

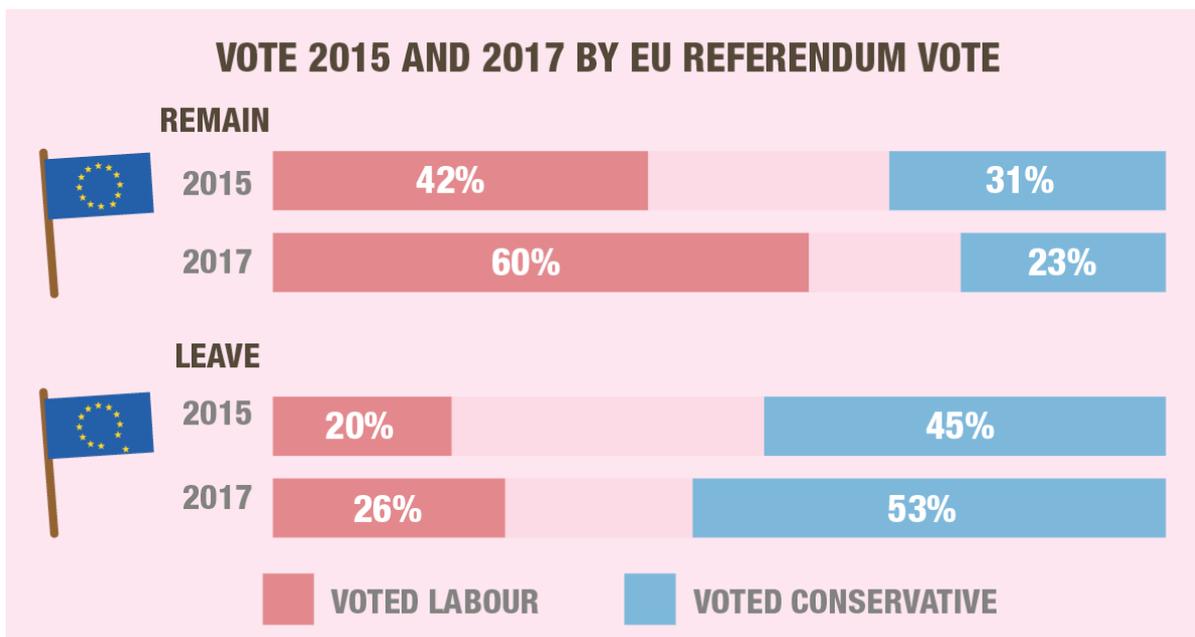
What **UK**
Thinks **EU**

HAS BREXIT RESHAPED BRITISH POLITICS?

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Has Brexit Reshaped British Politics?

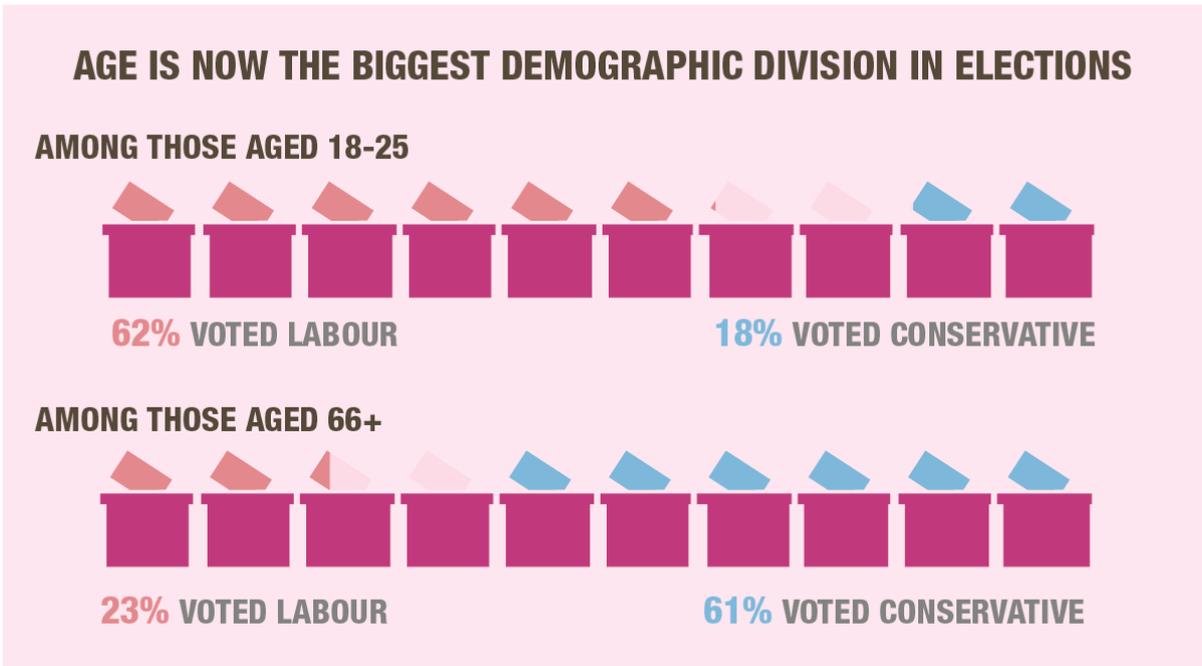
In the 2017 election the Conservatives gained support amongst Leave voters but fell back amongst Remain supporters. Labour, in contrast, advanced more strongly amongst Remain than amongst Leave voters



As a result, the distinction between whether someone is a social liberal or a social conservative came to be reflected much more in whether people voted Labour or Conservative.



Reflecting the pattern of the Brexit vote, age not social class is now the main demographic dividing line in British politics.



INTRODUCTION

When the Prime Minister stood outside 10 Downing Street on 18 April 2017 and announced that she wanted the House of Commons to vote for an early dissolution, she stated that her aim was to secure a mandate - and a large majority - for the vision of Brexit that she had laid out in a major speech at Lancaster House the previous January (May, 2017). In the event, her hopes of winning a substantial majority were dashed, and the Prime Minister found herself having to run a minority government propped up via a 'confidence and supply' arrangement with the DUP. The result, some claimed, meant the electorate had rejected the Prime Minister's vision of Brexit (Dunt, 2017; Stewart and Asthana, 2017), which envisaged that the UK should end freedom of movement, leave both the EU single market and the Customs Union, and no longer accept the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, a vision that her critics suggested was too 'hard'.

However, while the Prime Minister may have called the election in order to secure voters' endorsement of her vision of Brexit, we cannot assume that the issue necessarily influenced the way that people voted, let alone that the outcome of the election represented a rejection of that vision. After all, in the event, Brexit was far from being the only subject discussed during an election campaign that was punctuated by two major terrorist events and witnessed a major row about proposals in the Conservative manifesto for the future funding of social care (Ross and McTague, 2017). Moreover, given that support for the two parties with the most distinctive positions on Brexit - the Liberal Democrats (who wanted a second referendum) and UKIP (who backed a 'hard' Brexit) - fell at the election, it is not immediately obvious that people's views about Brexit influenced the way that they voted. Perhaps in the end voters themselves decided that the 2017 election was about domestic issues such as the economy, taxation and public services in much the same way as previous general elections have been.

In this paper, we examine to what extent voters' willingness to support the Conservatives or Labour reflected their views about Brexit. Did, for example, those who voted Remain, and who largely support a 'soft' Brexit, swing away from the Conservatives? Conversely, did Mrs May's party gain ground amongst those who voted to Leave the EU and those who are more inclined towards a 'hard' Brexit? If such patterns are in evidence, is their mirror image to be found in Labour's performance? Meanwhile, in so far as there is any evidence for these propositions, what are the implications for the character of Conservative and Labour support? Does the makeup of who votes Conservative and Labour and the reasons they do still look like much it has always done, or has Brexit reshaped - for the time being at least - the character of the two parties' support?

EVIDENCE

Our evidence comes from a variety of surveys now available of how people voted in the 2017 election. The first is a survey conducted in July 2017 of 2,184 members of a mixed mode random probability panel that is maintained by NatCen Social Research. All of the members of this panel were first interviewed for the 2015 or 2016 British Social Attitudes survey (Clery, Curtice and Harding, 2017), the respondents to which were chosen at random, and who then agreed to undertake further short interviews, either online or over the phone. Previous rounds of interviewing of this panel ascertained, inter alia, people's views about Brexit and how they voted in the EU referendum. The data have been weighted to correct known differences between the character of the original BSA samples and those who responded to the July 2017 wave of the panel (Wood, 2017). At the same time, we use the original 2015 and 2016 British Social Attitudes surveys themselves in order to examine the patterns of voting behaviour in the 2015 general election and the 2016 EU referendum.

Our second key source of evidence is a large survey of 31,196 people conducted in June 2017 by YouGov on behalf of the British Election Study (BES).¹ This was the 13th wave of what is a panel study that first began interviewing people in February 2014, in advance of the 2015 general election (and 2014 Scottish independence referendum). This means that for most respondents we also have information from many previous waves of interviewing, including waves undertaken after the 2015 election and the 2016 referendum, as well as during the 2017 general election campaign. Consequently, we can use the panel to trace how the character of party support has evolved during the course of the last two years. These data have also been weighted to reflect the known characteristics of the adult population.

Finally, in addition to these predominantly academic sources of evidence, we also use on occasion the evidence of commercial polls, and in particular polls conducted regularly (online) during the course of the election by both ICM and YouGov, as well as two large post-election polls undertaken by YouGov and Lord Ashcroft (Ashcroft, 2017). As we will see, although our various sources have collected their evidence using different approaches and methodologies, the patterns they uncover prove largely to be much the same, lending confidence to the veracity of the story we have to tell.

THE 2015 ELECTION AND THE 2016 REFERENDUM: TWO VERY DIFFERENT BATTLES

No two elections are exactly alike. However, there are some common themes. One of these is the argument between ‘left’ and ‘right’. Those on the ‘left’ are inclined to the view that society is too unequal and that the government should endeavour to make it less so, through, for example, higher taxation, more generous welfare benefits, the provision of public services, and regulation of the economy. Those on the ‘right’, in contrast, feel that a certain amount of inequality has to be accepted so that there are sufficient incentives for people to work and to invest and thereby ensure economic growth is delivered from which all can profit. They are thus usually looking for the government to do less rather than more. This argument has long been part of the regular diet of political debate between Conservative and Labour politicians, with, for example, the Conservative party inclined at election time to argue for low taxation and less regulation, and Labour to claim more needs to be spent on public services and more help given to the less well-off.

This long-standing debate is reflected in the way that people vote in elections. Each year the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey asks its respondents a series of questions designed between them to ascertain whether respondents are inclined to the left or to the right (Clery, Curtice and Harding, 2017). Details of these questions are given in the appendix to this briefing. Here we may simply note that we can use the responses to identify the one-third or so of respondents who give the most left-wing responses, the one-third who give the most right-wing, and the one-third who fall in between these two groups. These three groups voted very differently, as evidenced by the results of the 2015 BSA, conducted in the weeks and months after that year’s election.

As Table 1 shows, only around one in six of those on the left voted for the Conservatives, whereas two-thirds of those on the right did so. Conversely around half of those with relatively left-wing views voted Labour, compared with little more than one in seven of those on the right. On the other hand, whether people were on the left or the right made relatively little difference to the likelihood that they would vote for the Liberal Democrats or UKIP, though we might note that, contrary to what is commonly assumed, UKIP are not particularly popular amongst those on the right.

¹ Further details can be found at <http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/>

Table 1 Vote Choice 2015 by Left/Right Orientation

2015 Vote	Left	Centre	Right
	%	%	%
Conservative	17	36	66
Labour	51	33	15
UKIP	10	11	6
Liberal Democrat	7	9	7

Source: British Social Attitudes 2015

However, the debate in the EU referendum was not about whether the government should do a little more or a little less. Rather it was about whether it was acceptable that what government can and cannot do should have to take account of the UK's membership of the European Union and, above all, whether or not there needed to be greater control over immigration. Thus, perhaps we should not be surprised that, even though those on the left vote very differently in elections from those on the right – and vice-versa – there was very little difference between these two groups when it came to how they voted in the referendum. According to the 2016 BSA, those on the right (52%) were at most just a little more likely than those on the left (45%) or in the centre (48%) to vote for Leave.

The referendum debate about immigration and about sovereignty touched upon a different set of values than those associated with the terms 'left' and 'right'. It tapped instead into a disagreement between social liberals and social conservatives about the relative merits of a homogeneous and a heterogeneous society. On the one hand, social liberals are inclined to the view that individuals should be able to choose for themselves the moral code and social mores to which they adhere, and they feel comfortable living in an ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse environment. On the other hand, social conservatives feel that social cohesion demands a degree of adherence to common moral standards and social practices, and they feel this cohesion can be undermined by linguistic and other forms of diversity. Immigration is, of course, a phenomenon that tends to make a society more diverse.

Each year, the British Social Attitudes survey also asks a set of questions designed to ascertain whether people hold socially liberal or socially conservative views. Again, details of the questions are to be found in the appendix; here we use them to divide respondents into the one-third or so most liberal, the one-third most conservative, and the one-third who lie in between. In Table 2 we examine how liberals and conservatives voted in the 2015 election. There were some differences between them so far as their propensity to vote Conservative or Labour are concerned, but they were not large. Social conservatives were 15 points more likely than social liberals to vote Conservative, while social liberals were just 9 points more likely than social conservatives to vote Labour. These differences are much smaller than the equivalent differences (49 points and 36 points) between those on the left and those on the right in Table 1. Where the distinction did matter was in respect of voting for UKIP and the Liberal Democrats. UKIP was much more popular, relatively speaking, amongst social conservatives while the Liberal Democrats were most successful in winning votes amongst social liberals (see also Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1985).

Table 2 Vote Choice 2015 by Liberal/Conservative Orientation

2015 Vote	Liberal	Centre	Conservative
	%	%	%
Conservative	33	45	48
Labour	37	31	28
UKIP	3	12	15
Liberal Democrat	12	6	3

Source: British Social Attitudes 2015

In contrast, social liberals and social conservatives voted very differently from each other in the EU referendum. According to the 2016 BSA, just 21% of social liberals voted Leave, whereas as many as 72% of social conservatives did so. Those in the centre, meanwhile, divided almost evenly in the referendum, with 53% voting Leave.

The demographics of these two ideological differences, that is, between left and right, and between social liberals and social conservatives, are rather different from each other. Those in salaried, middle class occupations together with (especially) those running a small business are rather more likely to be on the right, while those in working class jobs tend to be on the left. In the 2015 BSA, for example, 37% of those in salaried occupations and 39% of small employers were on the right, compared with just 22% of those in routine and semi-routine occupations. However, whether someone is a social liberal or a social conservative depends primarily on their age or educational background. No less than 63% of graduates were social liberals in the 2015 BSA survey, compared with just 18% of those without any educational qualifications. Similarly, 54% of those aged between 18 and 24 were social liberals, while just 26% of those aged 65 and over fell into that group. Thus, as Table 3 shows, how someone voted in the referendum depended primarily on their age and education rather than their social class.

Table 3 EU Referendum Vote by Age Group, Highest Educational Qualification and Social Class

		Leave	Remain
Age Group			
18-24	%	28	72
25-34	%	37	63
35-44	%	37	63
45-54	%	47	53
55-64	%	55	45
65+	%	63	37
Highest Educational Qualification			
Degree	%	22	78
Higher education below degree	%	53	47
A Level	%	41	59
GCSE A-C	%	62	38
GCSE D-F	%	69	31
None	%	72	28
NS Social Class			
Professional and Managerial	%	36	64
Intermediate	%	53	47
Small Employers	%	56	44
Supervisory & Technical	%	60	40
Routine & Semi-Routine	%	60	40

Source: British Social Attitudes 2016

According to the 2016 British Social Attitudes survey, nearly three in four of those aged 18 to 24 voted to Remain in the EU, whereas, in contrast, nearly two in three of those aged 65 and over voted to Leave. Equally, around three-quarters of graduates voted for Remain, while three-quarters of those without any educational qualifications voted for Leave. The finely balanced overall outcome of the referendum thus hid what was a very sharp social division by age and educational background. Meanwhile, although those in a professional or managerial occupation were almost two to one in favour of Remain, otherwise there was relatively little difference in the voting behaviour of those in different occupational classes.

Against this backdrop, it is, perhaps, not surprising that how people voted in the EU referendum did not correspond especially closely with which of the two largest parties they supported (Curtice, 2017). According to BSA, those who supported the Conservatives were almost evenly divided in how they voted in the EU referendum, with 54% voting for Leave and 46% for Remain. Labour supporters were not so evenly divided, but even so as many as 33% voted for Leave while 67% backed Remain. In contrast, as we might anticipate, Liberal Democrat and UKIP supporters were less divided. Indeed, every single respondent to the 2016 BSA survey who identified themselves as a UKIP supporter said they voted Leave, although doubtless in the real world there were a few UKIP supporters who voted to Remain. Meanwhile, nearly three quarters (73%) of those who identified themselves as a Liberal Democrat voted to Remain while around a quarter (27%) backed Leave.

Thus, if voters' decisions in the 2017 election about whether to vote Conservative or Labour reflected their views about Brexit, there would seem to be plenty of scope for some voters to have departed from their usual voting choice. But if that scope were to be realised, voters would need to have reckoned that there was a discernible difference between the parties in their stance on Brexit. We might wonder how far that was the case. After all, the Labour party was not opposing the decision to leave the EU, while the Conservatives' position was described by the minister in charge of negotiating the UK's exit from the EU, David Davis, as 'constructive ambiguity' (Mance, 2017). Indeed, as Table 4 shows, many a voter admitted to YouGov during the 2017 election campaign that they did not know where the parties stood on Brexit. Around one in three said either that they were 'not sure' where the Conservatives stood or that they did not have any clear policy, while in the case of Labour and the Liberal Democrats nearly half were of that view. That said, whereas 38% associated the Conservatives with the idea of a 'hard' Brexit, only 4% reckoned Labour supported such a stance. Meanwhile around one in four thought that Labour opposed Brexit, whereas only around one in ten said the same of the Conservatives. In short, some voters at least did think there was a discernible difference between the parties on Brexit.

Table 4 Perceived Position of the Parties on Brexit, 2017 General Election

	Perceived Position of			
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats	UKIP
	%	%	%	%
They are opposed to Brexit and would like Britain to remain in the European Union	6	17	27	1
They are opposed to Brexit and would like to have a second referendum once negotiations are complete	3	9	20	1
They accept Brexit, but would like Britain to have a "soft Brexit" and retain the benefits of the single market	21	27	5	2
They support Brexit and would like Britain to leave the European Union completely and negotiate a new trade deal	38	4	1	63
They don't have any clear policy/Not sure	31	43	47	28

Source: YouGov 9-10.5.17

In any event, even if many voters had difficulty identifying where the parties stood on Brexit, they had less difficulty distinguishing between them when it came to one of the central issues in the EU referendum campaign - immigration. As Table 5 shows, according to YouGov over half reckoned that the Conservatives wanted to reduce immigration, whereas only around one in ten felt that the Labour party wished to do so. This finding is underlined by data collected by the British Election Study internet panel during the election campaign. Respondents to this study were asked to indicate where they thought the parties stood on this issue by placing the parties on a scale from zero to ten, where zero meant 'the UK should allow many fewer immigrants' to come to the UK, and ten signified that 'the UK should allow many more immigrants' to come. On average the Conservatives were given a score of 3.6, whereas the equivalent figure for Labour was 6.5. Evidently this was an issue - one that had become highly salient in the wake of the EU referendum - on which the Conservatives and Labour were widely thought to be a long way apart. On this evidence, it certainly seems we cannot dismiss the possibility that Brexit influenced how people voted in the 2017 election.

Table 5 Perceived Position of the Parties on Immigration, 2017 General Election

	Perceived Position of			
	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats	UKIP
	%	%	%	%
They would like to tighten immigration rules and reduce the amount of immigration into Britain	54	9	4	73
They would like to keep immigration into Britain at about its current level	15	31	21	1
They would like to relax immigration rules and allow more immigration into Britain	3	11	19	1
They don't have any clear policy/ Not sure	29	39	56	25

Source: YouGov 9-10.5.17

CAMPAIGN MOVEMENT

The 2017 election was, of course, unexpected. Many voters had probably not put much thought into how they might vote at the next election when the Prime Minister announced that she wanted an early ballot. Now that they were suddenly confronted with the prospect of casting a vote, they had to decide what to do. So, if Brexit did make a difference to the way that people voted, we might well anticipate that this will have been evident in how voting intentions evolved during the election campaign itself. As voters aligned their vote choice with their views about Brexit and immigration, perhaps Remain voters swung to Labour, while Leave voters moved in the opposite direction?

Table 6 The Evolution of Vote Intentions by EU Referendum Vote During the 2017 Election Campaign

Vote Intention	Remain Voters			Leave Voters		
	March/ Early April	Late May/ Early June	Change	March/ Early April	Late May/ Early June	Change
	%	%		%	%	
Conservative	38	33	-5	53	58	+5
Labour	32	45	+13	17	23	+6
Liberal Democrat	16	12	-4	4	4	0
UKIP	1	0	-1	19	8	-11

Source: Calculated from ICM Polls: March/Early April: Average of 4 polls conducted 3 March -17 April. Late May/Early June: Average of 4 polls conducted 26 May-7 June

Table 6 addresses this question by comparing the vote intentions of Remain and Leave voters in ICM's polls in the weeks immediately before the 2017 election was called with how they said they would vote during the last two weeks of the election campaign. If we look first of all at the change in party support amongst those who voted Leave in the EU referendum, we find little apparent support for our proposition. In the wake of a squeeze on UKIP support amongst this group, Conservative support increased by five points, but Labour support increased too, by six points. There is no sign here of Leave voters distinctively swinging in favour of the Conservatives.

However, a very different picture emerges amongst those who voted Remain. Although support for the Conservatives was already lower amongst this group when the election was called, support for the party fell by five points amongst Remain voters during the course of the campaign. In contrast, Labour's support increased markedly amongst this group, by no less than 13 points. Here are the first signs that perhaps some Remain voters at least may have been dissuaded from voting Conservative by the stance that the party was taking on immigration and Brexit.

A LONGER LENS – CHANGES IN SUPPORT SINCE 2015

Still, this by no means demonstrates that the pattern of voting in 2017 reflected people's views about Brexit any more closely than did the way that people voted in 2015. Perhaps all that happened during the 2017 election campaign is that Labour regained ground amongst Remain voters that it had lost during the previous two years (Curtice, 2017b). Maybe Remain voters had previously been particularly likely to have had doubts about Jeremy Corbyn's leadership – he had, after all, been much criticised for his allegedly lukewarm involvement in the Remain campaign during the EU referendum – and these doubts had now been assuaged.

Table 7 Vote 2015 and 2017 by EU Referendum Vote 2016

Vote	Remain Voters			Leave Voters		
	2015	2017	Change	2015	2017	Change
	%	%		%	%	
Ashcroft Poll						
Conservative	30	25	-5	45	60	+15
Labour	41	51	+10	20	25	+5
British Election Study						
Conservative	31	23	-8	45	53	+8
Labour	42	60	+18	20	26	+6

Sources: Lord Ashcroft Poll 6-9.6.17; 2015 and Referendum vote is as reported in 2017. 2015-17 British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 13; 2015 and Referendum vote obtained in most cases shortly after the relevant ballot.

However, this seems not to have been the case. In Table 7 we show, using two different surveys, the level of support for the Conservatives and Labour amongst Remain and Leave voters in both the 2015 and the 2017 elections. Both exercises suggest that the Conservatives performed less well amongst Remain voters in 2017 than it had done in 2015, while support for Labour amongst such voters was markedly higher. Meanwhile, although support for Labour increased amongst Leave voters too, it did so to a lesser extent than it did amongst Remain voters. The Conservatives, meanwhile, made progress amongst Leave voters, and may have even advanced more strongly amongst them than Labour did. Certainly, although the Conservatives had already been more popular than Labour amongst Leave voters in 2015, while the opposite was true of those who backed Remain, the gap between the two sets of voters was noticeably bigger in 2017 than it had been in 2015. Attitudes towards Brexit did, it seems, make a difference to how people voted in 2017.

Still, it might be objected at this point that the question before voters in the election was not whether the UK should leave the EU or not – that decision had already been made in the referendum. Rather, the issue that the Prime Minister was putting before voters in the election campaign was what shape Brexit should take (and who could better deliver it). Thus, what really matters is not the extent to which how people voted in the EU referendum was reflected in how they voted in the general election, but rather to what extent the kind of Brexit that voters wanted played a role in how they voted in 2017.

Table 8 Support for Conservatives and Labour in 2017 and Change in Support since 2015 by Brexit Priority

Brexit Priority	% Voted Conservative		% Voted Labour	
	2017	Change since 2015	2017	Change since 2015
Access to single market	18	-9	55	+11
Equal	46	0	38	+9
Control immigration	61	+16	24	+5

Source: 2015-17 British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 13

In fact, there is a clear link between people's priorities for Brexit and how they voted in the referendum. The first piece of evidence to that effect is shown in Table 8. Respondents to the British Election Study internet panel were asked to use a scale from zero to ten to indicate the relative importance to them in the Brexit negotiations of securing 'access to the single market' and controlling immigration, with zero indicating that they prioritised 'access to the single market' and ten indicating that they prioritised controlling immigration. Those who gave themselves a score of between zero and three are classified as prioritising access to the single market, those who replied with a score of between seven and ten as giving priority to controlling immigration, while those with a score of between four and six are categorised as giving more or less equal weight to both considerations. We can see that while support for the Conservatives increased by no less than 16 points amongst those for whom the priority was controlling immigration, it fell by no less than nine points amongst those who thought it was more important to secure access to the single market. Meanwhile, although Labour's vote did also increase to some extent amongst those who wanted above all to control immigration, at five points the increase was less than that enjoyed by the Conservatives amongst this group - and was lower than the eleven point increase in support that Labour itself enjoyed amongst those whose priority was access to the single market.

A similar result is obtained, at least so far as the Conservatives are concerned, if we look at the link between how people voted in the referendum and attitudes towards a hypothetical trade-off between free access to the single market and free movement of people. Respondents to the July 2017 wave of the NatCen Panel were asked whether or not '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'. As Table 9 shows, those who said that Britain definitely should not allow freedom of movement for EU citizens in return for free access to the EU single market swung strongly towards the Conservatives, whereas support for the party fell somewhat amongst those who at least might be willing to contemplate such a deal. In this instance, however, the increase in Labour support bears little relation to people's attitudes towards the possible shape of Brexit.

Table 9 Support for Conservatives and Labour in 2017 and Change in Support since 2015 by Willingness to Trade Immigration Control for Free Trade

Willingness to Allow	% Voted Conservative		% Voted Labour	
	2017	Change since 2015	2017	Change since 2015
Definitely	24	-3	48	+7
Probably	48	-1	35	+6
Probably not	58	+5	26	+7
Definitely not	66	+17	23	+5

Source: NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel July 2017

Much the same pattern is obtained too if we look directly at the apparent impact of attitudes towards immigration. In this instance respondents were asked to use a scale of zero to ten to say whether they thought ‘that Britain’s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by migrants coming to live here from other countries’, with zero indicating that they thought ‘cultural life is undermined’ and ten that ‘cultural life is enriched’. As Table 10 shows, those who think that cultural life is undermined by immigration swung by as much as twenty points towards the Conservatives, whereas support for the party fell by eight points amongst those who felt that cultural life is enriched. Meanwhile, although the differences are not as sharp, support for Labour increased by eight or nine points amongst those who were inclined to the view that immigration enriches cultural life, whereas it fell by five points amongst those who were clearly of the view that immigration undermines the country’s culture.

Table 10 Support for Conservatives and Labour in 2017 and Change in Support since 2015 by Attitudes towards the Cultural Consequences of Immigration

Perceived Cultural Impact of Immigration	% Voted Conservative		% Voted Labour	
	2017	Change since 2015	2017	Change since 2015
Undermined (0-1)	58	+20	28	-5
2-4	52	+2	32	+6
Neither (5)	47	+6	39	+1
6-8	36	-3	44	+9
Enriched (9-10)	9	-8	61	+8

Source: British Social Attitudes 2015; NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel July 2017

So, whether we look at how people voted in the EU referendum or their views about some of the central issues in the debate about Brexit, those with divergent views swung differently between 2015 and 2017. The Conservatives gained substantial ground amongst Leave voters, those who would prefer a 'hard' Brexit and those most concerned about immigration, whereas they lost support amongst those who voted Remain, those who would prefer a 'soft' Brexit, and those who view immigration positively. In the case of Labour the divergence between these two groups is not so sharp – the party typically made progress amongst both – but even so, it tended to advance more strongly amongst Remain voters and soft Brexiteers than it did amongst Leave voters and those who are keen for Brexit to bring about an end to freedom of movement. The link between people's attitudes towards Brexit and whether they voted Conservative or Labour was much sharper than it had been two years previously.

THE CHANGED VALUE AND DEMOGRAPHIC BASE OF PARTY SUPPORT

Given that is the case, does this also mean that the link between people's values and which party they voted for at the general election changed too? Has the distinction between social liberals and social conservatives become more important in determining which of the two largest parties people support, displacing perhaps the debate between those on the left and those on the right? And if that is the case, does this also mean that the demography of British elections has altered too, with age and education displacing social class as the basis of electoral choice?

Table 11 Support for Conservatives and Labour in 2017 and Change in Support since 2015 by Liberal/Conservative Orientation

Orientation	% Voted Conservative		% Voted Labour	
	2017	Change since 2015	2017	Change since 2015
BSA/NatCen				
Liberal	26	-7	49	+12
Centre	45	0	37	+6
Conservative	57	+9	33	+5
BES				
Liberal	20	-6	56	+13
Centre	49	+3	34	+8
Conservative	58	+14	27	+5

Sources: BSA/NatCen: British Social Attitudes 2015 & NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel July 2017; BES:2015-17 British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 13

It certainly appears to be the case that the distinction between social liberals and social conservatives mattered more in 2017 than in 2015. In Table 11 we show the level of support for Conservative and Labour amongst liberals and conservatives in 2017 and how this differed from 2015 according to two sources, both of which measured whether someone was a social liberal or a social conservative in the same way as was done in Table 2 above. Both sources show that support for the Conservatives increased amongst the one-third or so most socially conservative part of the population, while the party's vote fell back amongst the most socially liberal section of the electorate. Meanwhile, although the difference is less stark, both surveys also show that support for Labour increased more amongst liberals than it did amongst conservatives. As a result, social conservatives were between 30 and 40 points more likely than social liberals to vote Conservative, and between 15 and 30 points less likely to vote Labour.

But what do we observe when we undertake a similar comparison of the movements in party support amongst those on the left and those on the right? Here there is no consistent evidence of divergence, such as, for example, those on the left moving towards Labour with those on the right swinging towards the Conservatives. Neither source in Table 12 provides any evidence at all to support the latter possibility, and while the data from one source do show Labour gaining ground more amongst those on the left than amongst those on the right, the movement towards the party amongst those in the centre is almost as strong as amongst those on the left. There is certainly not enough evidence here to conclude that Labour's advance in the election was fuelled primarily by those on the left being attracted by Jeremy Corbyn's allegedly more left-wing agenda.

Table 12 Support for Conservatives and Labour in 2017 and Change in Support since 2015 by Left/Right Orientation

Orientation	% Voted Conservative		% Voted Labour	
	2017	Change since 2015	2017	Change since 2015
BSA/NatCen				
Left	21	+4	62	+6
Centre	41	+5	45	+8
Right	62	-4	18	+7
BES				
Left	16	+3	62	+13
Centre	34	+3	45	+11
Right	68	+3	18	+5

Sources: BSA/NatCen: British Social Attitudes 2015 & NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel July 2017; BES:2015-17 British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 13

That said, there clearly is no evidence here that the distinction between left and right was less likely to be reflected in how people voted than it was two years previously. Moreover, the difference between those on the left and those on the right in their level of support for the Conservatives and Labour is still bigger than the equivalent difference between social liberals and conservatives. Both surveys put the gap between left and right in their propensity to support the two parties at between 40 and 50 points or so. We cannot say, therefore, that the 2017 election saw the electoral battle between Conservative and Labour change from being a division between left and right into one between social liberals and social conservatives – left and right still mattered much as it had done in 2015. We can, however, say that the debate about Brexit has ensured that the division between the two parties is now about social liberalism vs. social conservatism as well as left vs. right

But what of the demography of party support? Have age and education come to matter more than previously? It was already the case in 2015 that younger voters were more likely to vote Labour than their older counterparts. However, as Table 13 shows, the age gap in party support widened yet further in 2017. According to the BES internet panel, for example, the Conservatives lost ground amongst those aged 35 and under, while they gained support amongst the over 45s. Labour, meanwhile, advanced strongly amongst the under 35s and only registered a minimal advance amongst the over 45s. As a result, whereas around three-fifths of those aged 66 and over voted for the Conservatives only around one in five of those aged 25 or younger did so. The figures for Labour are almost a mirror image of this picture. Other sources, such as the post-election polls conducted by Lord Ashcroft and YouGov, tell much the same story. Indeed, if we compare these figures with the equivalent statistics for the EU referendum in Table 3 above it appears that the age gap in Conservative and Labour support was at least as big as the age difference in levels of support for Remain and Leave in the EU referendum.

Table 13 Support for Conservatives and Labour in 2017 and Change in Support since 2015 by Age Group

Age Group	% Voted Conservative		% Voted Labour	
	2017	Change since 2015	2017	Change since 2015
18-25	18	-11	62	+21
26-35	30	-5	51	+14
36-45	37	0	43	+9
46-55	42	+3	38	+4
56-65	50	+3	30	+3
66+	61	+3	23	+2

Source: 2015-17 British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 13

In contrast, the differences in the election between graduates and those without any qualifications in their level of support for the Conservatives and Labour were much smaller than those in the EU referendum. Indeed, according to one of our sources in Table 14 there was relatively little difference between graduates and those without any qualifications in their propensity to vote Conservative or Labour. But given that graduates are relatively likely to be in middle-class occupations, this in itself might be thought a remarkable finding. Meanwhile both sources agree that the Conservatives lost support amongst graduates while gaining it amongst those without any qualifications at all. Both also suggest Labour advanced more strongly amongst graduates than amongst those without any qualifications.

Table 14 Comparison of Support for Conservatives and Labour in 2017 and Change in Support since 2015 Amongst Graduates and Those Without Any Qualifications

Highest Qualification	% Voted Conservative		% voted Labour	
	2017	Change since 2015	2017	Change since 2015
BSA/NatCen				
Degree	33	-4	43	+8
None	35	+2	47	+4
BES				
Degree	32	-4	45	+9
None	47	+16	35	+5

Sources: BSA/NatCen: British Social Attitudes 2015 & NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel July 2017; BES:2015-17 British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 13

Meanwhile, as Table 15 shows, there is not any evidence that the class divide widened in 2017. If anything, the opposite might have been the case, at least so far as the Conservatives are concerned – they appear to have lost ground amongst those in professional and managerial occupations while they advanced amongst those in semi-routine and routine jobs. That said, those in middle-class jobs and, above all, those running their own business remain more likely than those in working class occupations to vote Conservative and less likely to vote Labour. The class divide in electoral choice in Britain has not disappeared – but if we compare Table 15 with Table 13 above, what is striking is that the class differences in the pattern of party support in 2017 were much smaller than the differences by age. Social class is no longer the primary, let alone the sole demographic division in how Britain votes.

Table 15 Support for Conservatives and Labour in 2017 and Change in Support since 2015 by Occupational Class

National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification	% Voted Conservative		% Voted Labour	
	2017	Change since 2015	2017	Change since 2015
Professional & Managerial	40	-4	37	+7
Intermediate	45	-1	39	+9
Small Employers	55	+5	32	+8
Supervisory	34	+5	51	+19
Semi-routine & Routine	33	+5	49	+4

Source: BSA/NatCen: British Social Attitudes 2015 & NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel July 2017.

CONCLUSION

Despite the apparent ambiguity in the stances on Brexit adopted by the Conservatives and Labour during the EU referendum, it appears that voters' views about Brexit did influence how people voted in the 2017 election. Those who had voted Leave and who now wanted a 'hard' Brexit voted in greater numbers for the Conservatives than they had done two years previously, whereas the party lost ground amongst Remain voters and those who now preferred a 'soft' Brexit. Meanwhile, although the difference was not so stark, Labour advanced more strongly amongst the latter group than the former. The outcome of the 2017 election was in part at least influenced by the continuing debate about Brexit.

This had implications for the values that were reflected in how people voted. Although it still mattered, whether someone voted Conservative or Labour was not just a reflection of whether they were on the 'left' or the 'right', that is, whether they wanted more government and less inequality or less government and more opportunity. Rather, that choice was now also to a greater extent than before a reflection of whether someone was a social liberal or a social conservative, that is, someone who embraces a more diverse world or who feels concerned about it. Social conservatives swung towards the Conservatives, social liberals were attracted towards Labour – a process that helps explain why neither the party of social conservatism, UKIP, nor that of social liberalism, the Liberal Democrats, prospered in the election.

But the ability of the Conservatives and Labour to encompass the division about Brexit, and thus in turn that between social liberal and social conservatives, is potentially disruptive for both parties. Many in the Labour party still think of the party as one that represents the working class. In practice, however, the party now seems to be almost as popular amongst the ever growing army of (mostly socially liberal) graduates as it is amongst (supposedly left-wing) working class voters - while above all it is now the party of young voters. Inevitably this has created a debate about whether the party should be trying to 'reconnect' with 'traditional' older working class voters, many of whom do not share the social liberalism of the party's younger and university educated supporters. In the meantime, there is certainly little evidence that the party's allegedly more left-wing outlook under Jeremy Corbyn played a decisive role in determining who did swing back to the party in 2017.

In the case of the Conservatives the potential disruptions and tensions created by the election are even greater. The party has long been regarded as the party of big business, and has typically been successful in raising funds as well as moral support from that quarter. But most businesses would prefer Britain to remain in the EU and would certainly like to see the UK negotiate a 'soft' rather than a 'hard' Brexit. But the election saw the Conservatives gain ground amongst Leave voters and amongst those for whom limiting immigration rather than maintaining membership of the EU single market is a higher priority, thereby leaving the party with an electorate whose views are largely at odds with those of its traditional paymasters. How the Conservatives do or do not resolve that tension could well be crucial in determining their political future.

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APPENDIX: LEFT/RIGHT AND LIBERAL/CONSERVATIVE SCALES

The left/right scale is calculated from the answers respondents give to the following propositions:

Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off

Big business benefits owners at the expense of workers

Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth

There is one law for the rich and one for the poor

Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance

In each case respondents are invited to say whether they 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree'. Those who say 'strongly agree' are given a score of 1, those who 'agree' a score of 2, etc. These scores are then summed across all five items. In this paper, those on the 'left' are those whose total scale means they are amongst the one-third with the 'lowest' scores, while those on the 'right' are those with the one-third 'highest scores'.

The liberal/conservative scale is calculated from the answers respondents give to the following statements:

Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values

People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences

For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence

Schools should teach children to obey authority

The law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong

Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards

Again, in each case respondents are invited to say whether they 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree'. Those who say 'strongly agree' are given a score of 1, those who 'agree' a score of 2, etc. These scores are then summed across all six items. In this paper, those classified as 'conservative' are those whose total scale means they are amongst the one-third with the 'lowest' scores, while those categories as 'liberal' are those with the one-third 'highest scores'.

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