

CSI Brexit 6: What distinguishes Re-Leavers from Firm Remainers?[†]

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Summary

- In May of 2017, researchers from YouGov identified a subgroup within the British population that they dubbed ‘Re-Leavers’: individuals who had voted Remain but who now believed that the referendum result should be implemented.
- In Wave 3 of the Centre for Social Investigation’s longitudinal survey of attitudes to Brexit, we included the same question that YouGov asked in May of 2017.
- Our results were highly similar to those obtained by YouGov 10 months earlier: approximately 50% of Remain voters were Re-Leavers in May of 2017, and approximately 50% are still Re-Leavers as of March of 2018.
- Four characteristics turned out to be significant predictors of being a Re-Leaver rather than a Firm Remainer.
- First, individuals older than 70 were 18 percentage points less likely to be Re-Leavers than those younger than 25. Second, Conservative supporters were 23 percentage points more likely to be Re-Leavers than Labour supporters. Third, individuals who identify as European were 26 percentage points less likely to be Re-Leavers than those who identify as British. Fourth, individuals who say things have gotten better over the last decade were 19 percentage points more likely to be Re-Leavers than those who say things have gotten worse.

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Introduction

Since the EU referendum took place, there has been considerable debate about whether the result really represents the ‘will of the people’, and hence whether it should be implemented at all.^{1,2} In May of 2017, YouGov conducted a poll³ in which they asked respondents to say which of three statements best reflected their view on whether to implement the referendum result:

1. I support Britain leaving the EU, and the British government should ensure that Britain does leave the EU
2. I did not support Britain leaving the EU, but now the British people have voted to leave the government has a duty to carry out their wishes and leave
3. I do not support Britain leaving the EU and the government should ignore the result of the referendum or seek to overturn it in a second referendum

Overall, 45% of respondents ticked the first statement, 23% ticked the second statement, and 22% ticked the third statement. (A further 9% answered ‘don’t know’.) When it came to Leave voters, there was an overwhelming consensus: 92% ticked the first statement. Remain voters, by contrast, were decidedly split: 48% ticked the second statement, whereas 44% ticked the third statement. The YouGov researchers dubbed the Remain voters who had ticked the second statement ‘Re-Leavers’. In other words, these were individuals who had voted Remain but who now believed that the referendum result should be implemented.

In Wave 3 of the Centre for Social Investigation’s longitudinal survey of attitudes to Brexit⁴, we included the same question that YouGov asked in May of 2017. Using the data corresponding to this question, the present report examines whether the percentage of Re-Leavers has changed since the YouGov poll was published, and investigates which characteristics distinguish Re-Leavers from their counterparts who do not believe the referendum result should be implemented (a group I call ‘Firm Remainers’). We were particularly interested in whether characteristics like better education and higher social class would predict being a Firm Remainer, given that individuals who have expressed a desire to overturn the referendum result have been widely characterised as ‘liberal elites’.^{5,6}

Analysis of CSI’s data on Re-Leavers

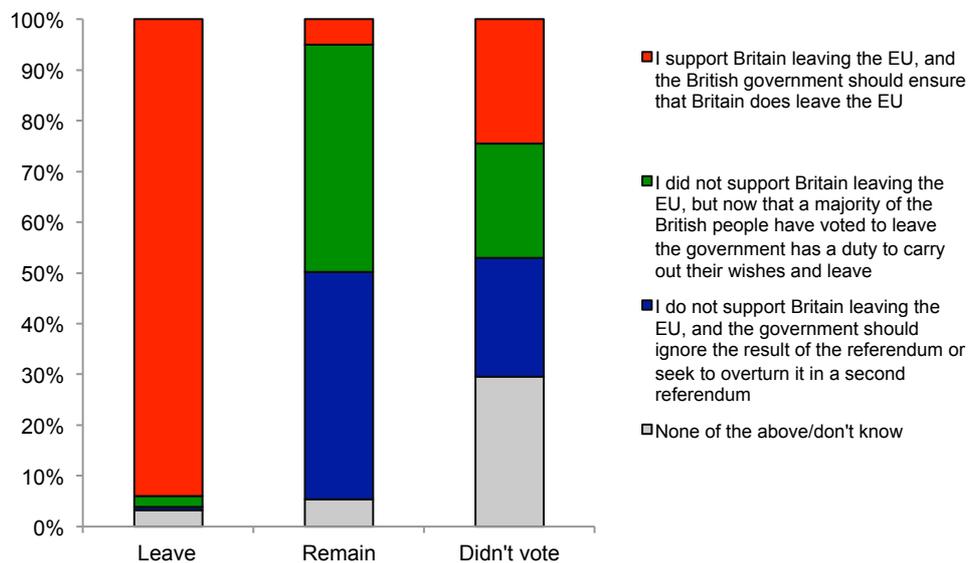
Approximately 3,000 respondents were surveyed online by the polling company Kantar between 2nd of February and 8th of March, 2018. Our question differed very slightly to the one YouGov asked in that we also gave respondents the option to say ‘none of the above options apply to me’.⁷ In spite of this difference, our results were highly similar to those obtained by YouGov ten months earlier. 42% of our respondents ticked the first statement, 22.5% ticked the second statement, and 22.5% ticked the third statement. (A further 13% answered ‘don’t know’ or ‘none of the above’).

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of results by referendum vote choice. Just as YouGov found, there is an overwhelming consensus among Leave voters: 94% ticked the first statement. And just as YouGov also found, Remain are decidedly split: 45% ticked the second statement, whereas 45% ticked the third statement. It can therefore be concluded that the percentage of Remain voters who are Re-Leavers has changed relatively little over the last 10 months: approximately 50% were Re-Leavers in May of 2017, and approximately 50% are still Re-Leavers as of March of 2018. Interestingly, respondents who did not turnout in the referendum are split into four roughly equal-sized groups: 25% ticked the first statement, 22% ticked the second statement, 23% ticked the third statement, and the remaining 30% said ‘don’t know’ or ‘none of the above’.

I checked to see whether Firm Remainers are actually ‘firmer’ in their commitment to leaving the EU than Re-Leavers by comparing the two groups’ responses to the question, ‘How strongly do you think of yourself as a Remainer?’ Respondents answered on a scale from 0 (‘Not very strong’) to 100 (‘Very strong’). Because the distribution of responses to this question was extremely skewed (only 7% had a score less than 50, and 34% had a score of 100), respondents were grouped into three tertiles, corresponding to scores of 0-80, 81-

99, and 100, respectively. Compared to respondents with a score of 0-80, those with a score of 81-99 were 24 percentage points more likely to be a Firm Remainer, while those with a score of 100 were 41 percentage points more likely to be a Firm Remainer. These figures confirm that Firm Remainers are indeed ‘firmer’ in their commitment to leaving the EU than Re-Leavers.

Figure 1. Breakdown of opinion on whether to implement the referendum result by vote choice.



Notes: Sampling weights were applied. The quickest 2% of respondents by total survey time were excluded.

In order to investigate which socio-demographic characteristics distinguish Re-Leavers from Firm Remainers, I ran a multivariate regression model of being a Re-Leaver rather than a Firm Remainer. (Respondents who voted Leave or who did not vote were excluded from the analysis). All of the following variables were included as predictors: age group, gender, ethnicity (white vs. non-white), country of birth (UK vs. foreign), level of education, occupational class, political interest, party identity, national identity, whether things have gotten better or worse over the last decade, and geographical region. (See Appendix A for full results.) These comprise most of the variables that have been identified as among the strongest predictors of support for Brexit in previous analyses.^{8,9,10,11}

Interestingly, however, only four characteristics turned out to be significant predictors of being a Re-Leaver rather than a Firm Remainer.¹² First, individuals older than 70 were 18 percentage points less likely to be Re-Leavers than those younger than 25.¹³ Second, Conservative supporters were 23 percentage points more likely to be Re-Leavers than Labour supporters. Third, individuals who identify as European were 25 percentage points less likely to be Re-Leavers than those who identify as British.¹⁴ And Fourth, individuals who say things have gotten better over the last decade were 22 percentage points more likely to be Re-Leavers than those who say things have gotten worse. Somewhat surprisingly, Re-Leavers could not be distinguished from Firm Remainers along lines of gender, ethnicity, education or social class. This finding suggests that Remainers who wish to overturn the referendum result are no more ‘elite’ than their counterparts who now believe that the referendum result should be implemented.

The finding that Conservative Remain voters are more likely to be Re-Leavers than Remain voters from other parties is particularly interesting because it implies that there is now a relatively high degree of consensus among Conservative supporters that the referendum result should be implemented, despite the fact that around 40% of Conservatives voted Remain.¹⁵ Indeed, in our sample overall, only 10% of Conservatives ticked the third statement, compared to 22% of SNP supporters, 34% of Labour supporters, 43% of Green supporters, and 46% of Liberal Democrat supporters. Incidentally, these figures arguably provide evidence against the claim made by Sara Hobolt and colleagues that “the referendum has given rise to a new form of political attachment”¹⁶, given that most Conservative Remain voters have apparently recalibrated their view on Brexit to reflect the result of the referendum, and current Conservative government policy.

There are two possible explanations for the finding that individuals who say things have gotten better over the last decade are more likely to be Re-Leavers. First, Firm Remainers may have been more likely to say things have gotten worse insofar as they regarded the referendum result itself as evidence that things have indeed gotten worse. Second, Remainers who are more optimistic in general may be more sanguine about Brexit, and may therefore have put a lower estimate on the economic or other costs of implementing the referendum result.

Appendix A

Table A1 displays estimates from linear probability models of being a Re-Leaver rather than a Firm Remainer (binary dependent variable). Four characteristics are significant predictors of being a Re-Leaver: being older than 70 rather than younger than 25 (diff. = -18ppts., $p = 0.37$), identifying with the Conservatives rather than Labour (diff. = 23 ppts., $p < 0.001$), identifying as European rather than British (diff. = -26 ppts., $p < 0.001$), and saying things have gotten better over the last decade rather than worse (diff = -19 ppts., $p < 0.001$).

Table A1. Estimates from linear probability models of being a Re-Leaver rather than a Firm Remainer.

| | Re-Leaver as opposed to Firm Remainer (binary dependent variable) |
|--|--|
| <i>Age group (ref. = 18-24)</i> | |
| 25-34 | -0.09 |
| 35-44 | -0.09 |
| 45-54 | -0.07 |
| 55-69 | -0.05 |
| 70+ | -0.18* |
| <i>Gender (ref. = Female)</i> | |
| Male | 0.05 |
| <i>Ethnicity (ref. = Non-white)</i> | |
| White | 0.00 |
| <i>Country of birth (ref. = Born abroad)</i> | |
| Born in UK | -0.01 |
| <i>Level of education (ref. = Below secondary)</i> | |
| Secondary | -0.01 |
| Post-secondary | 0.03 |
| University degree | 0.00 |
| <i>Occupational class (ref. = Routine or semi-rout.)</i> | |
| Intermediate occupation | 0.03 |
| Manager or higher grade professional | 0.05 |
| Other | -0.05 |
| <i>Political interest (ref. = Not at all interested)</i> | |
| Not very interested | 0.02 |
| Fairly interested | 0.06 |
| Very interested | -0.01 |
| <i>Party identity (ref. = Labour)</i> | |
| Conservative | 0.23*** |
| Lib Dem | -0.01 |
| UKIP | 0.12 |
| SNP | 0.10 |
| Green | -0.08 |
| Other/Don't know/Prefer not to say | 0.09+ |
| <i>National identity (ref. = British)</i> | |
| English | 0.02 |
| Welsh | -0.16 |
| Scottish | 0.01 |
| Northern Irish | -0.02 |
| Irish | -0.26+ |
| European | -0.26*** |
| Other | -0.14 |
| <i>Things gotten better or worse over last decade (ref. = Worse)</i> | |
| About the same | 0.03 |
| Better | 0.19*** |
| Don't know | 0.12 |

Continuation of Table A1

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|--|-------|
| <i>Geographical region (ref. = North East England)</i> | |
| North West England | 0.05 |
| Yorkshire & Humber | 0.00 |
| East Midlands | 0.09 |
| West Midlands | 0.14 |
| East of England | 0.05 |
| London | -0.05 |
| South East England | 0.00 |
| South west England | 0.07 |
| Wales | 0.07 |
| Scotland | 0.00 |
| Northern Ireland | -0.18 |
| Unweighted <i>n</i> | 1,263 |

Notes: Entries are coefficients from OLS models. ‘ref.’ denotes the reference category for each variable. Standard errors are omitted for the sake of brevity. Only respondents who voted Remain are included. The quickest 2% of respondents by total survey time were excluded. Sample weights were applied. Significance levels, based on robust standard errors: + 10%, * 5%, ** 1%, *** 0.1%.

Notes and References

- ¹ Keegan, W. (2018). The ‘will of the people’ can change. Ask Clement Attlee. *The Guardian*, 8 April, published online.
- ² Low, A. (2016). Brexit is not the will of the British people – it never has been. *LSE Brexit*, 24 October, published online.
- ³ Roberts, M. & Curtis, C. (2017). Forget 52%. The rise of the “Re-Leavers” mean the pro-Brexit electorate is 68%. *YouGov*, 12 May, published online.
- ⁴ Richards, L. & Heath, A. & Carl, N. (2017). Red Lines and Compromises: Mapping Underlying Complexities of Brexit Preferences. *Political Quarterly*, early online view.
- ⁵ Lucas, E. (2017). Hypocrisy of the liberal elite on Brexit is breathtaking. *The Times*, 24 November, published online.
- ⁶ Heath, A. (2017). From Brexit to Barcelona, liberal elites have lost faith in self-determination. *The Telegraph*, 12 October, published online.
- ⁷ The wording of our statements also differed very slightly to the wording of YouGov’s three statements.
- ⁸ Hobolt, S.B. (2016). The Brexit vote: A divided nation, a divided continent. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23, 1259–1277.
- ⁹ Clarke, H.D., Goodwin, M. & Whitely, P. (2017). Voting to Leave. *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union*, Ch. 7. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- ¹⁰ Evans, G. & Menon, A. (2017). Voting to Leave. *Brexit and British Politics*, Ch. 4. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- ¹¹ Carl, N. (2017). CSI Brexit 3: National identity and support for Leave versus Remain. *Centre for Social Investigation*, published online.
- ¹² In an earlier wave of the survey, we asked respondents whether the number of immigrants into Britain should be increased or reduced. I re-ran the analysis including this variable (in addition to all the variables shown in Table A1), but it was not a significant predictor of being a Re-Leaver rather than a Firm Remainer.
- ¹³ This result was not reported in the original version of this briefing note. It was discovered after a slight change in model specification.
- ¹⁴ These results are consistent with what YouGov found in May of 2017 (see the pdf corresponding to their full results).
- ¹⁵ Lord Ashcroft. (2016). How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday... and why. *Lord Ashcroft polls*, 24 June, published online.
- ¹⁶ Hobolt, S.B., Leeper, T. & Tilley, J. (2017). Public attitudes. In Menon, A. & Wilson, A. (eds.). *EU Referendum: One Year On. Report for The UK in a Changing Europe and The Political Studies Association*, published online.