What UK Thinks EU

HAS BREXIT GONE OFF THE BOIL? OR ARE THE EMBERS OF BREXIT STILL GLOWING?

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Published November 2020

The UK in a Changing Europe

NatCen Social Research that works for society

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INTRODUCTION

Following the Conservatives' success in winning the December 2019 general election, the UK left the European Union at the end of January 2020. The country is now scheduled to exit the single market and the customs union at the end of this year, by which point it is intended that an agreement will have been reached on their future relationship, and especially so in respect of trade. Meanwhile, the country's attention is now focused on the management of the most significant public health crisis in a century. Brexit might once have stirred a firestorm of impassioned debate and parliamentary manoeuvre, but it would seem that the die is now cast and that the embers of the controversy have cooled rapidly. By the time the country goes to the polls again in 2024 perhaps only the ashes will be left.

In this paper, we assess the accuracy of this portrayal of public attitudes towards Brexit as the transition period comes to an end. It is divided into four parts. First of all, we ask whether there is any evidence that those who voted Remain in 2016 have begun to change their minds and have now come to accept the idea that the UK should be outside the EU. Second, we examine whether there are signs that the passion and emotion that were widely in evidence on both sides during the Brexit debate have begun to dissipate – are we no longer a country of 'Remainers' and 'Leavers'? Third, does it appear to be the case that the disagreements between the two groups of voters over what Brexit will and should bring have begun to fade? Is there any prospect of some degree of consensus emerging over Britain's future relationship with the EU? Finally, we present updated evidence on the link between people's views about Brexit and their party preference and the implications of our findings for the party political battle.

DATA

Our evidence comes from multiple waves of interviewing on attitudes towards Brexit undertaken with members of the NatCen mixed mode panel during the course of the last year. The NatCen panel comprises individuals who were originally invited – after being selected at random – to respond to a recent annual round of NatCen's British Social Attitudes survey (Curtice et al., 2019) and who, on completing that interview, indicated that they were willing to respond to further short surveys either (primarily) via the internet or (alternatively) over the phone. It is the first panel of randomly selected potential respondents to internet surveys to be established in Britain (Jessop, 2018). Members of the panel have been quizzed about their attitudes towards Brexit on a regular basis since shortly after the 2016 referendum, and the findings of previous waves were reported in Curtice (2019a) and in earlier publications cited therein. All in all, we now have a series of eleven surveys which, between them, provide us with unique insight into how public attitudes towards Brexit have evolved during the last four years.

In this paper, our attention is focused in particular on the most recent wave of interviewing undertaken between 2 and 26 July 2020. A total of 2,413 persons were successfully interviewed between those dates, representing 68% of those who were invited to answer the survey. At the same time, we make use of four other waves of interviewing conducted during the last year. The first of these was undertaken between 15 March and 7 April 2019, just as the UK was due - but in the end failed - to leave the EU on the scheduled data of 29 March – because the government was unable to secure parliamentary approval for the withdrawal deal it had struck with the EU. In this wave 3,429 people were interviewed, representing a response rate of 60%. The second was conducted between 5 September and 6 October 2019, during the height of the continuing Brexit stand-off in the House of Commons and shortly before the Prime Minister unveiled a revised version of the provisions in respect of Northern Ireland in the proposed EU withdrawal treaty. A total of 3,346 people were interviewed on that occasion, representing a response rate of 60%. Meanwhile, two further waves of interviewing were conducted, the first before the December 2019 election (21 November – 11 December) and the other in the weeks immediately after polling day and the ensuing Christmas break (30 January – 1 March 2020). The pre-polling day survey was answered by 2,429 respondents (57% response) and the post-polling day one by 2,411 (58%).

HAVE REMAIN VOTERS ACCOMMODATED THEMSELVES TO BREXIT?

The outcome of the general election in December 2019 has been widely interpreted, including not least by the government itself, as evidence that a majority of voters wished to 'get Brexit done' (Lawless et al., 2019). That after all was the promise made by the Conservatives in their election manifesto and it was rewarded with an overall majority of eighty. Yet a look at the outcome in terms of votes as opposed to seats raises a question mark about this interpretation. For while 47% of the votes cast (in Great Britain) were given to one of the parties that were arguing in favour of leaving the EU at the end of January 2020, rather more, 52%, were cast for parties that were willing to back holding a second EU referendum that might potentially reverse the original decision. The reason for the Conservatives' success lay not in any clear confirmation that there was majority support for leaving the EU, but rather in the fact that the party secured nearly all of the support given to pro-Brexit parties (45%), whereas support for pro-second referendum parties was divided between Labour (33%), the Liberal Democrats (12%), the nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales (4%), and the Greens (3%). The resulting twelve-point lead for the Conservatives over Labour was, given Britain's use of the single member plurality electoral system, more than enough to deliver the Conservatives a substantial parliamentary majority, but did not reflect the apparent balance of opinion on Brexit as registered in the level of support for pro-Brexit and pro-second referendum parties at the ballot box.

Still, whatever the balance of opinion on Brexit at the time of the general election, Remain voters might now have accommodated themselves to the outcome. There are two ways in which this might manifest itself. One would be evidence that, if the 2016 referendum were to be run again, some Remain voters now say they would vote Leave rather than Remain. Alternatively, while they might be reluctant to report what might be regarded as a complete change of heart, perhaps some Remain voters feel that now that the UK has left the EU they would not wish to see the new status quo reversed and would prefer the UK to stay out of the EU rather than apply to rejoin. Our latest survey addressed both these possibilities.

There is little evidence in the two surveys we have conducted since the UK left the EU of any sustained swing from Remain to Leave when voters are presented once again with the question that appeared on the 2016 ballot paper. In Table 1 we show the estimate of support for Remain and for Leave (leaving aside those who said 'Don't Know' or indicated that they would not vote) to which our series of surveys have pointed when we apply to the actual outcome of the 2016 EU referendum the difference between the current level of support for Leave and Remain in our sample, and the level of support for the two options in how our respondents say they voted in 2016.[1] We can see that this estimate has consistently pointed to a small lead for Remain, one that by last year appeared to have settled down at around 55% for Remain to 45% for Leave, a picture not dissimilar to that painted by the opinion polls conducted at the time (Curtice, 2019b). In the two readings taken since Brexit happened, the proportion backing Remain has dipped slightly, to 53% in February and 54% in July, but the two surveys do not point to any gradual continuous erosion of support for Remain.

Table 1: Extrapolated Hypothetical Repeat Referendum Vote, September 2016-July 2020

Extrapolated Repeat Referendum Vote	2016	2017			2018	
	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June	
	%	%	%	%	%	
Remain	52	51	52	52	54	
Leave	48	49	48	48	46	
Extrapolated Repeat Referendum Vote	2019				2020	
	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Remain	55	55	54	55	53	54
Leave	45	45	46	45	47	46

The figures in this table have been calculated by applying the net swing in support for Remain and Leave since June 2016 as measured by our data to the actual outcome of the referendum in June 2016.

Table 2, where people's current preference is shown separately for those who voted Remain in 2016, those who supported Leave, and those who did not vote, largely confirms this picture. No less than 87% of Remain voters in our latest survey say that they would vote the same way again, a figure that exactly matches that in two of the four surveys we conducted in 2019, and somewhat above the proportion of Leave voters (80%) who currently state that they would vote again to leave the EU. Such a gap between the propensity of Remain and Leave supporters to vote the same way again has been in evidence ever since the 2016 referendum. Nevertheless, there is some indication that since the UK has left the EU Leave voters have been a little more inclined to say that they would vote the same way again – during 2019 the proportion saying they would do so slipped to around three-quarters. In short, the completion of Brexit may have underpinned support for the idea among Leave voters rather than weakened the level of opposition among those who voted against it.

1 This approach corrects the distribution of how people said they would vote in a second referendum for any discrepancy between how people reported they voted in 2016 (information that was collected from members of NatCen's panel at the first available opportunity after the referendum and not usually at the current wave of interviewing) and the overall outcome. Thus, for example, in our most recent survey 53% said that they voted Remain and 47% Leave, a discrepancy of five points as compared with the official outcome. Meanwhile, 59% said that they would now vote Remain and 41% Leave, a swing of six points to Remain compared with how the sample behaved in 2016. Thus, the extrapolated estimate of what the outcome of a referendum would have been in a ballot held in July 2020 is Remain 54% (six points above the 2016 tally) and Leave 46 points (six points below).

Table 2: Vote Intention in a Second EU Referendum by Reported Referendum Vote, Sept. 2016-July 2020

	Sept 2016			Feb 2017			July 2017		
Vote Intention	Remain	Leave	Abstained	Remain	Leave	Abstained	Remain	Leave	Abstained
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Remain	96	8	43	92	8	39	93	10	50
Leave	2	88	32	7	88	28	4	88	26
Would Not Vote	2	4	25	2	3	33	3	3	23

	Oct 2017			June 2018			Feb 2019		
Vote Intention	Remain	Leave	Abstained	Remain	Leave	Abstained	Remain	Leave	Abstained
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Remain	90	10	48	90	12	49	89	13	56
Leave	9	84	28	6	82	24	8	79	19
Would Not Vote	1	6	24	4	6	27	3	8	25

	Mar 2019			Sept 2019			Nov/Dec 2019		
Vote Intention	Remain	Leave	Abstained	Remain	Leave	Abstained	Remain	Leave	Abstained
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Remain	87	14	50	87	13	50	91	11	58
Leave	7	74	22	7	77	24	7	83	19
Would Not Vote	6	12	29	6	10	26	2	7	23

	Feb 2020			July 2020		
Vote Intention	Remain	Leave	Abstained	Remain	Leave	Abstained
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Remain	88	11	49	87	10	48
Leave	7	84	24	7	80	20
Would Not Vote	4	5	27	6	9	31

Note: Those who said they did not know how they would vote or who refused to say how they would do so have been excluded from the denominator on which the figures in this table are based.

Meanwhile, our table also casts additional light on why our surveys have regularly pointed to a lead for Remain, and especially so during the last two or three years. While a significant proportion of those who did not vote in 2016 say they would not vote again (31% express that view in our most recent survey), among those who now do express a preference, Remain is by far a more popular choice (48% say they would vote that way, compared with 20% who back Leave). Indeed, ever since the second half of 2017 consistently around a half or so of those who did not vote in 2016 (some of whom were too young to do so) have regularly expressed a preference for Remain, and there is little sign of this having changed in our most recent survey.

However, the picture we obtain when voters are presented with the choice between rejoining the EU or staying out is somewhat different. We asked our respondents:

> ***Say there was a referendum in which you were asked to choose between the UK staying out of the EU or the UK rejoining the EU, how would you vote?***
>
> Stay out of the EU
>
> Rejoin the EU
>
> I would not vote

As Table 3 shows, the proportion of 2016 Remain voters who say they would vote to rejoin the EU is, at 80%, somewhat below the proportion whom we have seen indicate that they would vote Remain again (87%, see Table 2 above). In contrast, at 84%, the proportion of Leave voters who state that they would vote to stay out is not only a little above the proportion who say that they would vote Leave again (80%) but also a little above the proportion of Remain voters who would back rejoin. (Indeed, while no less than 97% of those who say they would *currently* vote Leave indicate that they would back staying out, only 91% of current Remain supporters would vote to rejoin.) Thus, although the balance of opinion among those who did not vote in 2016 is much the same as that we saw earlier in Table 2, the overall level of support for rejoining the EU in our survey is five points below the level of support for remaining. Given that our estimate earlier of the level of support for Remain was 54% (Table 1), this means that our evidence points to rejoining (49%) being slightly less popular than staying out (51%).

Table 3: Hypothetical Alternative Referendum Vote by Reported Referendum Vote, July 2020

	Remain	Leave	Did Not Vote
	%	%	%
Rejoin	80	8	49
Stay out	13	84	22
Would not vote	7	8	29

There is, then, some evidence that some Remain supporters feel that, now that the UK has left the EU, it should stay out rather than attempt to rejoin - and they say this even though they would still back Remain if the original decision to leave were put to another ballot. As a result, a balance of opinion that appeared at the time that the UK left the EU still to have been tilted narrowly in favour of remaining in the EU (see the February 2020 entry in Table 1) may now be tilted (even more) narrowly (by 51% to 49%) in favour of staying out. But either way, what is clear is that while Brexit has now been done, the country continues to be more or less evenly divided on the merits of being in or out of the EU. To that extent at least, the Brexit division is still with us.

A DYING PASSION?

Still, while it might be one thing to hold an opinion about the merits of Brexit, it could be another for it to be a choice about which voters feel intently. Indeed, whatever significance leaving the EU might once have been thought to have may now seem to have paled into insignificance against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic. Yet during the last few years Brexit has seemed to be a subject that matters intensely to a substantial body of voters. For many, being a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver' had become an identity that they acknowledged and which often they felt strongly – a picture that stood in sharp contrast to the fact that most people felt at most only a weak sense of identity with any of the political parties (Curtice 2018; Curtice and Montagu, 2019; Hobolt et al., 2020). It appeared that people had an emotional attachment to their side of the Brexit debate that meant that they would be reluctant to change their mind. However, now that the Brexit die has been cast and the news agenda has moved on, perhaps this sense of commitment and identity to one side or other has begun to dissipate.

Of this there is some sign (see Table 4). During the course of 2019 our surveys consistently found that just 9% said that they did not think of themselves as either a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver' while approaching a half (46%) said that they felt 'very strongly' attached to one side or the other. However, now as many as 14% emerge as not identifying with either label, while the proportion that do so very strongly has slipped to 39%. Between them the outcome of the 2019 election and the implementation of Brexit have, it seems, been accompanied by some decline in how strongly people hold their views.

Table 4: Strength of Brexit Identity June 2018-July 2020

	June 18	Feb 19	Mar 19	Sept 19	Feb 20	July 20
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very strong	44	46	46	46	42	39
Fairly strong	33	33	33	33	34	32
Not very strong	12	11	11	12	15	15
Non-identifier	11	9	9	9	10	14

However, we should be aware that this still means that people are far more likely to feel strongly about Brexit than they are about any of the political parties. In our February 2020 survey we also asked our respondents, using much the same question wording as is deployed in ascertaining Brexit identity, whether they identified with or felt closer to one of the political parties. Just 9% said that they identified very strongly with one of the parties, while over one in four (28%) indicated that they did not identify with any of the parties at all - figures that are consistent with the evidence of the British Social Attitudes survey for the last two decades or so (Curtice and Montagu, 2019). To that extent, it still seems possible that people's views about Brexit retain the potential to trump any party loyalties they may have.

Still, we might wonder whether the decline in the prevalence and strength of Brexit identity has been sharper among those on the Remain side of the argument – an indication perhaps that they have given up on their now seemingly lost cause. However, of this there is little sign. At 49% the proportion who identify as a Remainer in our most recent survey is the same as it was in September of last year, and is just three points down on the highest proportion that we have recorded (52% in February 2019). At 37% the proportion who now identify as a Leaver is five points down on the position in September 2019 (when the highest proportion was recorded). Meanwhile, although, at 48% the proportion of Remainers who identify very strongly is seven points down on the high recorded during the 2019 election campaign, the proportion of Leavers who are very strongly attached to their cause is, at 43%, six points down on the high obtained in February 2019. In short, the erosion of Brexit identity has occurred at much the same pace on both sides of the Brexit divide, leaving Remain supporters as still seemingly the more strongly committed of the two.

DIMINISHING DISAGREEMENT?

During the course of the Brexit debate Remain voters and Leave voters often appeared to disagree sharply about how Brexit should be resolved and what the consequences of leaving the EU would be. Indeed, the two camps often seemed to be polarised in their attitudes and outlook (Curtice, 2019c; Curtice and Montagu, 2019). But now that the decision to leave the EU has been made, perhaps the disagreement has become more muted? Perhaps voters are less likely to think that Brexit will make a substantial difference one way or the other? And perhaps Remain and Leave voters are less likely to hold diametrically opposed points of view about what the UK's future relationship with the EU should look like?

Consequences

One of the central issues in the referendum campaign was the economy – and especially so in the minds of Remain voters (Curtice, 2017). Here there is some sign that somewhat more voters are now inclined to the view that Brexit will not make much difference either way. As Table 5 shows, even though since the EU referendum voters had gradually become somewhat more pessimistic on the issue - a trend, however, that was reversed following the general election - the proportion saying that leaving the EU would not make much difference to the economy has for the most part hovered consistently at just above 20%. However, in our most recent survey it has risen to 28%, higher than it has been at any point since the referendum.

There is a similar modest trend when, in a couple of our surveys, we have invited respondents to consider the economic consequences if 'the UK leaves the EU without an agreement on their future relationship'. As we might anticipate, on balance voters are more pessimistic about such a scenario than they are about the economic consequences of Brexit in general; in our most recent survey just 12% said that the economy would be better off without an agreement, while 57% felt that it would be worse off. But much the same proportion (29%) say that it would not make much difference either way, a figure that is four points above what we recorded when we asked the question during the general election campaign.

Table 5: Expectations of the Consequences of Leaving the EU for the Economy, June 2016-February 2019

Expect Brexit to mean economy will be...	2016		2017			2018
	June	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better Off	29	30	29	24	25	25
Not much difference	29	25	23	26	22	23
Worse Off	39	45	46	49	52	51
Net: Better Off – Worse Off	-10	-15	-17	-25	-27	-26
Expect Brexit to mean economy will be...	2019				2020	
	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better Off	19	19	20	21	26	21
Not much difference	22	23	23	22	22	28
Worse Off	58	56	55	56	50	49
Net: Better Off – Worse Off	-39	-37	-35	-35	-24	-28

June 2016: *If Britain were to leave the EU, do you think Britain's economy would be better off, worse off, or wouldn't it make much difference?* Sept 2016-July 2020: *From what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that as a result of leaving the EU Britain's economy will be better off, worse off, or won't it make much difference?*

A more phlegmatic outlook also now seems to be in evidence when voters are asked how good or bad a deal they expect Britain to get out of Brexit (see Table 6). Until the Prime Minister succeeded in striking a revised deal with the EU in October 2019, voters had come increasingly to the view that Britain would emerge with a bad deal. The delivery of Brexit has shifted that mood considerably – but not so much to the view that Britain will secure a good deal as to a hope or expectation that it will be neither good nor bad. In our two most recent surveys around two in five (40%) have expressed that view, compared with only around a quarter or so for much of 2018 and 2019.

Table 6: Expectations of Whether Britain Will Get a Good or Bad Deal out of the Brexit Talks, February 2017-July 2020

	2017			2018
Expect Britain to get a...	Feb	July	Oct	June
	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	33	25	19	17
Neither Good Nor Bad	27	29	28	25
Bad Deal	37	44	52	57
Net: Good – Bad	-4	-19	-33	-40

	2019			2020	
Expect Britain to get a...	Feb	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
	%	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	6	6	11	17	12
Neither Good Nor Bad	28	26	31	40	39
Bad Deal	63	66	54	41	46
Net: Good – Bad	-57	-60	-43	-34	-34

Between February 2017 and June 2018 respondents were asked: *How good or bad a deal do you think Britain will eventually get out of the Brexit negotiations with the EU?* In February 2019 the text read: *How good or bad a deal do you think Britain has got out of the Brexit negotiations with the EU so far?* In September 2019, and February and July 2020 the question read: *How good or bad do you think the terms and conditions under which Britain leaves the EU will be?* The wording in Nov/Dec 2019 read: *From what you have seen and heard so far, how good or bad are the terms and conditions under which it is proposed Britain should leave the EU?*

However, a similar shift is not to be observed in respect of the perceived consequences of Brexit for immigration, an issue that appeared to be of particular concern to Leave voters in the referendum (Curtice, 2017). This perhaps is not surprising, for as Table 7 makes clear, any expectations voters may have had during the referendum that the overall level of immigration would fall in the wake of leaving the EU soon seem to have disappeared. As a result, this is one issue at least where voters have not appeared to be deeply polarised. Ever since the autumn of 2016, the proportion who anticipate that leaving the EU will not make much difference to immigration has hovered around the 50% mark, and, at 54%, the latest figure is little different from what has previously been in evidence.

Table 7: Expectations of the Consequences of Leaving the EU for the Level of Immigration, June 2016-July 2020

Expect Brexit to mean immigration will be...	2016		2017			2018
	June	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
	%	%	%	%	%	
Higher	7	7	7	9	7	7
Not much difference	28	53	48	52	50	53
Lower	64	38	43	39	43	38
Net: Lower – Higher	+57	+31	+36	+30	+36	+31
Expect Brexit to mean immigration will be...	2019				2020	
	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
	%	%	%	%	%	
Higher	9	7	5	7	7	8
Not much difference	50	57	54	53	47	54
Lower	39	35	40	38	45	36
Net: Lower – Higher	+30	+28	+35	+31	+38	+28

June 2016: *If Britain were to leave the EU, do you think immigration to Britain would be higher, lower, or wouldn't it make much difference?* Sept 2016-July 2020: *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?*

Preferences

It appears then that in recent months some voters have come to the view that perhaps Brexit will not make such a dramatic difference after all. Our data also suggest that voters are now somewhat less likely to indicate either support for or opposition to some of the options for Britain's future relationship with the EU.

Consider, for example, attitudes towards some of the questions that have to be addressed in determining how the UK trades with the EU in future. One of the least contentious issues to date has seemed to be the maintenance of free trade. Respondents have been asked regularly in our surveys whether any agreement with the EU should include:

> allowing companies based in the EU to sell goods and services freely in Britain in return for allowing British companies to sell goods and services freely in the EU.

As Table 8 reveals, typically 85% or more have said that they are in favour of this proposition. However, in our most recent survey the proportion has fallen to just below four in five (79%), while the proportion who say they are neither in favour nor against has increased from 10% to 18%.

Table 8: Attitudes towards Free Trade, Sept 2016-July 2020

	2016	2017			2018
Free Trade	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	90	88	87	88	86
Neither	8	9	10	9	10
Against	2	3	2	3	3
	2019			2020	
Free Trade	Feb	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	84	86	86	85	79
Neither	11	12	10	10	18
Against	4	2	4	4	3

A similar trend is in evidence if we look at the responses to two further questions we have asked periodically on this subject. The first asks whether any agreement with the EU should include the following provision:

> allowing Britain to put a tax on goods imported from the EU, while allowing the EU to put a tax on goods imported from Britain?

As Table 9 shows, this proposition has always proved relatively unpopular, albeit not as unpopular as the level of support for free trade in response to the previous question might have been thought to imply. However, in our most recent survey the single most popular option among respondents was to say that they were neither in favour nor against. At nearly in two in five (39%), the proportion expressing that view was well up on the 25-30% that had done so in previous surveys.

Table 9: Attitudes towards Tariffs between the UK and the EU, October 2017-July 2020

Tax on Imports between UK and EU	Oct 2017	June 2018	Feb 2019	
	%	%	%	
In favour	24	22	24	
Neither	26	30	28	
Against	49	48	46	
Tax on Imports between UK and EU	Sept 2019	Nov/Dec 2019	Feb 2020	July 2020
	%	%	%	%
In favour	27	28	30	26
Neither	30	26	27	39
Against	42	45	42	34

At the same time, our latest survey also records some increase in the proportion who say they are neither in favour nor against the reintroduction of customs checks on people and goods coming into Britain from the EU. As Table 10 shows, the popularity of this step has declined somewhat since we first asked about it in the autumn of 2016. Now, however, there has also been a marked increase, from 16% to 26%, in the proportion who say they are neither in favour nor against.

Table 10: Attitudes towards Reintroducing Customs Checks, September 2016-July 2020

Reintroduce customs checks between Britain and the EU	Sept 2016	Feb 2017	Nov/Dec 2019	July 2020
	%	%	%	%
In favour	70	69	55	51
Neither	14	15	16	26
Against	16	16	28	23

But what of attitudes towards immigration? Although many voters have long since come to the view that Brexit would not necessarily make much difference to the overall level of immigration, there has been continued majority, albeit somewhat varying, support for ending freedom of movement as registered by the pattern of responses to the proposition that the future relationship with the EU should 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.

However, as Table 11 shows, at 26% the proportion who are neither in favour nor against this proposition is now as much as six points above the figure registered on any previous survey, and is as much as nine points above the level recorded at the beginning of this year.

Table 11: Attitudes towards Freedom of Movement, Sept 2016-July 2020

Treat EU Migrants Like Non-EU	2016	2017			2018
	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	74	68	68	64	59
Neither	12	16	14	15	20
Against	13	15	17	20	20

Treat EU Migrants Like Non-EU	2019				2020	
	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
	%	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	59	62	62	58	62	56
Neither	20	17	18	18	17	26
Against	20	21	19	22	20	17

Here we seem to have uncovered relatively consistent evidence that some of the heat may have gone out of the Brexit debate. Voters are somewhat less likely to think that Brexit will make much difference, and they are also less likely to express either support or opposition in respect of some of the options for Britain's future relationship with the EU. That said, apart from immigration, where around a half of voters have long been inclined to the view that leaving the EU would not make much difference, both the view that Brexit will not make much difference and indifference to the shape that it might take are still, for the most part, largely a minority view. There would still seem to be plenty of scope for both delight and disappointment at what does eventually transpire when the transition period comes to a conclusion at the end of this year.

REMAIN/LEAVE DIFFERENCES

Looking at the proportion of people who do not have a clear view one way or the other about what Brexit will or should mean is only one possible measure of the temperature of the debate about the implications of Brexit. Another is to look at the intensity of the differences between Remain and Leave voters. If the debate has begun to cool, the two groups might be expected to disagree with each other less about what Brexit will entail or on what Britain's future relationship with the EU should be. In particular, if Remain voters are beginning to accommodate themselves to Brexit, we might anticipate that their views have been especially likely to have shifted, with the result that they are now closer to the opinion of Leave supporters.

Table 12: Expectations of the Consequences of Leaving the EU for the Level of Immigration by EU Referendum Vote, June 2016-July 2020

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Remain 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
Expect Brexit to mean immigration will be...	%	%	%	%	%
Higher	7	8	9	8	5
Not much difference	67	58	60	57	57
Lower	26	33	31	36	36

	2019				2020	
Voted Remain 2016	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Expect Brexit to mean immigration will be...	%	%	%	%	%	%
Higher	8	7	5	6	7	7
Not much difference	57	61	59	59	50	55
Lower	35	31	35	34	43	37

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Leave 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
Expect Brexit to mean immigration will be...	%	%	%	%	%
Higher	5	6	8	4	8
Not much difference	39	38	42	41	48
Lower	55	55	49	55	43

	2019				2020	
Voted Leave 2016	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Expect Brexit to mean immigration will be...	%	%	%	%	%	%
Higher	7	6	4	6	6	8
Not much difference	44	53	49	46	42	51
Lower	48	40	46	46	52	40

However, we do not find any consistent evidence of convergence when we look at the trend over time in how the two groups evaluate the consequences of Brexit. True, as Table 12 shows, Remain voters and Leave supporters have come to express very similar views about what the consequences of leaving the EU will be for immigration. In both cases around two in five now expect Brexit to result in a reduction in immigration, while just over half say that it will not make much difference either way. In contrast, prior to our most recent survey Leave voters had always been somewhat more likely than Remain supporters to say that leaving the EU would result in a reduction in immigration – though the gap has long since been lower than it was in the first 18 months immediately after the referendum. However, the latest convergence is not the product of Remain voters coming to share the views of Leave voters. For the most part, the expectations of Remain voters have changed relatively little during the last four years. Rather, the convergence between February and July 2020 has primarily been the product of Leave voters coming to be less likely to take the view that immigration will fall as a result of Brexit after all.

Meanwhile, the two sides are still far apart when it comes to their evaluation of the economic consequences of Brexit (see Table 13). Four in five Remain voters believe that the economy will be worse off as a result of the UK leaving the EU, while approaching half (46%) of Leave supporters believe that the economy will be better off. While this means that Remain voters are a little less pessimistic than they were for much of 2019, at the same time Leave voters now appear to be somewhat more optimistic, leaving the two sides more or less as far apart as they have been for most of the last four years.

Table 13: Expectations of the Consequences of Leaving the EU for the Economy by EU Referendum Vote, June 2016-July 2020

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Remain 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
Expect Brexit to mean economy will be...	%	%	%	%	%
Better Off	5	7	6	6	4
Not much difference	15	13	14	11	15
Worse Off	79	78	79	81	80

	2019				2020	
Voted Remain 2016	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Expect Brexit to mean economy will be...	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better Off	4	4	4	5	6	4
Not much difference	12	13	11	11	14	16
Worse Off	83	82	84	84	79	80

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Leave 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
Expect Brexit to mean economy will be...	%	%	%	%	%
Better Off	58	54	46	45	51
Not much difference	32	30	35	34	30
Worse Off	9	15	18	21	17

	2019				2020	
Voted Leave 2016	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Expect Brexit to mean economy will be...	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better Off	41	39	40	46	56	46
Not much difference	32	34	35	32	29	36
Worse Off	25	26	24	21	15	18

Table 14: Expectations of Whether Britain Will Get a Good or Bad Deal out of the Brexit Talks by EU Referendum Vote, February 2017-July 2020

	2017			2018
Voted Remain 2016	Feb	July	Oct	June
Expect Britain to get a...	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	17	12	11	9
Neither Good Nor Bad	25	24	20	18
Bad Deal	56	63	68	72

	2019			2020	
Voted Remain 2016	Feb	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Expect Britain to get a...	%	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	6	3	7	8	6
Neither Good Nor Bad	28	18	25	31	24
Bad Deal	64	77	66	59	70

	2017			2018
Voted Leave 2016	Feb	July	Oct	June
Expect Britain to get a...	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	50	39	27	26
Neither Good Nor Bad	27	33	33	33
Bad Deal	20	26	38	40

	2019			2020	
Voted Leave 2016	Feb	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Expect Britain to get a...	%	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	6	8	16	27	23
Neither Good Nor Bad	25	32	34	44	46
Bad Deal	66	57	46	26	28

At the same time, the two sides now appear to have moved further apart on the question of how good or bad a deal the UK will obtain in its negotiations with the EU (see Table 14). During 2019, the two sides did converge on this issue, as Leave voters came to share much of the pessimism of Remain voters that the UK would get a bad deal – a reaction, doubtless, to the severe criticism to which the deal that Theresa May had secured was subjected in the House of Commons (Curtice, 2019a). However, now that the UK has left the EU, Leave voters have reacquired much of their former optimism, albeit they are still less optimistic than they were in the first half of 2017 (that is, before the difficulties created for Theresa May by the outcome of the 2017 general election became manifest). Just under a quarter of Leave voters (23%) now expect Britain to get a good deal while just over a quarter (28%) believe it will obtain a bad deal. In contrast Remain supporters appear in our latest survey to be about as pessimistic as they have ever been. A slight dip in February (immediately following Britain's withdrawal) in the proportion of Remain supporters who said that Britain will get a bad deal (to 59%), has since been reversed and the figure now stands at 70%.

Overall, then, it seems that Remain and Leave voters are still far apart in their expectations of what Brexit will bring. But what about their preferences for what it should entail? If the Brexit divide is showing signs of weakening, then it is perhaps here above all that we might expect the views of Remain voters and Leave supporters to have come closer together.

Not that Remain and Leave voters have always been far apart on all aspects of Britain's relationship with the EU. This is certainly not true of the issue of free trade, where, as Table 15 shows, there has long been a near consensus in favour of allowing EU companies to trade freely in the UK in return for allowing UK companies to do so inside the EU. Even now, as many as 88% of Remain supporters and 82% of Leave voters agree with this proposition, not dissimilar to the position throughout the last four years.

Table 15: Attitudes towards Free Trade by EU Referendum Vote, Sept 2016-July 2020

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Remain 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
Free Trade	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	94	91	91	94	92
Neither	4	7	8	5	6
Against	1	1	1	1	1
	2019			2020	
Voted Remain 2016	Feb	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Free Trade	%	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	92	93	92	90	88
Neither Good Nor Bad	7	6	5	7	10
Bad Deal	1	1	3	3	2

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Leave 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
Free Trade	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	90	88	86	88	83
Neither	8	9	11	8	12
Against	2	3	2	3	3
	2019			2020	
Voted Leave 2016	Feb	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Free Trade	%	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	84	85	86	86	82
Neither Good Nor Bad	9	12	9	10	14
Bad Deal	7	2	4	3	4

However, there has always been a rather greater difference between the outlook of Remain voters and that of Leave supporters when they are asked whether Britain should be able to impose taxes on goods imported from the EU in return for the EU being able to do the same for goods imported from the UK (see Table 16). In our latest survey, just under half of Remain voters (47%) say they are opposed to such a regime, whereas on balance Leave supporters back the idea by 33% to 25%. However, while Leave voters have been divided on the issue ever since our survey work first addressed it in the autumn of 2017, the level of opposition to the idea among Remain supporters has fallen below half for the first time – so here there is some evidence of convergence.[2]

Table 16: Attitudes towards Tariffs between the UK and the EU by EU Referendum Vote, October 2017-July 2020

Voted Remain 2016	Oct 2017	June 2018	Feb 2019	
Tax on Imports between UK and EU	%	%	%	
In favour	18	15	15	
Neither	23	25	25	
Against	58	60	60	
Voted Remain 2016	Sept 2019	Nov/Dec 2019	Feb 2020	July 2020
Tax on Imports between UK and EU	%	%	%	%
In favour	21	17	23	23
Neither	24	22	21	30
Against	54	60	55	47

Voted Leave 2016	Oct 2017	June 2018	Feb 2019	
Tax on Imports between UK and EU	%	%	%	
In favour	30	30	33	
Neither	30	33	29	
Against	39	36	25	
Voted Leave 2016	Sept 2019	Nov/Dec 2019	Feb 2020	July 2020
Tax on Imports between UK and EU	%	%	%	%
In favour	36	37	37	33
Neither	33	29	31	40
Against	30	33	31	25

2 This also seems to have been matched by a reduction – from 46% in Nov/Dec 2019 to 37% now in the proportion of Remain voters who support the reintroduction of customs checks between the UK and the EU. However, this proportion is still above the 28% who expressed opposition in September 2016 and the 26% who did so in March 2017.

Table 17: Attitudes towards Freedom of Movement by EU Referendum Vote, Sept 2016-July 2020

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Remain 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
Treat EU Migrants Like Non-EU	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	62	58	53	49	47
Neither	14	18	18	20	23
Against	24	23	27	31	30

	2019				2020	
Voted Remain 2016	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Treat EU Migrants Like Non-EU	%	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	46	50	48	47	48	48
Neither	24	18	20	18	20	24
Against	29	32	32	35	33	29

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Leave 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
Treat EU Migrants Like Non-EU	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	89	82	83	82	75
Neither	8	11	8	10	15
Against	3	7	8	8	9

	2019				2020	
Voted Leave 2016	Feb	Mar	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
Treat EU Migrants Like Non-EU	%	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	80	78	81	78	82	76
Neither	11	14	12	13	9	18
Against	8	8	6	9	8	6

Unsurprisingly, as compared with the position on trade there has always been more of a difference of view between Remain and Leave voters on the desirability or otherwise of retaining freedom of movement. For most of the last four years, the proportion of Leave voters who believe that potential migrants from the EU should have to apply to come to the UK has hovered around the 80% mark (see Table 17). In contrast, after having been around three in five in the initial months after the referendum, the proportion of Remain voters who express that view has subsequently been consistently a little below a half. The picture is little different in our most recent survey. Consequently, the two groups are still more or less as far apart on the issue now as they have been for much of the last three years.

A similar picture emerges if we examine voters' attitudes towards the potential trade-off between immigration and access to the EU single market. Here respondents are asked:

It has been argued that when Britain leaves the EU, British firms will only be allowed to continue to sell goods and services freely to people in the EU if people from the EU are still free to come here to live and work.

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 allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work

Probably should allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work

Probably should not allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work

Definitely should not allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work

As Table 18 shows, despite the apparent reservations that many Remain voters appear to have about freedom of movement, throughout the last four years around four in five Remain supporters have said that Britain should either 'definitely' or 'probably' allow freedom of movement in return for free trade. In contrast, consistently around three in five Leave voters have expressed the opposite view. There is no sign that this gap has closed more recently. In our latest survey, 83% of Remain voters feel that Britain should strike such a bargain while 60% of Leave voters take the opposite view.

Table 18: Willingness to Allow Freedom of Movement in Return for Free Trade by EU Referendum Vote, Sept. 2016-July 2020

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?

	2016	2017			2018
Voted Remain 2016	Sept	Feb	July	Oct	June
	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	34	37	48	39	42
Probably should	36	37	38	37	36
All 'should'	*(70)*	*(74)*	*(86)*	*(76)*	*(78)*
Probably should not	21	18	11	17	16
Definitely should not	8	6	2	6	6
All 'should not'	*(30)*	*(24)*	*(14)*	*(23)*	*(22)*

	2019			2020	
Voted Remain 2016	Feb	Sept	Nov/Dec	Feb	July
	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	42	37	45	36	43
Probably should	35	42	35	42	40
All 'should'	*(77)*	*(80)*	*(80)*	*(78)*	*(83)*
Probably should not	15	15	14	16	12
Definitely should not	6	5	6	5	4
All 'should not'	*(20)*	*(20)*	*(19)*	*(20)*	*(16)*

Table 18: continued

Voted Leave 2016	2016 Sept	2017 Feb	2017 July	2017 Oct	2018 June
	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	10	9	13	7	11
Probably should	20	27	32	25	27
All 'should'	*(30)*	*(36)*	*(45)*	*(32)*	*(38)*
Probably should not	34	38	31	34	30
Definitely should not	36	26	23	34	30
All 'should not'	*(70)*	*(63)*	*(53)*	*(67)*	*(61)*

Voted Leave 2016	2019 Feb	2019 Sept	2019 Nov/Dec	2020 Feb	2020 July
	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	13	9	10	9	6
Probably should	25	33	28	27	33
All 'should'	*(38)*	*(43)*	*(38)*	*(36)*	*(40)*
Probably should not	28	29	28	34	36
Definitely should not	33	27	32	28	24
All 'should not'	*(61)*	*(56)*	*(60)*	*(62)*	*(60)*

The two groups are also well apart when they have been asked a broader question about how close or distant the UK's relationship with the EU should be in future (Table 19). While 81% of Remain voters say that the relationship should be 'very' or 'fairly' close, only 55% of Leave supporters express the same view. True, at 26 points, the gap between these two figures is somewhat smaller now than it was on either occasion that we asked the question in 2019 (38 points in March and 35 points in September), but in so far as this is the case the explanation lies not simply in a decline in the proportion of Remain voters who say that the UK should have a close relationship but also in an apparent tendency for Leave supporters to have become a little more willing to back a close relationship.

Table 19: Attitudes towards How Close or Distant the UK's Relationship should be with the EU by EU Referendum Vote, March 2019-July 2020

Voted Remain 2016	Mar 2019	Sept 2019	Feb 2020	July 2020
	%	%	%	
Very or fairly close	83	87	82	81
Neither close nor distant	13	8	10	13
Very or fairly distant	4	4	7	5

Voted Remain 2016	Mar 2019	Sept 2019	Feb 2020	July 2020
	%	%	%	%
Very or fairly close	45	52	58	55
Neither close nor distant	40	35	33	35
Very or fairly distant	15	13	9	11

All in all, it appears that, on the central issue of the UK's trade relationship with the EU and on the key question of immigration, in many instances Remain and Leave voters are as far apart now as they were in the period leading up to Britain's withdrawal from the EU at the end of January 2020. They may not always have held diametrically opposed views in the first place, but there is no consistent evidence of a meeting of minds in recent months. In particular, there is no consistent evidence of Remain voters in particular coming to share the views of Leave supporters. Rather the differences between the two groups whereby Remain supporters tend to prioritise having a close trading relationship while Leave voters are more concerned to secure control over immigration remain consistent with how they have been for much of the Brexit debate.

THE PARTY POLITICAL BATTLE

Not least of the reasons why it could be thought that the embers of the Brexit debate might have died down has lain in how some of the political parties have reacted to the outcome of the 2019 general election and the fact that the result of that contest paved the way for the UK to leave the EU at the end of January. Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who in the general election had indicated a willingness to back a second referendum that might reverse the decision to leave – an outcome to which the Liberal Democrats in particular were strongly committed – have now indicated that they think that the question of Britain's membership of the EU has been resolved for the foreseeable future. It appears that neither will be arguing for the time being at least in favour of Britain rejoining the EU.

At the beginning of this paper we noted the balance of support for parties that favoured Brexit and those that were willing to back a second referendum. Meanwhile, it has been established by more than one poll of how people voted in the 2019 election that the two principal supporters of a second referendum (in England at least), Labour and the Liberal Democrats, were heavily reliant on the backing of those who voted Remain in the EU referendum. This is confirmed by the results of the survey we conducted in February 2020 (see also Curtice, 2019d).[3] As the first two columns of Table 20 show, support for Labour at the election was, at 45%, three times higher among those who voted Remain than it was among those who voted Leave (15%). Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats hardly picked up any support at all among those who voted Leave (2%). The Conservatives, in contrast, are estimated to have secured the support of three-quarters (75%) of those who voted Leave.

Table 20: Vote at December 2019 Election by EU Referendum Vote and Current Brexit Preference, February 2020.

	EU Referendum Vote		Current Brexit Preference	
Vote December 2019	Remain	Leave	Remain	Leave
	%	%	%	%
Conservative	20	75	15	79
Brexit/UKIP	*	4	0	3
Labour	45	15	49	12
Liberal Democrat	22	2	22	2
SNP/PC	7	2	8	1
Green	4	2	4	2
Other	2	1	1	1

* Less than 0.5%

Yet, in truth, these figures underestimate the strength of the alignment between how people voted in the election and their views on Brexit. In the second pair of columns in Table 20 we show the relationship between how people voted in the election and their current views on Brexit (as measured in February of this year). Here our estimate of support for Labour among Remain supporters is, at 49%, four points higher than it was based on how people voted in 2016, while the party's support among Leave supporters is even lower – just 12%, down three points. Conversely, we discover that the Conservative tally among Leave voters is now four points higher, while that among Remain supporters was, at 15%, as much as five points lower. Even fewer voters voted for a party whose current stance on Brexit was at odds with their own current views on the subject than is indicated by an analysis by how people voted in 2016.

The explanation for this difference lies in the differential dynamics of attitudes towards Brexit among Labour and Conservative supporters. Although, as we have already seen, relatively few voters have changed their minds about Brexit (see Table 2 above), those that have are especially numerous both among those who voted Leave in 2016 and Labour in 2019 and among those who voted Remain in 2016 and Conservative in 2019. Whereas among Leave voters as a

3 As well as being similar to the results of the polls reported at Curtice (2019d), our figures are also similar to those reported by the 2019 British Election Study Internet Panel (Wave 19). This reported that the Conservatives won 73% of the vote of those who had voted Leave in 2016 and 18% of those who backed Remain. The equivalent figures for Labour were 14% and 50% respectively, and for the Liberal Democrats, 3% and 21%.

whole as many as 84% said in February that they would vote Leave again, among those Leave supporters who voted Labour in 2019 the figure was just 68%, while around a quarter (24%) now said that they backed Remain. Similarly, whereas 88% of all Remain voters said that they would vote the same way again, just two-thirds (67%) of those who voted Conservative in 2019 were still loyal to Remain, while as many as 28% now stated that they backed Leave. It appears as though some of those voters whose Conservative or Labour party preference was at odds with their views on Brexit were persuaded during the course of the Brexit debate to change their views on whether or not Britain should leave the EU so that they were consistent with the views of their preferred party.[4] This means that the ability of both Labour and the Conservatives to secure the support of those whose current views on Brexit were at odds with their own was even weaker than is implied by the data on the relationship between how people voted in the EU referendum and how they voted in the December 2019 election.

Looking at how people would now vote to rejoin or stay out of the EU does little to disturb this picture. No less than 52% of those who in our most recent survey would vote to rejoin the EU voted Labour in the December 2019 election, while just 11% of those who would vote to stay out did so.[5] Indeed, by this measure support for the party is nearly five times higher among those who apparently would back a commitment to rejoin the EU as it is among those who would now prefer to stay out – a division that would seem sharply at odds with the party's current Brexit stance. Meanwhile, 20% of rejoiners voted Liberal Democrat in 2019, compared with just 3% of those who would prefer to stay out. In short, however we look at it, the Brexit divide is still deeply embedded in Britain's partisan politics.

CONCLUSION

We have uncovered some evidence that the fires of Brexit no longer burn quite as brightly as they once did. Somewhat fewer voters now feel a strong identity as a Remainer or a Leaver. Rather more voters now say that perhaps Brexit will not make much difference either way and rather more too are indifferent about the detail of Britain's future relationship with the EU. At the same time, some voters who would still prefer Britain to be inside the EU do take the view that the decision to leave the EU should not now be reversed. From this evidence, it might be thought that the Brexit divide is beginning to heal somewhat.

Yet this picture should not be overdrawn. Most voters have not changed their minds about the decision that was made four years ago. Their sense of commitment as a Remainer or a Leaver is still far stronger than their sense of commitment to any political party, while we have seen that the alignment between how people voted in the December 2019 election and their views about Brexit was even stronger than many previous analyses have suggested. For the most part the differences of outlook between Remain voters and Leave supporters about the consequences of Brexit and the shape of Britain's future relationship with the EU is as strong as it has been for much of the last four years.

Above all, perhaps, despite the fact that some Remain voters would now vote to stay out of the EU, there is relatively little evidence that their views have converged towards those of Leave voters, and thus that there is any clear indication that they are coming to accept the decision to

4 It also appears to be the case that those who voted Conservative in 2019 and whose current preference is to stay in the EU are less likely than Remain supporters in general to say that they would vote to rejoin the EU. Just 75% say that they would do so, compared with 91% of all current Remain supporters.

5 In the case of the Conservatives the party enjoyed the support in 2019 of 77% of those who voted to stay out, and just 13% of who would back rejoining.

leave. Rather, Britain still looks like a country that is divided down the middle on the merits of that decision.

All of this raises interesting questions about where the Brexit debate goes from here. On the one hand the Conservative government is determined to deliver the UK's withdrawal from the EU single market and customs union at the end of this year, and will doubtless hope to be rewarded by Leave voters at the ballot box for having implemented their wishes. They will want to keep the issue alive. On the other hand, both Labour and the Liberal Democrats appear to have concluded that the Brexit debate is over – and that the political agenda will move on from an issue that seemed in the end to deliver them both a bloody nose and cost them vital support among those who voted Leave. And, of course, the coronavirus pandemic may well have that effect.

Yet so far at least the Brexit divide remains very much with us. Still around half of the country appears to be opposed to the decision that has been made, and if that continues to be the case this substantial body of voters may still be seeking in future a party that they feel represents their views. While for Labour at least the potential electoral attractions of 'reconnecting' with Leave voters are clear, both Labour and the Liberal Democrats also have to be mindful of how reliant they have both now become on the backing of those who supported – and still support - Remain. Their ability to acknowledge that legacy may be as important to their future prospects as the delivery of Brexit will be for the Conservatives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is supported by a research grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (grant no. ES/T000775/1) as part of its 'The UK in a Changing Europe' initiative. Responsibility for the views expressed here lies solely with the author.

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