

# THE EMOTIONAL LEGACY OF BREXIT: HOW BRITAIN HAS BECOME A COUNTRY OF 'REMAINERS' AND 'LEAVERS'

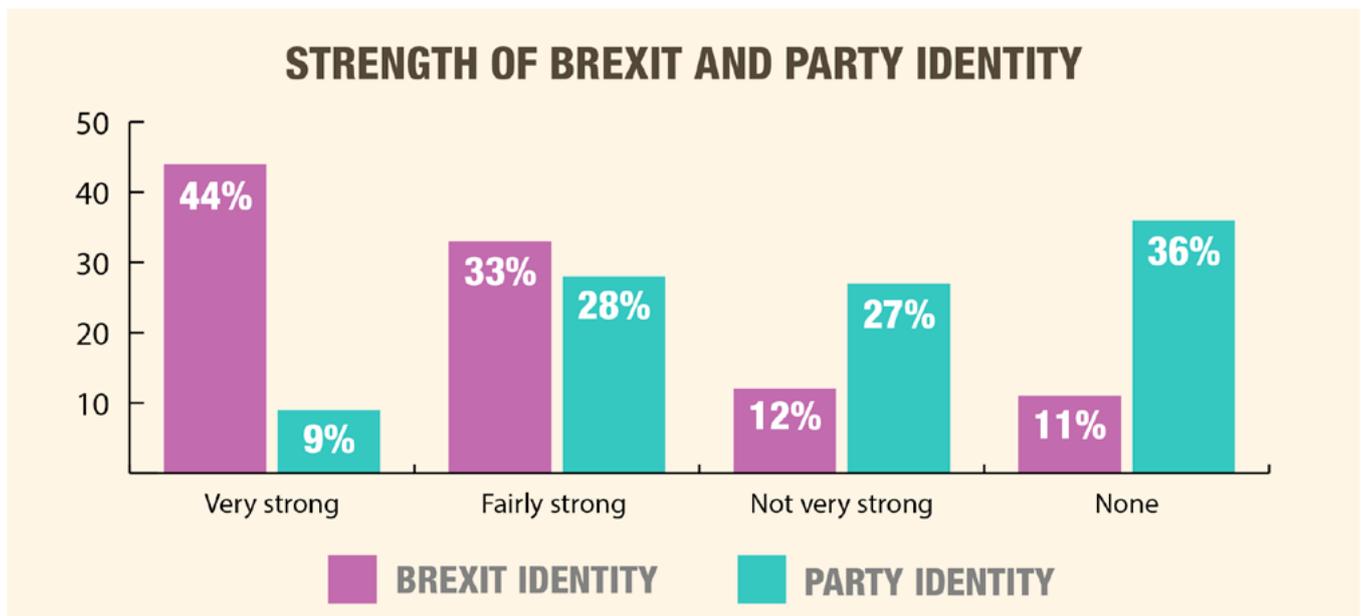
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# The Emotional Legacy of Brexit: How Britain Has Become a Country of ‘Remainers’ and ‘Leavers’

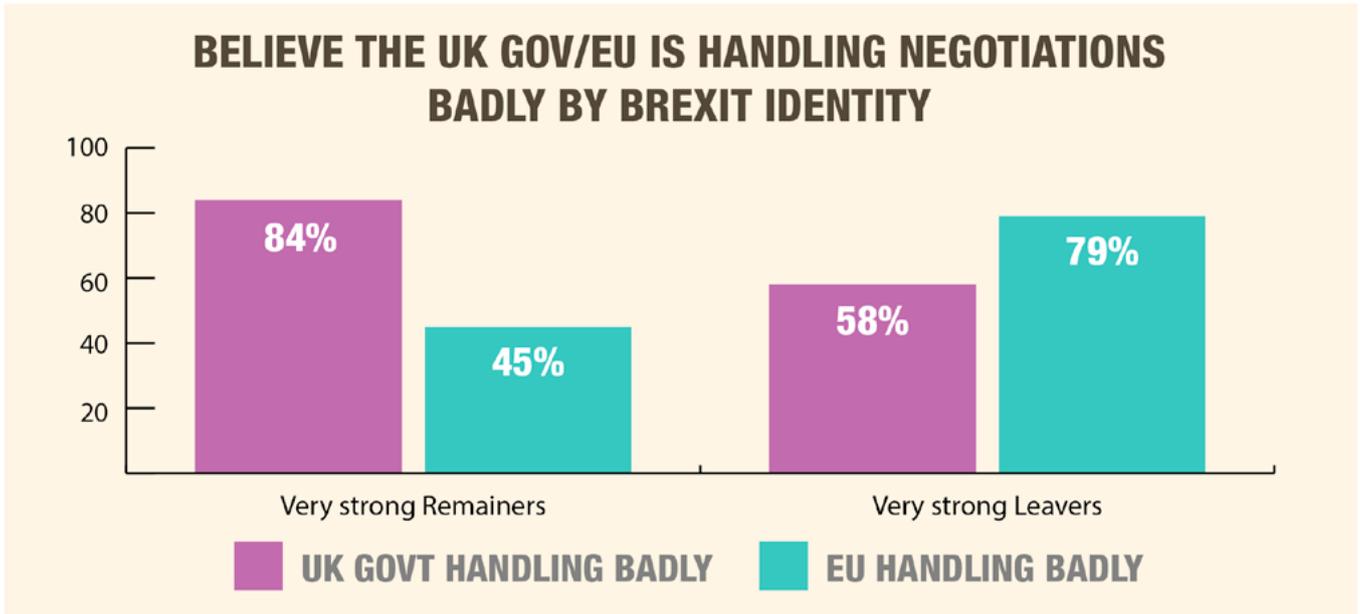
It has long been evident that these days relatively few voters feel strongly attached to a political party. But it has been suggested that, in the wake of the EU referendum, many people regard themselves as either a strong ‘Remainer’ or a strong ‘Leaver’. Using data from the most recent wave of questions about Brexit asked on the NatCen mixed mode random probability panel, we compare the prevalence and strength of Brexit identity with that of party identity, and assess the extent to which those with a strong Brexit identity have distinctive views about the Brexit process.

## KEY FINDINGS

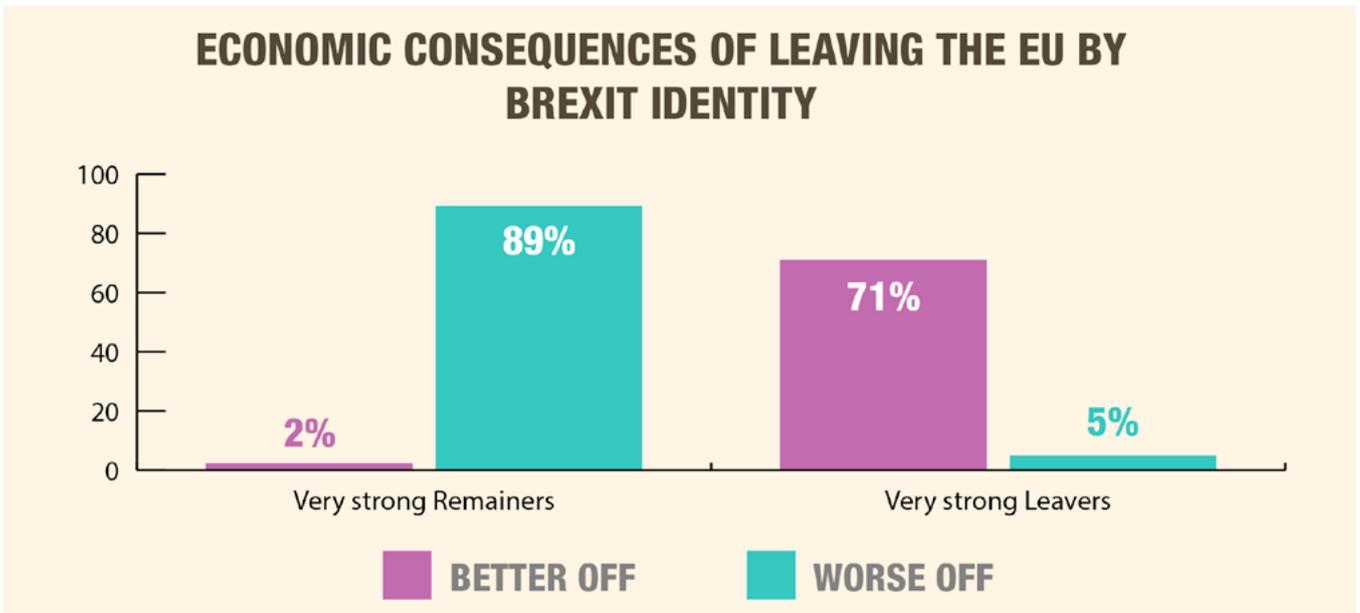
Far more people feel a strong attachment to Remain or Leave that consider themselves to be a supporter of a political party.



Very strong Remainers are particularly likely to be critical of how the UK government has been handling the Brexit negotiations while very strong Leavers are especially critical of the EU.



Nearly all very strong Remainers are pessimistic about the economic consequences of Brexit while most very strong Leavers are optimistic.



## INTRODUCTION

One of the central concepts in the study of voting behaviour is ‘party identification’ (Dalton, 2016). It points to the possibility that voting behaviour is not simply a cognitive or rational act, whereby voters cast their ballot in favour of whichever party’s policies are closest to their own views or whichever party they think is best able to run the country. Rather, voters may be motivated by affective or emotional considerations. They may come to regard or identify themselves as ‘Labour’, ‘Conservative’ or ‘Liberal Democrat’, much like someone might regard themselves as a ‘Manchester United’ or ‘Manchester City’ supporter. Because of this emotional bond, they may continue to vote for the party with which they identify even though they may be unhappy about some of its recent policy proposals or have doubts about the competence of its current leadership.

However, academic surveys of voters conducted during the course of the last fifty years have consistently found that fewer and fewer people identify strongly with a political party (Clarke et al., 2004; Lee and Young, 2013, Sanders, 2017). As a result, voters are often thought to be more inclined to take account of a party’s policies and/or performance in how they vote (Franklin, 1985; Clarke et al., 2009), and, consequently are also potentially more volatile in the choice that they make (Mellon, 2016). But at the same time, they may also be more difficult to motivate to vote at all. In short, the decline in party identification has seemed like something of a double-edged sword – a more rational but also a less engaged electorate.

It has, though, been suggested that Brexit has added a new twist to this story. In their research on voters’ attitudes towards Brexit, Hobolt et al. (2018) have suggested that while relatively few voters think of themselves a strong supporter of any particular party, many do now think of themselves as a ‘Remainer’ or a ‘Leaver’. In other words, it is argued that the debate about Brexit is so intense for many voters that they have come to form a strong emotional attachment to the cause of remaining in or leaving the EU. If that is the case, then it would seem unlikely that the more or less even balance of opinion recorded in the referendum in June 2016 will shift decisively in one direction or the other in the immediate future. It implies that any new information that voters receive about Brexit is filtered and interpreted through the lens of their ‘Remainer’ or ‘Leaver’ identity, such that their existing preference is not disturbed. Meanwhile, if many voters are emotionally attached to Remain or Leave, reconciling the two sides of the Brexit debate when the future of the UK’s relationship is eventually resolved may also prove quite difficult, while the issue could continue to be an important one in shaping how people vote in future elections.

In this paper, we report the results of our attempt to test the existence and assess the significance of Brexit identity. We begin by showing how many people claim to be a ‘Remainer’ or a ‘Leaver’ in response to questions that are worded as similarly as possible to those that have previously been used to ascertain party identification. By adopting this strategy, we are able to undertake a systematic comparison of the prevalence and strength of Brexit identity with that of party identity. We then go on to examine the extent to which Brexit identity has served to keep voters loyal to the vote that they cast in 2016, not least by helping to shape their view of the consequences of Brexit and how Brexit is being negotiated.

## ASKING ABOUT BREXIT IDENTITY

In their research, Hobolt et al. have ascertained whether someone thinks of themselves as a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver' by asking the following:

**Since the EU referendum last year, some people now think of themselves as Leavers and Remainers, do you think of yourself as:**

- A Leaver**
- A Remainer**
- Neither a Leaver nor a Remainer**
- Don't know**

On occasion they have also asked the following of those who did not declare that they are a Leaver or a Remainer in response to the above question:

**Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one side or the other? If yes, which one?**

- Leavers**
- Remainers**
- Neither Leavers nor a Remainers**
- Don't know**

However, there are possible objections to the wording of Hobolt et al.'s initial question. By stating that 'some people now think of themselves as Leavers and Remainers' without also indicating that others do not, the question might be thought to be at risk of encouraging respondents to report having a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver' identity. Meanwhile, the wording is not close to that of any of the questions currently in use to measure party identification, thereby making systematic comparison of the prevalence of the two identities difficult.

The initial question that is asked on NatCen's British Social Attitudes survey (Phillips et al., 2018) to ascertain whether or not someone has a party identification reads as follows:

**Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party?**

Meanwhile, the principal instrument for the survey-based study of voting behaviour in Britain, the British Election Study (British Election Study, 2017), asks:

**Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, or what?**

The nearest possible functional equivalent to either version would appear to be, 'Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Remainer or a Leaver?' But to ask this question without indicating that these labels refer to the debate about Brexit risks incredulity in the minds of voters if they do not necessarily link them in their minds to the discussion about Britain's future relationship with the EU. Meanwhile, as we have already indicated, we were concerned about asking a question that appeared to presume that voters did have some kind of Brexit identity. After undertaking pilot testing that suggested that the question did appear to be widely understood, we opted for the following formulation:

**Thinking about Britain's relationship with the European Union, do you think of yourself as a 'Remainer', a 'Leaver', or do you not think of yourself in that way?**

Both British Social Attitudes (BSA) and the British Election Study (BES) ask a follow-up question of those who do not declare a party identity in response to their initial question. In the case of BSA this question reads:

**Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one political party than to the others?**

Its equivalent on the BES is very similar:

**Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others?**

We therefore opted for the following formulation that closely follows the wording on BSA:

**Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one side or the other?**

Between them, our initial and our follow-up question are designed to give us an indication of the prevalence of the two Brexit identities, 'Remainer' and 'Leaver'. However, we also wished to ascertain how strongly people associate themselves with one or other of the two identities. Perhaps whatever adherence they have to one side or the other is largely nominal, much like many people's identification is with the Church of England, rather than something that represents a strong emotional pull. Here, fortunately, both BSA and BES ask exactly the same question to ascertain the strength of someone's party identification. It reads:

**Would you call yourself very strong (party), fairly strong, or not very strong?**

where the name of the party with which the respondent has already said that they identify is inserted at '(party)'. We, therefore, were able to mimic this question directly by asking:

**Would you call yourself a very strong (Remainer/Leaver) fairly strong, or not very strong?**

Consequently, when it comes to the strength of someone's Brexit identity the data reported here are directly comparable to those obtained for party identification on both BSA and the BES.

## THE DATA

Our two questions designed to tap the direction of someone's Brexit identification and the further question on the strength of their identity were included on the most recent wave of NatCen's mixed mode random probability panel (Jessop, 2018). A total of 2,090 interviews were conducted between 7 June and 8 July 2018, representing a 56% response rate amongst the 3,734 people who were invited to take part, all of whom had originally been interviewed for the annual British Social Attitudes survey. In order to limit the impact of differential willingness to participate in the survey, the data have been weighted to reflect the known demographic character of the population and the distribution of responses to key variables on the original British Social Attitudes surveys. Full details of the questions about Brexit that were asked on the survey and the pattern of responses they obtained are to be found in a previous report on this site (Curtice, 2018; Montagu, 2018).

As well as being asked about their Brexit identity, respondents to this wave of the NatCen panel were also presented with the BSA sequence of questions designed to ascertain party identity. The strength of their party identity was, however, not asked on this wave. Here our comparison is with the answers that respondents gave when they were first interviewed as part of the annual BSA survey.

## REMAINERS AND LEAVERS

The pattern of responses to our questions confirms that voters are far more likely to declare a Brexit identity than they are to say that they have a party identity. As many as 31% of our panel respondents not only said when interviewed on the June 2018 wave of the panel that they did not think of themselves as a supporter of one of the parties, but also indicated that they did not feel closer to any of them. Indeed, as many as 36% of them did not do so when they were first interviewed as part of BSA. In contrast, just 11% of our panel respondents both said that they did not think of themselves as a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver', and that they did not feel closer to either side. Identification with one or other side in the Brexit debate does, indeed, seem to be much more widespread than party identity.

Moreover, it appears that for many people their Brexit identity is far from simply nominal. Table 1 compares our panel respondents' reported strength of party identification when they were first interviewed for BSA with how strongly they claim to identify as a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver'. Whereas slightly less than one in ten (9%) said that they identify very strongly with a political party, well over two in five (44%) say that are a very strong Remainer or a very strong Leaver. Less than one in four (23%) either have only a weak (i.e. 'not very strong') sense of Brexit identity or none at all. In contrast, more than three in five (63%) fall into one of those categories so far as party identification is concerned.

**Table 1 Strength of Brexit and Party Identity**

	Brexit Identity	Party Identity
<b>Strength of Identity</b>	%	%
Very strong	44	9
Fairly strong	33	28
Not very strong	12	27
None	11	36

Sources: NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel June 2018; British Social Attitudes

There has been some tendency among those who would like the UK to remain in the EU to suggest that many Leave voters' support for exiting the EU is based more on emotional considerations than on any rational evaluation of what is in Britain's best interests (van Gastel, 2016; van Boxtel, 2017). Yet in practice those who say they would now vote Leave in another EU referendum are only slightly more likely to identify as a Leaver (92%) than those who would back Remain are to identify as a Remainer (89%). Meanwhile, those who identify as a Remainer are actually more likely than those who say they are a Leaver to declare that their attachment is 'very strong'. As Table 2 shows, over half (53%) of those who identify as a 'Remainer' say they feel that way 'very strongly'. In contrast, only around four in nine (45%) of Leavers say they are very strongly attached to their identity. Contrary to the impression that is often given, it appears that emotional attachment to their cause is at least as much a characteristic of those who wish to remain in the EU as it among those who wish to leave.

**Table 2 Strength of Brexit Identity by Direction of Brexit Identity**

	Remainer	Leaver
<b>Strength of Brexit Identity</b>	%	%
Very strong	53	45
Fairly strong	36	39
Not very strong	11	16

## IMPORT

But what difference does it make when someone says that they are a strong Remainer or a strong Leaver? One expectation we would have is that those with a strong identity are more likely to turn out and vote. Table 3 shows that this is indeed the case. Not only were strong identifiers more likely to say that they voted in the EU referendum, but they were also more likely to have cast a ballot in last year's general election. Only around a half of those without any identity at all participated in either vote, whereas almost nine in ten of those with a very strong identity did so.

**Table 3 Turnout in EU Referendum and 2017 General Election by Strength of Brexit Identity**

Strength of Brexit Identity	% voted in	
	EU Referendum 2016	General Election 2017
Very strong	86	87
Fairy strong	85	82
Not very strong	72	75
None	50	51

Sources: NatGen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel June 2018; British Social Attitudes

Another pattern that we would expect to find is that the stronger someone's Brexit identity, the less likely it is that they have changed their minds about the merits of remaining or leaving. This also proves to be the case. Nearly everyone who says that they identify very strongly with the side for which they voted in 2016 says that they would vote the same way again. In contrast, only around a half of those who do not identify at all with either side say that they would do so. Note though that for the most part it is only among Leavers whose identity is 'not very strong' that the strength of their identity makes a difference to their chances of being willing to vote the same way again. Just 68% of them would vote Leave again, whereas as many as 95% of 'not very strong' Remainers say they would vote Remain once more. Given also that such weak identifiers are more common among Leavers than Remainers, this pattern helps account for the fact that, as we have shown previously (Curtice, 2018), overall those who voted Leave are somewhat less likely than those who backed Remain to say they would vote the same way again.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Of course, our analysis would be more powerful if we could show that those with a strong sense of Brexit identity two years ago had subsequently proven more likely to say that they would vote the same way, rather than showing that those with a strong sense of identity have been more loyal during the last two years. Their strong sense of identity could be a consequence rather than a cause of their loyalty. Note, however, that our analysis has, perforce, excluded those whose current identity is at odds with their reported vote in 2016, and thus, perhaps, some of the turnover that might otherwise have been evident among those with a weak identity.

**Table 4 Reported Willingness to Vote Same Way as in 2016 by Strength of Brexit Identity**

% would vote same way as in 2016	Brexit Identity		All
	Remainer	Leaver	
Very strong	99	98	99
Fairly strong	94	94	94
Not very strong	95	68	79
None	52	42	47

Note: respondents whose current identity is different from how they voted in 2016 are excluded, as are those who did not vote in 2016.

Sources: NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel June 2018 and earlier waves; British Social Attitudes

## PERCEPTIONS

But to what extent is the strength of someone’s Brexit identity reflected in their views about what they would like from the Brexit process? More importantly, does their evaluation of how well or badly that process is going depend on that sense of identity? Is there reason to believe that those with a strong emotional attachment to remaining in or leaving the EU are looking at the Brexit process through a partisan lens?

First, we look at the extent to which what people would like to emerge from the Brexit negotiations reflects their sense of identity. One key issue in the EU referendum, and one where public opinion has subsequently been divided about what type of arrangement should emerge from Brexit, is immigration. We might anticipate that those with a strong Remainer identity are relatively unconcerned about ending freedom of movement for EU citizens, whereas perhaps it is of particular importance to those with a strong Leaver identity. To assess whether or not this is the case, in Table 5 we show the proportion who say they are in favour or against the following proposition being an outcome of the Brexit process, broken down by the direction and strength of a respondent’s Brexit identification:

### 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?

We also divide those without any identity at all into those who say they would vote Remain and those who would back Leave.

**Table 5 Attitudes towards Treating EU Migrants the Same as Non-EU Migrants by Direction and Strength of Brexit Identity**

Strength of Brexit Identity	Remainers		Leavers	
	In favour	Against	In favour	Against
	%	%	%	%
Very strong	36	42	79	11
Fairly strong	55	22	77	6
Not very strong	58	17	74	11
None (*)	58	17	79	3

(\*) Respondents who said they would vote Remain/Leave in another referendum, but who do not identify with either side.

As we might anticipate, Leavers are more likely to back the idea that potential EU migrants should have to apply to come to Britain in exactly the same way as prospective migrants from outside the EU have to do. However, among Leavers themselves the level of support hardly varies at all between strong and weak identifiers. In each case around three-quarters to four-fifths support the idea. A wish to control EU migration is apparently not the preserve of those with the strongest emotional commitment to leaving the EU. Much the same picture is also found amongst Remainers where, for the most part, just under three-fifths also support the idea that EU migrants should have to apply to come to the UK.

There is, however, one striking exception – very strong Remainers. Here only just over one in three are in favour of the proposition, and they are actually outnumbered by those who say that they are against the idea. It would seem that part of what makes someone a very strong Remainer is an unusually high level of commitment to the idea of freedom of movement.

Indeed, the views of this group also stand out markedly when respondents are asked whether Britain should be willing to allow freedom of movement for EU citizens in return for the continuation of free trade with the EU. As many as three in five very strong Remainers (62%) believe that Britain ‘definitely should’ be willing to strike such a deal. In contrast, even amongst fairly strong Remainers little more than a quarter (26%) take that view. Most Remainers are divided between those who think that Britain probably should be willing to strike such a deal and those who are inclined to the view that probably it should not, rather than tending to express a firm view one way or the other.

At the same time, however, when the issue is approached in this way, what also becomes clear is that how strongly someone identifies as a Leaver makes a difference to the perceived relative importance of ending free movement rather than maintaining free trade. Around two-fifths of very strong Leavers think that Britain definitely should not accept freedom of movement in return for free trade, almost twice the proportion among any other group of Leavers. Indeed, among those who describe themselves as a 'not very strong' Leaver, a half think that Britain either definitely or probably should be willing to accept such an exchange.

**Table 6 Willingness to Allow Free Movement in Return for Free Trade by Direction and Strength of Brexit Identity**

*Do you think Britain should or should not allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work in return for allowing British firms to sell goods and services freely in the EU?*

	Definitely Should	Probably Should	Probably Should Not	Definitely Should Not
Strength of <b>Remain</b> identification	%	%	%	%
Very strong	62	26	7	5
Fairly strong	26	45	20	9
Not very strong	17	38	39	5
None (*)	21	39	25	15

	Definitely Should	Probably Should	Probably Should Not	Definitely Should Not
Strength of <b>Leave</b> identification	%	%	%	%
Very strong	12	23	24	41
Fairly strong	10	26	41	22
Not very strong	9	41	32	18
None (*)	11	33	36	20

(\*) Respondents who said they would vote Remain/Leave in another referendum, but who do not identify with either side.

However, the answers given to questions about what should appear in the Brexit deal probably tell us more about people's prior dispositions towards Brexit rather than providing an indication of whether they have been interpreting the debate through a partisan lens. Of rather greater interest so far as the latter possibility is concerned is whether people's strength of identity affects their perceptions of how well or badly the Brexit process is proceeding and their views of the possible consequences of leaving the EU. These are topics where voters might have been thought to have received new information during the course of the last two years that might have led them to change their minds but which, however, may have been interpreted differently by those with and those without a strong Brexit identity.

First of all, in Table 7 we examine the extent to which expectations of how good or bad a deal Britain will secure from the Brexit negotiations vary according to the direction and strength of someone's Brexit identity. To some extent it clearly does. Very strong Leavers are most likely to think that Britain will obtain a good deal, while very strong Remainers are most likely think it will secure a bad deal – indeed, there is almost a consensus among this latter group that that is how things will turn out. But there is also a limit to how far this pattern pertains. Even among those who say they a very strong Leaver, more (40%) think that Britain will end up with a bad deal that anticipate it will find itself with a good one (30%). Not all strong Leavers, it seems, are so committed to the idea of leaving the EU that they cannot contemplate the possibility that, in the short-term at least, it might not work out well for the country.

**Table 7 Expectations of Whether Britain Will Get a Good or Bad Deal out of the Brexit Talks, by Direction and Strength of Brexit Identity**

Strength of Brexit Identity	Remainers		Leavers	
	Good Deal	Bad Deal	Good Deal	Bad Deal
	%	%	%	%
Very strong	8	84	30	40
Fairly strong	11	68	28	36
Not very strong	11	55	14	39
None (*)	9	52	16	34

(\*) Respondents who said they would vote Remain/Leave in another referendum, but who do not identify with either side.

However, it is possible that voters who are concerned about the potential outcome of the negotiations blame the prospect of failure on how the UK government and/or the EU are handling the negotiations rather than come to doubt the wisdom of their original choice. Table 8 reveals that, irrespective of their partisanship, many voters are indeed critical of how the two sides have been dealing with the talks. That said, the table also reveals that both strong Leavers and strong Remainers have somewhat distinctive views about the performances of the UK government and the EU. Very strong Remainers are especially critical of the UK government – no less than 84% feel that it has handled the talks badly. In contrast, they are no more critical of the EU than are weak Remain identifiers. Meanwhile, although very strong Leavers are a little more likely than weak Leavers to be critical of the UK government's handling of the talks, they are particularly likely to feel that the EU has been handling the talks badly. Nearly four-fifths of them hold that view.

**Table 8a Perceptions of How Well/Badly the UK Government Have Handled the Brexit Negotiations by Direction and Strength of Brexit Identity**

Strength of Brexit identity	Remainers		Leavers	
	Handling Well	Handling Badly	Handling Well	Handling Badly
	%	%	%	%
Very strong	6	84	23	58
Fairly strong	9	70	20	48
Not very strong	10	64	12	48
None (*)	5	60	12	47

**Table 8b Perceptions of How Well/Badly the EU Have Handled the Brexit Negotiations by Direction and Strength of Brexit Identity**

Strength of Brexit Identity	Remainers		Leavers	
	Handling Well	Handling Badly	Handling Well	Handling Badly
	%	%	%	%
Very strong	27	45	11	79
Fairly strong	21	52	8	69
Not very strong	8	48	11	63
None (*)	13	49	9	51

(\*) Respondents who said they would vote Remain/Leave in another referendum, but who do not identify with either side.

It appears, then, that having a very strong Brexit identity influences who voters blame when the process of leaving the EU appears to be going wrong. Those most strongly committed to Remain are especially ready to blame the UK government, not least perhaps because they dislike the fact that it is pursuing Brexit in the first place. Conversely, the strongest Leavers are especially inclined to blame the EU, thereby reflecting, most likely, a dislike they have for the institution in the first place. In short, the strength of voters' Brexit identity does apparently make a difference to how voters attribute credit or blame, with them doing so in such a way as to reinforce their existing preconceptions.

But to what extent do strong and weak identifiers have different perspectives on the economic consequences of Brexit? This might be thought to be particularly important given that, as we showed in our previous report (Curtice, 2018), people's expectations of the economic consequences of leaving the EU appear to be more strongly related than any other consideration to whether or not they would vote the same way as they did in the 2016 referendum. In particular, only 40% of those who voted Remain in 2016 and who now think the economy will be better off say that they would vote the same way again, while just 48% of those who voted Leave in 2016 and who now reckon that the economy will be worse off report that they would vote Leave again. If strong Remainers are reluctant to think that Brexit will make the economy better off, and strong Leavers stick to the view that it will, then this could help explain why relatively few voters appear to have changed their mind about the principle of staying in or leaving the EU.

**Table 9: Expectations of the Consequences of Leaving the EU for the Economy by Direction and Strength of Brexit Identity**

Strength of Brexit Identity	Remainers		Leavers	
	Expect economy will be...		Expect economy will be...	
	Better Off	Worse Off	Better Off	Worse Off
	%	%	%	%
Very strong	2	89	71	5
Fairly strong	5	76	53	12
Not very strong	10	72	24	33
None (*)	8	64	34	18

(\*) Respondents who said they would vote Remain/Leave in another referendum, but who do not identify with either side.

Table 9 suggests that this is, indeed, the case. No less than 89% of very strong Remainers believe the economy will be worse off as a result of leaving the EU, compared with 72% of not very strong identifiers and just 64% of those who say that they would vote Remain in a second referendum but who do not identify as a Remainer. The difference is even starker among Leavers. No less than 71% of very strong identifiers believe that the economy will be better off, compared with just 24% of not very strong identifiers, though, at 34%, the figure is then a little higher among those who say they would vote Leave but do not identify as a Leaver. It looks as though those with a strong Brexit identity view the economic consequences of Brexit rather differently than do those with a less intense attachment to one side or other in the Brexit debate.

## CONCLUSION

It seems then that many voters have a strong emotional commitment to one side or the other in the Brexit debate. Moreover, it appears as though such voters behave and think just as one would anticipate from previous research on the impact of party identification. Those with a strong Brexit identity are more likely to vote, a pattern that many would argue is good for the health of democracy. At the same time, it appears that their commitment both reflects and affects how they regard the Brexit process. Very strong Remainers and very strong Leavers have very different views about what Brexit should mean for EU migration. Very strong Remainers are inclined to be critical of the UK government's handling of Brexit, while very strong Leavers are more likely to blame the EU. And while very strong Remainers are mostly convinced that Britain's economy will be weakened by Brexit, the vast majority of very strong Leavers are of the opposite view. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that, after two years of intense debate about what Brexit could and should mean, very few of those with a very strong Brexit identity have changed their mind about the principle of remaining in or leaving the EU. The partisan lens through which they see the world helps ensure that the 'facts' of that debate do not disturb their commitment to the choice that they have already made.

Remarkably then, it seems that Brexit has stirred up a degree of political passion of which, in the wake of the long-term decline in the strength of party identification, voters had long since seemed incapable. Perhaps the decline in party identification has always been more a consequence of a growing inability of parties to secure the affection, loyalty and commitment of voters than, as widely assumed, the emergence of a more rational, sceptical electorate that was no longer willing to invest emotionally in a political party or cause. But be that as it may, the strength of many voters' commitment to Remain and Leave adds a further dimension – along with the sharp demographic differences in attitudes to Brexit and the more or less even division of Remain and Leave support – to the impression that Brexit has polarised the British electorate. It suggests too that, irrespective of what Brexit does eventually mean, many voters are likely to remain loyal to whatever choice they made in June 2016, not only until the Brexit process has reached a conclusion but also well beyond. Passion, once aroused, can leave a long-lasting impression.

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