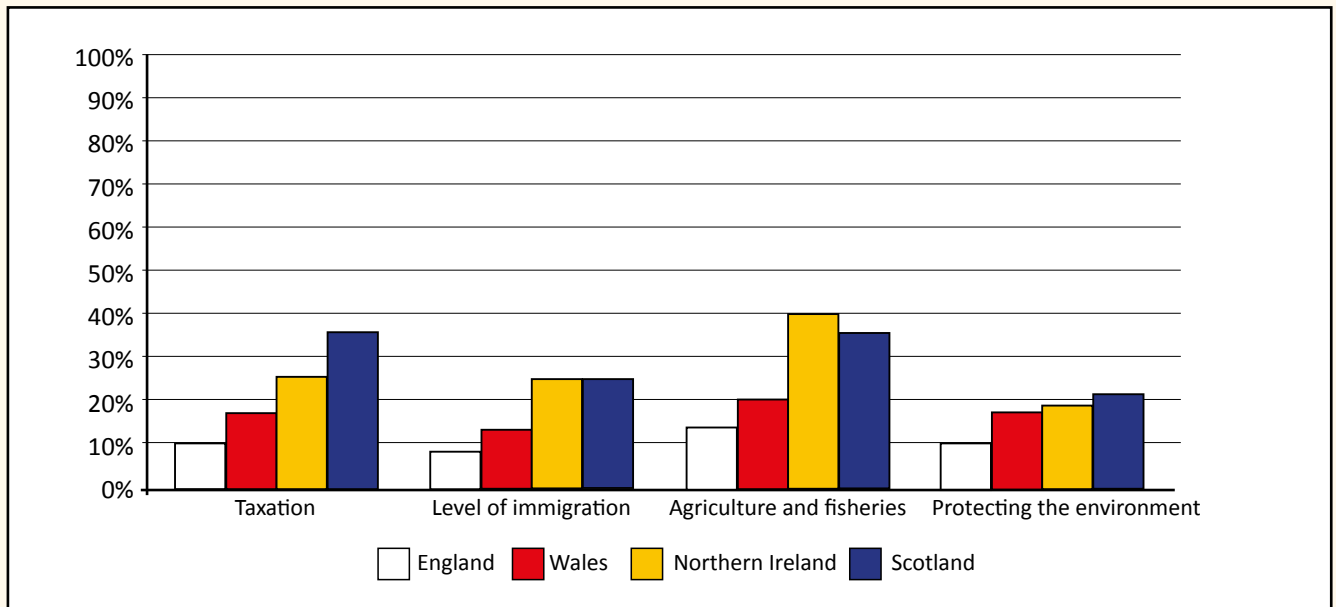


These results suggest that even most Remain supporters attach quite a lot of importance to national sovereignty. Indeed, in both Lord Ashcroft's referendum-day poll and the BES internet panel, by far the most frequently given reason for voting Remain was the 'economy', rather than anything positive about the EU itself. One possible reason why so few of the Remain supporters in our sample appear to support decision-making at the European level is that we used the phrase "should *mainly* be decided", and most Remain supporters may consider the current balance of competences to be satisfactory.

Another possible reason is that some Remain supporters may be unaware that the EU plays any role in areas of policy like, say, agriculture and fisheries. Indeed, [research by Simon Hix](#) shows that Britons are less knowledgeable about the EU than citizens of any member state. For example, [nearly half of Britons](#) were unaware that "The EU currently consists of 28 member states".

An important caveat is that our question included only one supra-national response category (i.e., 'European level') but three national or sub-national response categories. Any tendency for people to avoid extreme responding will therefore have resulted in a lower overall percentage in the supra-national response category.

We were also interested in whether decision-making preferences differed between English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish people. Support for decision-making at the European and regional levels did not differ substantially by country of residence, except that Northern Irish people were more likely to support decision-making at the European level for immigration. But support for decision-making at the *devolved level* was significantly different, as Figure 3 shows.

**Figure 3: Support for decision-making at the devolved level by country of residence**

Interestingly, support for decision-making at the devolved level is considerably higher in Scotland and Northern Ireland than it is in Wales or England. It is particularly low in England, which is probably attributable to the fact that there is currently no devolved assembly in England.

We checked to see whether support for decision-making at the devolved level differed between Leave and Remain supporters within each country of residence. For example, we suspected that English Leave supporters might be more supportive of decision-making at the devolved level than English Remain supporters. However, all such differences were small, and the vast majority were not significant.

In conclusion, the majority of respondents in our sample think that all four policies should be decided at the national or sub-national level, rather than the European level. Support for decision-making at the European level is somewhat higher among Remain supporters, while support for decision-making at the devolved level is somewhat higher among Scottish and Northern Irish people.

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# Sovereignty and cooperation: different dimensions of Brexit

**Lindsay Richards and Anthony Heath**

Possible post-Brexit relationships between the UK and the EU are usually categorised in terms of two ideal types. The hard Brexit position can be summarized in the words of the Conservative Party's Eurosceptics such as Jacob Rees-Mogg, who has said that "if [the ECJ](#) still has jurisdiction we will not have left the EU... it is perhaps the most important red line in ensuring the leave vote is honoured". Boris Johnson and Michael Gove have also made clear their "[ambition to be a fully independent](#) self-governing country by the time of the next election".

On the other side, Leader of the Opposition Jeremy Corbyn told the United Nations "We want to see a close and [cooperative relationship with our European neighbours](#) ... based on solidarity as well as mutual benefit and fair trade".

The key issues on the hard side are sovereignty and control, whilst those on the soft side are collaboration and trade. These issues, within the constraints of the negotiations, are usually considered to be trade-offs. For example, having access to the single market would necessarily involve acceding to EU market regulations, thereby relinquishing some control.

But how do the two opposing ideals play out in the minds of the general public? To explore this question, we use data collected online by Kantar Public between 10 July and 2 August 2017. We asked our respondents to imagine themselves at the negotiating table. For each of the key areas of negotiation we asked them to say whether they would make a deal, budge, or whether this issue would be a red line. The issues on the table included: immigration, sovereignty, the single market, scientific collaboration, budget contributions, citizens' rights, and the Irish border.

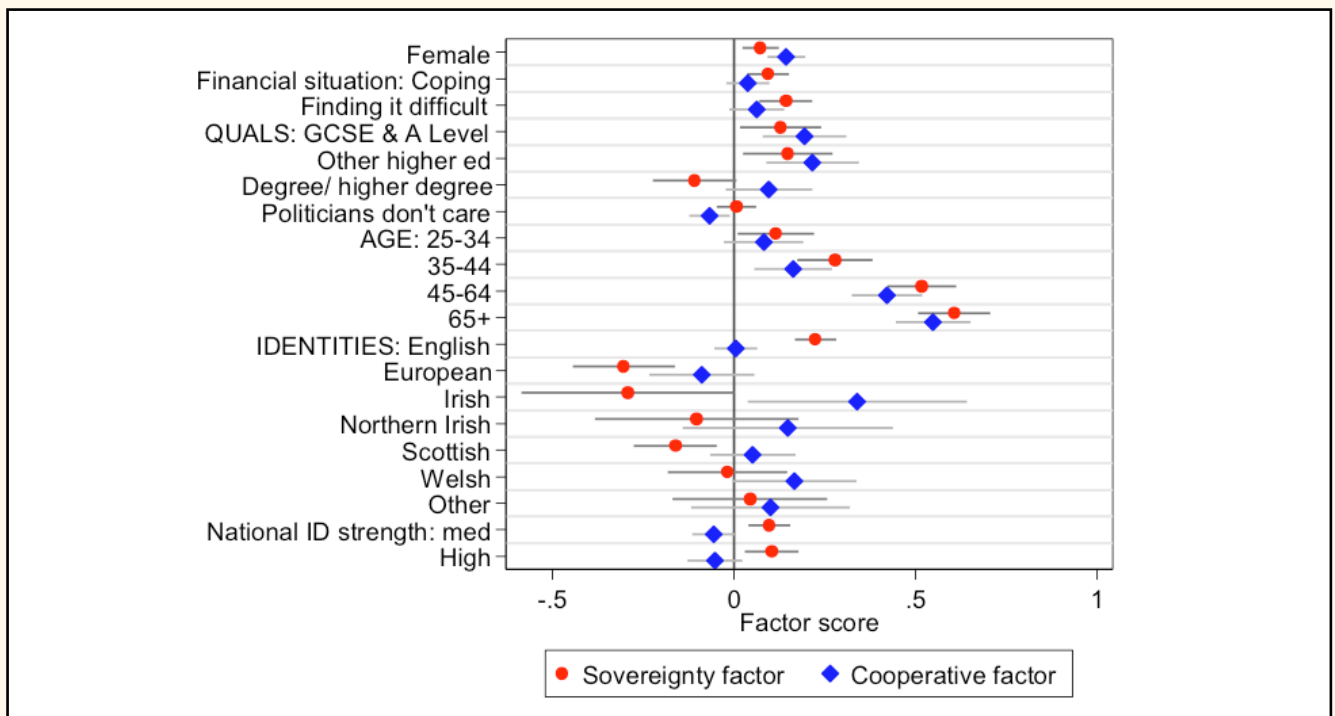
The structure of our question does not force respondents to make trade-off, meaning they can chose both the single market and sovereignty if they please. Indeed, as [other studies](#) have also found, many do. Using a method known as factor analysis, we use the inter-relationships between these seven items to reveal hidden attitudinal dimensions (or 'factors').

What emerges quite strikingly from the data are two factors, the first of which looks very much like the archetypical hard Brexit position. Like Rees-Mogg, Johnson, and Gove, it relates most strongly to sovereignty followed by budget contributions and free movement. This we label the 'Sovereignty Factor'. The second factor relates most strongly to scientific collaboration followed by access to the single market and citizens' rights: this, echoing Corbyn's words, we label the 'Cooperative Factor'.

We find a correlation of 0.44 between these two dimensions, meaning there is a moderate tendency for people who score high on one, to also score high on the other (and vice versa, to score low on both). The moderate correlation implies that the two dimensions are not opposites. Some individuals want to have their cake and eat it, favouring *both* sovereignty and cooperation. Others do see the dimensions

as contradictory, valuing sovereignty *rather than* cooperation and cooperation *rather than* sovereignty. We also test whether these dimensions are natural opposites in terms of their socio-demographic profiles. As we show in Figure 1, age has a similar effect on both dimensions. Older people tend to score higher on the Sovereignty Factor, but also on the Cooperative Factor. Other demographic Factors that predict higher scores on both factors include being female and being in a financial situation below 'living comfortably'.

**Figure 1: Socio-demographics have similar effects, but national identity distinguishes the two factors**



*Plot of regression coefficients; outcomes are the two latent factors; references categories are 'Living comfortably' (financial situation), 'No qualifications, 18-24' (age), 'British' (national identity), 'Weak' (national identity strength)*

Identity has had a prominent place in explaining Brexit-related opinion, where a local and traditional outlook (Englishness) has been pitted against a more trans-national outlook (Britishness, Europeanness). Here we do see differences between the two dimensions: Englishness is associated with a preference for sovereignty, while Scottishness and Irishness are associated with preferences for lower sovereignty and higher cooperation.

Education, another indicator of cultural position, shows an interesting pattern. Those with mid-range qualifications score higher than those with no qualifications on both sovereignty and cooperation. At degree level, however, we see a divergence: degree holders want cooperation but no sovereignty.

Our evidence strongly suggests that the soft-hard Brexit distinction plays out in the minds of British people as two dimensions that are only moderately related. Older people and those with mid-range qualifications want both more sovereignty and cooperation; conversely those with non-English national identities and degree-holders follow the political separation, and prefer more cooperation but less sovereignty.

# Immigration

John Curtice

Immigration was a key issue in the EU referendum. The vote was held against the backdrop of, by historical standards, relatively high levels of net inward migration. Polls suggested that well over half thought that immigration would fall if the UK left the EU, and that around 70% of those who held that view voted Leave. It was therefore hardly surprising that in the Lancaster House speech in which she outlined her vision of the UK's future relationship with the EU, the Prime Minister indicated that the UK no longer wanted to keep freedom of movement.

So, immigration not only played a key role in the EU referendum, but has also proved central in shaping the kind of Brexit the UK government hopes to achieve. But eighteen months on, do voters still expect immigration to fall, and do they want freedom of movement to end?

**Table 1. Expectations of the consequences of leaving the EU for immigration, September 2016-October 2017**

	Sept 2016	Feb 2017	July 2017	Oct 2017
	%	%	%	%
Higher	7	7	9	7
Not much difference	53	48	52	50
Lower	38	43	39	43

*Question: From what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that as a result of leaving the EU immigration to Britain will be higher, lower, or won't it make much difference?*

*Source: NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel*

There is little sign that voters' expectations of what will happen to immigration have markedly changed. Table 1 shows that on the four occasions a survey instigated by this author using NatCen's mixed mode random probability panel has addressed the issue, around two in five have consistently said they expect immigration to be lower as a result of leaving the EU. Other readings suggest that expectation is even more widespread. In six polls conducted by YouGov since the June 2017 general election, on average 52% have said they expect less immigration as a result of Brexit, not far short of the 56% registered on average in five polls conducted during the referendum campaign itself.

Relatively few polls have asked people on a regular basis what arrangement for EU migration they would ideally like to see emerge from the Brexit negotiations. However, NatCen's mixed mode panel has on four occasions asked people whether they would like the agreement to include:

"Requiring people from the EU who want to come to live here to apply to do so in the same way as people from outside the EU?"



**Table 2. Attitudes towards requiring EU migrants to apply in the same way as non-EU migrants, September 2016-Oct 2017**

	Sep 2016	Feb 2017	July 2017	Oct 2017
	%	%	%	%
In favour	74	68	68	64
Neither	12	16	14	15
Against	13	15	17	20

*Source: NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel*

As Table 2 shows, this is a relatively popular proposition – especially amongst those who voted Leave, 82% of whom backed it in the most recent survey. But at the same time almost half of Remain voters (49%) support it too. Remain voters are not necessarily uninterested in proposals to reduce EU migration.

The relative popularity of attempts to control migration has also been confirmed by the answers respondents to NatCen’s panel gave when they were asked other, differently worded questions about the subject. For example, in February 2017, 70% said they were in favour of requiring British citizens who want to move to an EU country to apply to do so, while in September 2016, 70% were in favour of Britain imposing a limit on the number of people who can come here to live and work. That said, Table 2 suggests there might have been some reduction in the level of support for controlling EU migration, albeit not on a scale to suggest that the UK government might now easily contemplate scrapping it as an objective.

However even if many voters hope and expect that immigration will fall as a result of Brexit, this does not necessarily mean they consider it a high priority. Perhaps when faced with the choice between ending freedom of movement and securing other objectives, such as continued access to the single market, those other objectives appear more important?

In practice, most polls that have asked voters to choose between access to the single market and ending freedom of movement have found the public quite evenly divided. For example, in five readings obtained by Opinium in the last quarter of 2017, on average 39% said that ‘staying in the single market’ was the more important priority, only slightly more than the 36% who indicated that ‘ending free movement of labour’ mattered more. Similarly, while in seven polls conducted by ORB since the general election on average 43% have agreed that ‘having greater control over immigration is more important than having access to free trade with the EU’, 42% have disagreed.

Meanwhile, in the most recent NatCen survey, 53% said that the UK should ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ allow ‘people from the EU to come here freely to live and work’ if that was the price that had to be paid for British firms being able to trade freely in the EU, while 47% indicated that it ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ should not.

Attitudes on this topic reflect for the most part how people voted in the referendum. For example, in the most recent NatCen survey, three-quarters of Remain voters said the UK should be willing to

accept free movement in return for free trade, while two-thirds of Leave voters took the opposite view. Although many Remain voters might ideally like to see an end to freedom of movement, they do not necessarily regard it as a priority. But in so far as the UK government is seeking in the Brexit talks to reflect the views expressed by the majority who voted to Leave, it seems there are still good reasons why ending freedom of movement should remain one of its negotiating priorities.

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# Nations and Regions

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## Towns and Cities

**Will Jennings, Gerry Stoker and Ian Warren**

Brexit exposed differences between people but also places. The big cities were the strongest base for Remain while towns and less urbanised areas provided the main platform for the Leave vote. Populations of the former tend to be young (and getting younger), better educated, more diverse (and increasingly so), more likely to work in professional-creative ‘cosmopolitan’ occupations, and less likely to own their home. They are also more socially liberal, pluralistic in their identity and relaxed about social change (in particular immigration).

In contrast, the populations of towns and rural areas are more prone to nostalgia, uneasy about immigration and tend to be more authoritarian and socially conservative. The Brexit vote was not a one-off event, but reflected emerging differences in outlooks between metropolitan and town dwellers.

### **Place, decline and Brexit**

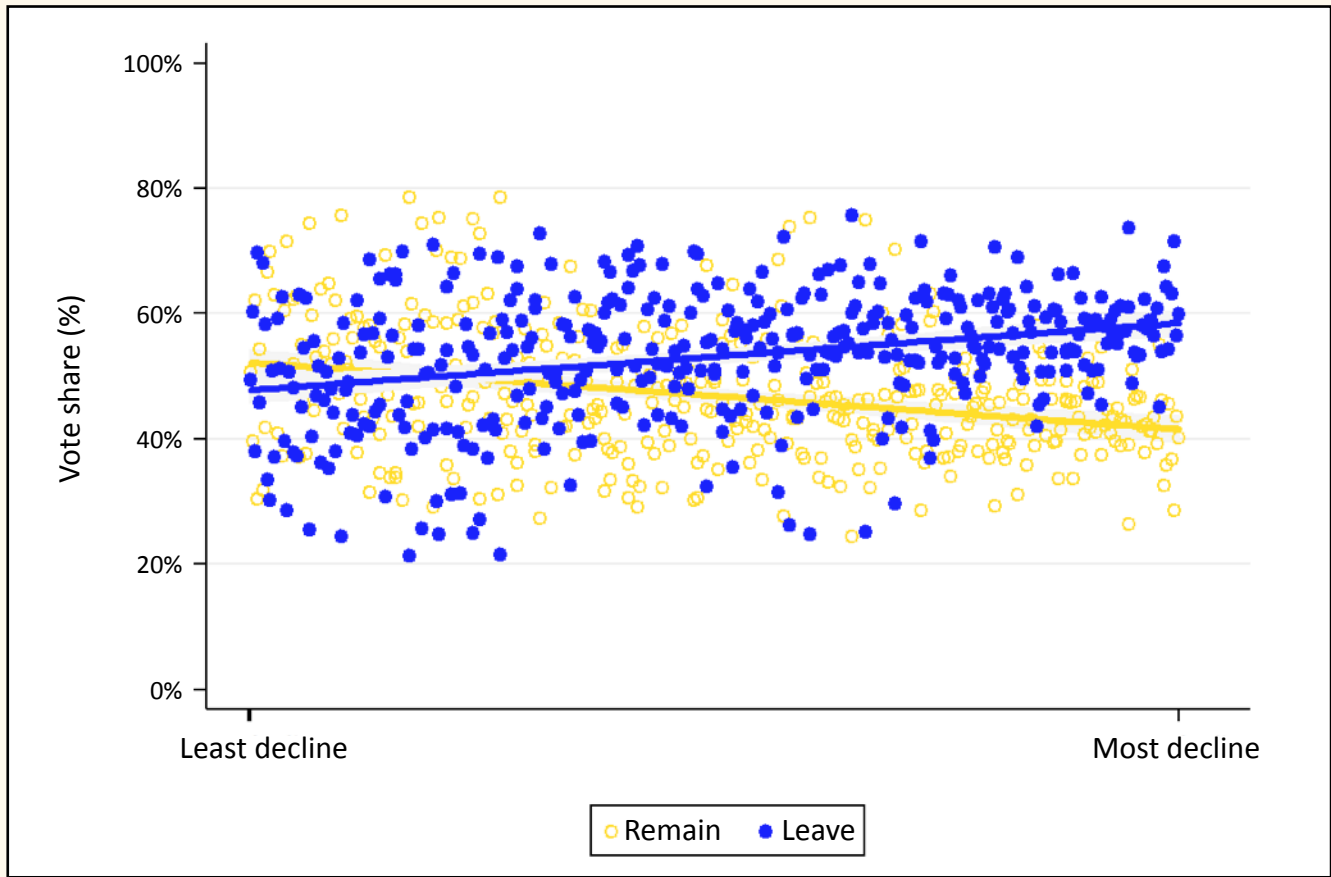
A complex economic and social dynamic has pushed cities and towns in different directions over several decades. To understand this growing divide in outlook by place we need an account that recognises the changes experienced by particular areas over an extended period of time.

For this purpose, at the [Centre for Towns](#) we have adapted a measure of economic and demographic decline developed by the the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which uses a set of indicators to determine the relative rate of decline of particular places between 1981 and 2011. These are designed to capture the rate of population growth (or decline), economic activity (or inactivity) and enterprise, and the inflow of younger and more educated workers – critical factors for success in the global economy.

Areas are ranked according to their rate of growth or decline relative to one another, with the final index taking the sum of rankings on the indicators. Most of the fast-growing areas are found in big cities, while many of the declining areas are coastal or former manufacturing areas.

Figure 1 plots the Remain and Leave vote share for each local authority against its ranking of relative decline. The pattern revealed is quite clear: areas that have experienced the most decline in recent decades voted Leave in greater numbers, whereas areas of relative growth were more likely to vote Remain. On average, the Leave vote was 20 points higher in those places that have experienced the greatest declines in terms of human and economic capital since the 1980s. As such, the Brexit vote can be viewed as a symptom of the divergent socio-economic trajectories of cities and towns.

Figure 1: Relative decline and Brexit



Britain’s new pessimists?

How do the populations of towns and cities differ in their outlooks? In partnership with Sky Data we fielded a national survey in October 2017 asking people whether they thought politicians care about people like them and whether they feel they are doing better financially than other people. By doing this we were able to establish whether people feel better or worse off – politically and economically – compared to the past and also, importantly, in their expectations for the future. We divided respondents into those who live in towns and those who live in ‘core cities’ – allowing us to reveal important differences in outlook according to place.

Figure 2 plots feelings of political influence (‘efficacy’). People living in big cities were less likely to believe politicians didn’t care about people like them in the past (50% compared to 60% of town-dwellers holding the same view), but their view has shifted substantially – with an increase of near 20% in the number of people saying politicians don’t care about people like them now. This group see their political clout as on the wane – which could be interpreted as a direct reaction to the Brexit vote. Citizens’ expectations about future political influence were slightly more upbeat for both groups – at least compared to the present. It is significant, though, that the current political context leaves the residents of towns and cities feeling equally alienated by politics, with little optimism about what the future holds.

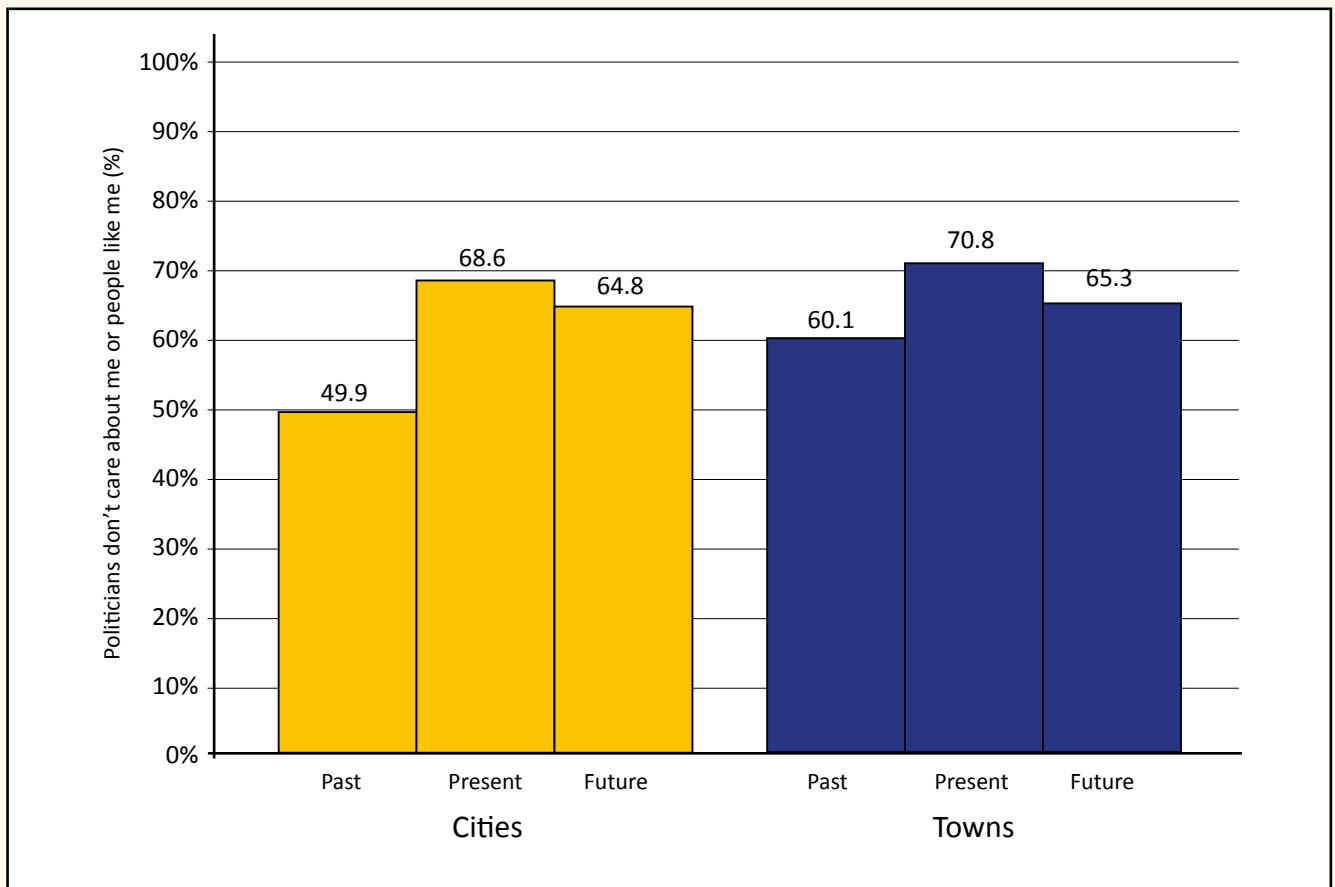
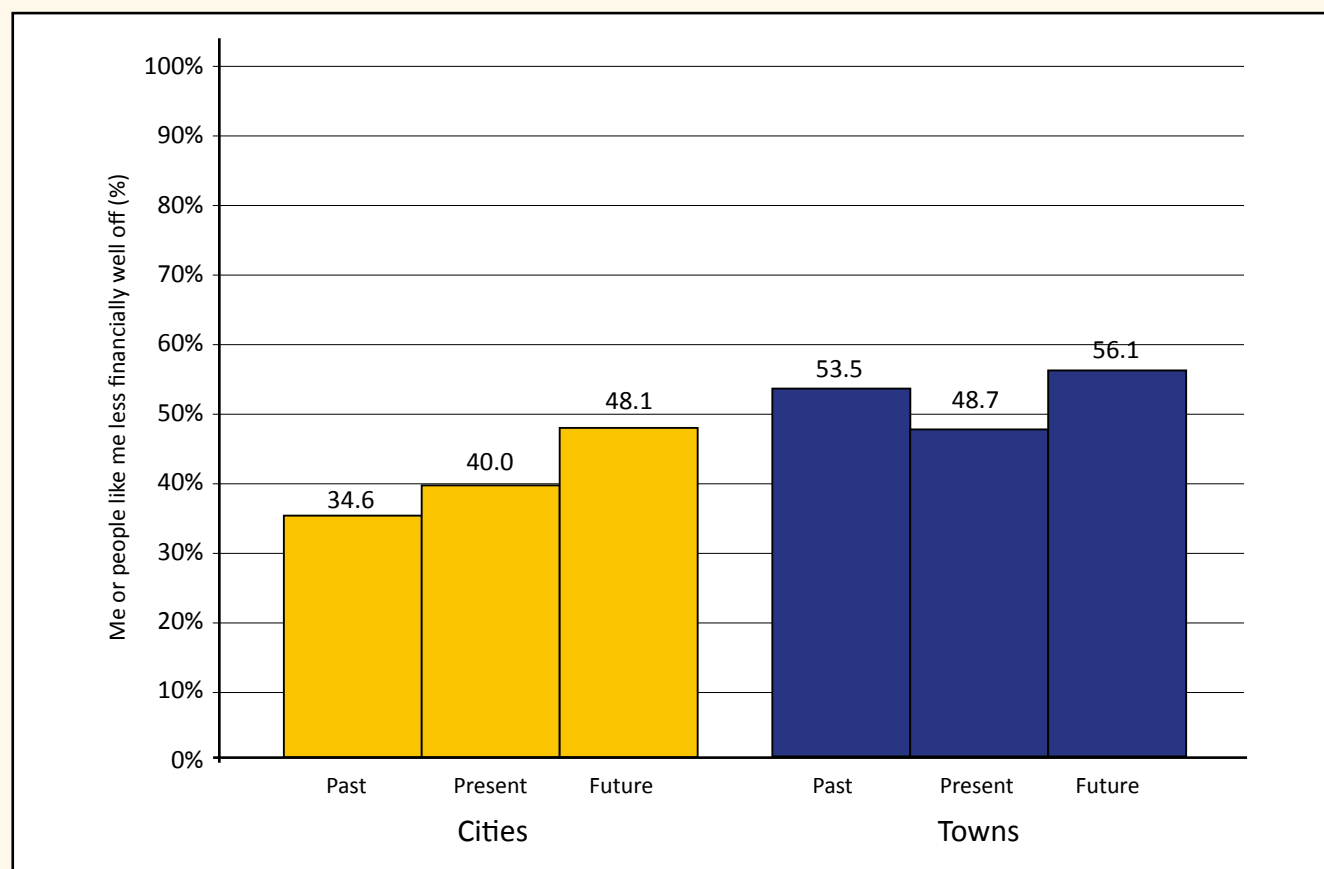
**Figure 2: Feelings of political influence in towns and cities**

Figure 3 looks at perceptions of economic insecurity and again reveals a divide between the populations of towns and cities. People living in towns were, on average, more likely to believe they or people like them are worse off than other people – both in the past, present and future, though currently see themselves as slightly better off than in the past. Those in cities, on the other hand, increasingly view themselves as less financially well off – a trend that again might be attributed to Brexit and the impact it is having on social attitudes. While Brexit may have represented the start of a rebalancing between the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalization, our survey revealed a rise of economic pessimism across both groups.

**Figure 3: Perceptions of personal financial circumstances in towns and cities**



## Conclusion

Our survey showed that in some ways Brexit has turned the politics of towns and cities on its head. While people living in cities feel that their political influence and financial situation has worsened compared to the past, towns-dwellers have in the short-term become slightly more optimistic about their financial situation and are more confident about their *political voice* being heard in the future. This is a negative sum game overall, however, as people living in towns remain negative about the future compared to the past – such that Brexit does not come with newfound optimism for ‘sunlit uplands beyond’ for those living in areas that tended to vote Leave.

The evidence we have offered here sees Brexit as a product of *relative deprivation* (in towns – having endured decades of relative decline) and a creator of it (in cities – which look towards a less optimistic future after Brexit). Britain’s new pessimists are city dwellers, though only to the extent that they are now almost as pessimistic as townsfolk. So far, Brexit has only succeeded in making everyone feel worse off.

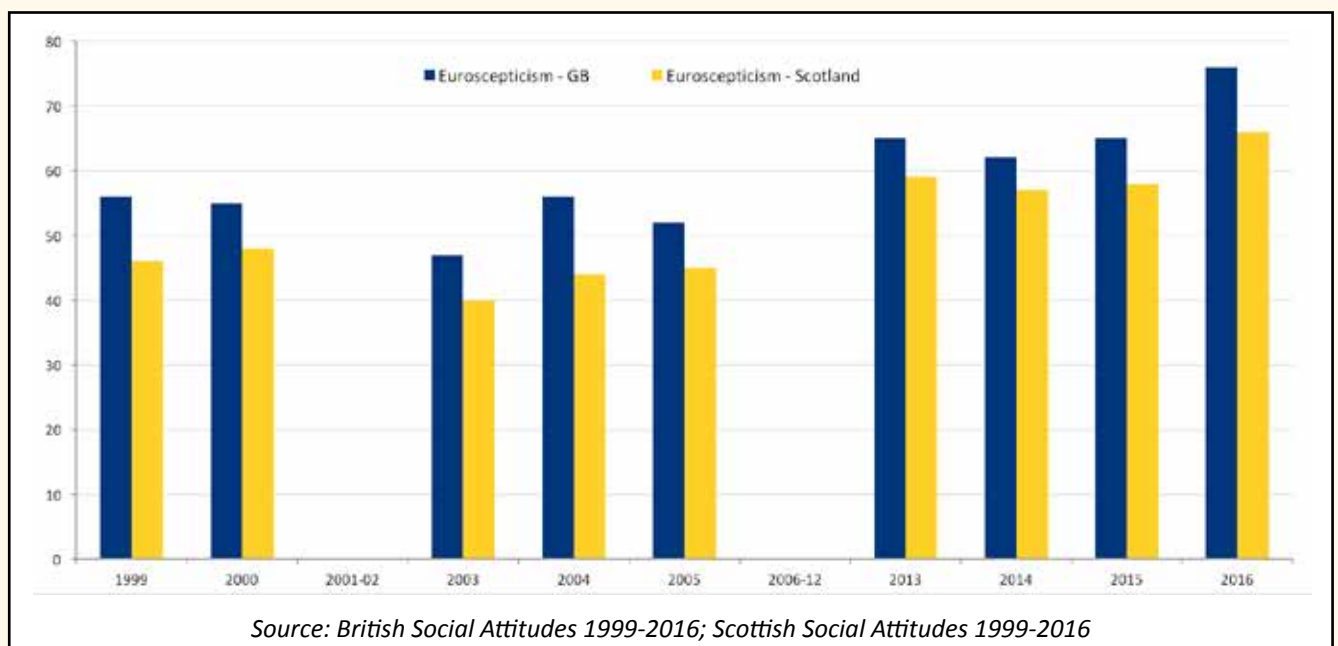
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# Scotland

Ian Montagu

Scotland voted very differently from the rest of Britain in the EU referendum: 62% of Scottish voters supported Remain compared with 48% across the UK as a whole. The result north of the border chimed with the avowedly pro-European stance adopted by the Scottish government throughout the referendum campaign, and suggested that the Scottish electorate held opinions towards Europe that were markedly different from those held by their counterparts across the rest of the UK. In response, the First Minister requested the authority to hold a second referendum on Scottish independence as a result of what she referred to as the 'material change of circumstances' brought about by the UK's vote to leave the EU. But do attitudes really differ between Scotland and the rest of Britain on the issue of Europe? And, if so, do voters in Scotland feel strongly enough about staying in the EU that they would be willing to rethink their constitutional preference?

The first point to note is that, despite the divergent result of the referendum north and south of the border, levels of Euroscepticism in Scotland (that is, the proportion of the population who favour a looser relationship with the EU than is currently the case) do not differ greatly from those across the rest of Britain. According to comparable data from the British and Scottish Social Attitudes surveys, levels of Euroscepticism in both Scotland and Britain as a whole were well above 50% in each of the three years prior to the referendum, with the most recent available reading suggesting that, by 2016, Euroscepticism in Scotland had increased to 66% (compared with 76% across Britain as a whole).



How do we square high levels of Euroscepticism in Scotland with the referendum result, which saw the majority of voters north of the border vote to remain in the EU in June 2016? The answer, to some

extent at least, lies in the relative strength of the party cues received by voters in Scotland (where the politically dominant and staunchly pro-European SNP held 56 out of the 59 available seats at Westminster and a strong majority at Holyrood) and those received across the rest of Britain (where the Conservatives were publicly split on the issue and Labour struggled to get its official pro-Remain message across to the electorate).

The effect of party cues can be demonstrated using British Election Study data, which illustrates that many voters in Scotland (and in particular SNP supporters) chose to remain in the EU despite not being convinced that leaving would be particularly harmful for the economy, and even though they felt that Brexit might cause immigration to fall. Essentially, this data show us that those in Scotland with relatively Eurosceptic attitudes were more likely to vote Remain than their counterparts across the rest of Britain, and that this effect was particularly pronounced amongst those who supported the SNP.

% voted Remain:	Brexit would...	
	make no difference to UK economy	cause immigration to fall
SNP supporters	57	62
Scotland	43	43
England & Wales	29	29

*Source: British Election Study*

Despite the result of the EU referendum, then, it appears that underlying Scottish attitudes towards Europe do not differ greatly from those observed elsewhere in Britain. However, now that the UK has voted to leave the EU, do voters in Scotland adopt a divergent stance on the shape that Brexit should take?

Of this, there is little evidence. According to data collected using the random probability-based NatCen and ScotCen Panels (further referenced in this report by John Curtice in the context of attitudes towards immigration), the majority of voters in Scotland wish to maintain free trade with the EU whilst ending freedom of movement – a position also held by the majority of voters elsewhere in Britain. The most recent wave of fieldwork undertaken in October 2017 suggests that support for retaining free trade stands at 90% in Scotland compared with 88% across Britain as a whole, while the equivalent figures for ending freedom of movement are 59% and 64% respectively.

Further, although voters in Scotland appear to be more likely than voters south of the border to accept freedom of movement in return for free trade (63% compared with 53%), a majority believe that post-Brexit rules on both trade and immigration should be the same in Scotland as they are across the rest of the UK. It appears therefore that the views of voters in Scotland on what Brexit should mean are closer to the conception of Brexit envisaged by Theresa May than that offered by Nicola Sturgeon.



	Scotland (%)	England & Wales (%)
<i>Free trade</i>		
In favour	90	88
Neither	6	9
Against	3	3
<i>Free movement</i>		
In favour	59	64
Neither	15	15
Against	25	20

Source: NatCen/ScotCen Panel, October 2017

All of this suggests that, despite the differential referendum result in Scotland, leaving the EU may not represent the constitutional game-changer that some expected. The prevalence of Euroscepticism in Scotland, coupled with attitudes towards the shape of Brexit that correspond more closely with those of Westminster than Holyrood, hint at an electorate that may not reflect the resolutely pro-European outlook of the SNP.

Even more crucially, it appears that the very people required to change their minds in order to push support for independence over the 50% mark – those who voted No in the 2014 independence referendum, and Remain in the EU referendum – may not be so attached to the EU as to be willing to break up the Union with the rest of the UK to retain Scotland's EU membership. According to the latest Scottish Social Attitudes data, even amongst unionists who voted Remain there exists a high degree of relative Euroscepticism – despite not wanting to leave the EU outright, 66% of this group wished to see a reduction in the EU's powers. This suggests this group values the Union with the UK more than they value their links to the EU.

Whilst the First Minister's speech at Bute House requesting the authority to hold a second independence referendum reiterated her stance that voters in Scotland deserved "the right to choose our own future", Ms Sturgeon also offered a cautionary note, highlighting that when voters made their choice in June 2016 "independence was not on the ballot paper ... we cannot simply assume that because someone voted to Remain in the EU that they would vote Yes for an independent Scotland". It appears her caution was well-founded.

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# Wales

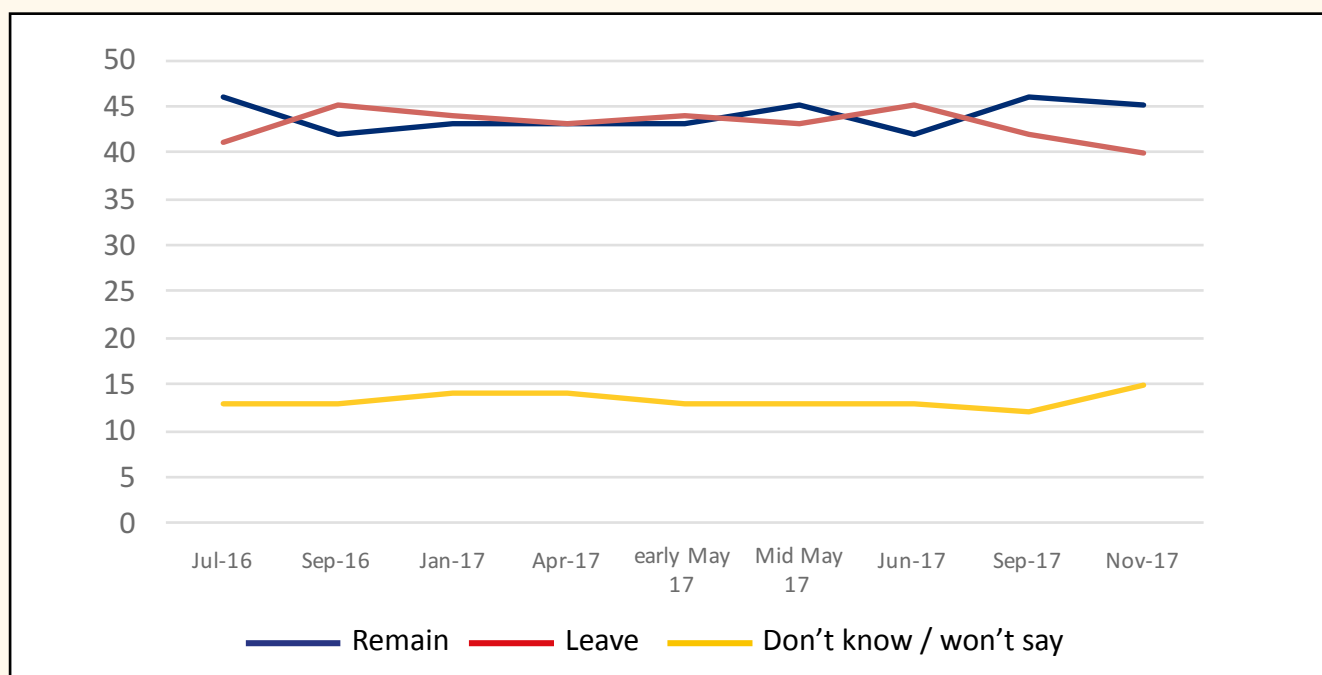
## Roger Scully

The June 2016 referendum result in Wales surprised many. Wales voted Leave by a margin that almost exactly mirrored the result across the UK. It did so against its own apparent self-interest (as a net beneficiary from the EU budget) and against the overwhelming consensus of the Welsh political and cultural elite. Yet Leave it clearly was.

Since the referendum, Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre has conducted regular and detailed research on public attitudes to Brexit. Our frequent Welsh Political Barometer polls (the only regular political polling in Wales, conducted jointly with YouGov and ITV-Wales) has tracked public opinion. A major academic survey, linked to the 2016 Welsh Election Study, was conducted in summer 2017. And in late summer 2017 we also carried out qualitative focus groups, concentrating on working class Leave voters in the south Wales valleys that voted heavily for Brexit.

The regular polls have shown little sign of any significant shift in public attitudes thus far. People have been asked how they would vote in another Brexit referendum: as Figure 1 shows, throughout the last eighteen months there has been little change. This overall stability reflects very few people on either side of the Remain/Leave divide having changed their mind since June 2016. The most recent poll, published in late-November 2017, suggested a modest move against Brexit: Remain was five points ahead of Leave. But this is hardly a decisive shift in the public mood.

**Figure 1: Second EU referendum voting intention, July 2016 – November 2017, Wales**



Source: Welsh Political Barometer polls, fieldwork by YouGov

The persisting divisions between Remainers and Leavers go much further than merely referendum voting intention. Our detailed academic survey showed stark differences between the two groups along several dimensions. Remainers and Leavers in Wales differed on what they *want* to happen. There was no consensus on what kind of deal the UK should seek with the EU. The majority of Leave voters (78%) wished to see the UK regain full control over how Britain is governed and who can live in the UK, even if that meant not having a free trade relationship with the EU. By contrast, some 63% of Remain voters either wished for Britain to remain in the EU after all (41%) or to retain close ties through associate membership (22%).

The two sides also differed starkly in terms of what they *expected* to be the consequences of Brexit. When asked if they would personally be better or worse off as a result of Brexit, some 73% of Remainers believed they would be worse off, compared to only 17% of Leavers. Most Leavers (53%) felt there would be no perceivable difference, though nearly a third (30%) believed they will be personally better off after Brexit. Similar findings can be seen when asking about the economic consequences of Brexit for Wales, with 82% of Remainers believing it will be worse off, compared with only 24% of Leavers. The majority of Leavers (52%) again expected no marked difference, with 24% thinking Wales will be better off.

We also asked respondents about the impact of leaving the EU on key policy areas including unemployment, immigration and Britain's global influence. The data showed that:

- On the question of unemployment, the majority of Leave voters (60%) expected unemployment to stay around about the same as now, but some 30% believed that it will fall after Brexit. Almost no Remain voters thought that unemployment will fall: the majority (54%) think it will be higher, and another 39% think that it will stay at about the same level.
- When it comes to immigration into the UK, the majority of Leavers (70%) expected to see immigration fall, whereas only 30% of Remainers believed immigration will decline; 63% of them expected it to remain about the same.
- On the issue of Britain's global influence, very few Leave voters (10%) thought that Britain will have less influence after Brexit, compared with 68% of Remain voters expecting that Britain's place in the world will be diminished.

But Remain/Leave voter differences even went as far as matters of political process: *how* Brexit should be done. When asked what they would like to see happen once the talks are concluded, there was again no consensus. Most Leave voters thought that any agreement struck between the UK and EU should either be implemented immediately or after a ratification vote in the UK Parliament. By contrast, a majority of those who voted Remain in 2016 either wanted a second referendum to endorse an agreement or thought that both the UK Parliament and the devolved parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should have to ratify any deal.

To try to understand some of these attitudes more fully, we also conducted five lengthy focus groups with working class Leave voters in the South Wales Valleys. The valleys have been solidly Labour for

decades; they have also received large amounts of EU aid in recent times. Yet all of them voted Leave, most by substantial margins, against the advice of the Welsh Labour party and against their own apparent economic self-interest. So why did they do it?

Three key points came out of our group discussions. The first was continuing and substantial hostility among many of these voters towards immigration. Several participants articulated specifically working class objections to immigration: that immigrants were taking jobs from locals and driving down wages – to the benefit of employers rather than ordinary workers. The second prominent theme in the discussions was that participants struggled to see how their communities had benefitted from EU membership. Much EU spending in the valleys was viewed as being wasteful ‘vanity projects’ that had been carried out without much consultation with local communities. The final point was that many Leave voters expected that Brexit may cause short-term problems – this appears to have already been ‘priced in’ to some extent – but they expect it to be worth it in the longer-term.

This research has provided us with the most detailed understanding yet of public thinking about Brexit in Wales. The picture it paints is not a very positive one. There is little sign of public consensus emerging on Brexit: we are not coming together, as the Prime Minister has suggested, but continue to be deeply divided.

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# Northern Ireland

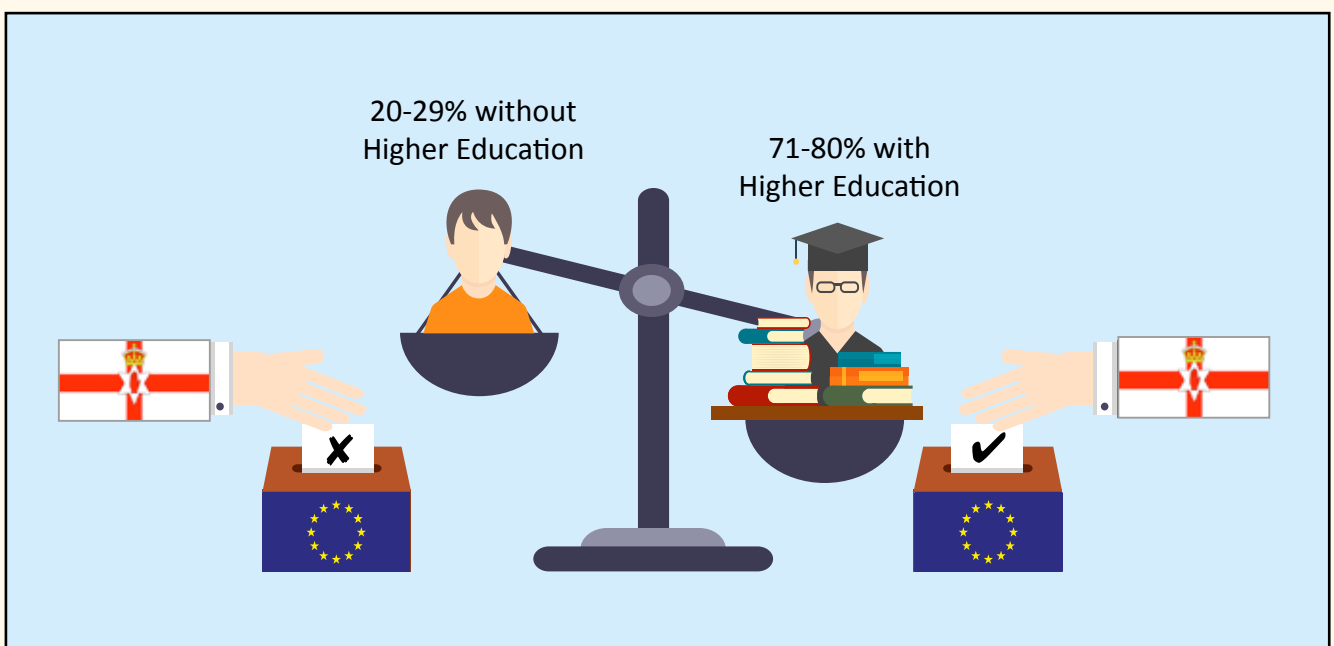
John Garry

Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU at the June 2016 referendum by a margin of 56% to 44%. Voting was very strongly linked to the underlying divide in Northern Ireland between Catholic nationalists (who tend to identify as Irish and favour a united Ireland) and Protestant unionists (who tend to identify as British and favour maintaining Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom).

85% of Catholics voted Remain compared to only 40% of Protestants, and 88% of people who describe themselves as 'nationalist' voted Remain compared to only 34% of 'unionists'. Similarly, 87% of respondents who identify as Irish voted Remain, compared to only 37% of British identifiers.

In addition to this potent ethno-national basis to voting in the referendum, a globalisation-based interpretation of voting is also relevant. Leave voters in Northern Ireland tended to be those 'left behind' by globalisation (working class, less skilled and educated voters with socially conservative views) while the 'winners' of the globalisation process (young, educated, skilled multi-culturalists) tended to be pro-Remain.

For example, 80% of Northern Ireland citizens with a postgraduate qualification and 71% of those with a degree voted Remain, compared to less than half of those citizens with GCSE qualifications or less. People who attended a grammar school were also more likely to vote Remain than people who did not attend. 85% of those who strongly agree that *'immigration has been good for Northern Ireland's economy and society'* voted Remain, compared to only 24% of those who strongly disagree. A similar, albeit slightly less strong, relationship exists between opposing homosexuality and voting Leave.



These two interpretations of voting – the ethno-national and the ‘left behind’ explanations – interact with each other. Catholics are quite homogenous in their pro-Remain disposition, with little variation between how working class, less well-educated Catholics voted compared to middle class, more highly educated Catholics. In contrast, the ‘left behind’ argument is much better at explaining variation in Protestant voting behaviour: higher skilled and educated Protestants were much more likely than lower skilled, lower educated Protestants to vote Remain. Notably, there is almost no difference between how grammar school Catholics and non-grammar school Catholics voted. However, there is a much stronger propensity for non-grammar school Protestants to vote Leave than grammar school Protestants.

What about public opinion since the referendum? Comparing the same voters at the time of the referendum and almost one year later, it emerges that 90% of those who voted Remain in 2016 say that they would do so again if there was a second referendum. However, slightly fewer than three quarters of those who voted Leave indicate that they would do so again if another referendum were held. In a similar vein, ‘switchers’ from Leave to Remain are over twice as numerous (17%), as Remain-to-Leave switchers (7%). So, insofar as there is movement in opinion since the referendum, it is in a pro-Remain direction.

Unsurprisingly there are differences in how Leavers and Remainers assess the implications of exit for Northern Ireland. 29% of all respondents think that the economy in Northern Ireland will be stronger after exit, but there are massive differences between pro-Remain respondents (only 7% are positive) and pro-Leave respondents (76% are positive). Also, two thirds of all respondents believe that Northern Ireland should have ‘special status’ after exit, meaning that the relationship between Northern Ireland and the EU would be closer than the relationship that Britain would have with the EU. However, differences exist: 85% of Remainers and only 32% of Leavers agree with the need for ‘special status’.

Both sides agree on the need to avoid the emergence of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Less than a quarter of Leavers and only 11% of Remainers think that there should be a hard border, almost certainly reflecting shared and widespread worries about trade disruption and the potential for renewed political violence – in addition to the likely fear of unionists on the Leave side that the emergence of a hard border could initiate a debate on Irish unification.

While a hard north/south border has little support, half of all respondents (to a September 2017 survey) agreed with the statement that *‘people should be prepared to accept border controls between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, if this is agreed in the Brexit negotiations between the Government and the EU’*.

Willingness to accept such controls was stronger among Leave voters (64% agreed), supporters of unionist parties (59%) and Protestants (54%), probably reflecting a willingness to live with east/west border controls as the price of a Brexit successfully negotiated by the British government (although opinions may harden as the issue becomes more politicised). Lower levels of agreement from Remain voters (44%), nationalist supporters (47%) and Catholics (43%) imply, by contrast, reluctance to contemplate any kind of new border controls.

The Northern Ireland component of the Brexit negotiations is likely to remain salient for the entire duration of the process as concerns about the border are inextricably linked to the wider question of the long term vision of a post-exit UK. The key take-home message for the negotiators from the evidence on Northern Ireland behaviour and opinion to date is that 'Brexit' is associated with a strong division in how the ethno-national groups voted in the referendum, and a strong consensus on the need to avoid a hard north/south border.



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