

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

BRITAIN DIVIDED? WHO SUPPORTS AND WHO OPPOSES EU MEMBERSHIP

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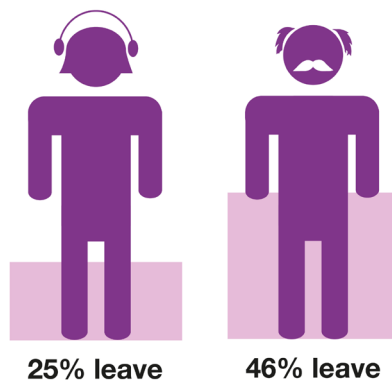
Britain Divided? Who Supports and Who Opposes EU Membership

The EU Referendum campaign is beginning to get into gear. Both sides will be attempting to identify and persuade their core audiences. Using the evidence of recent opinion polls as well as two major surveys, we examine in this briefing which kinds of voters appear more likely to want to leave the EU and which are more likely to want to remain. To what extent do attitudes differ by people's characteristics such as their age, class or educational background? Are different sections of British society likely to come to a similar conclusion on the merits of staying in or leaving the EU, or is the referendum likely to expose significant social divisions about the kind of country we want to be?

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

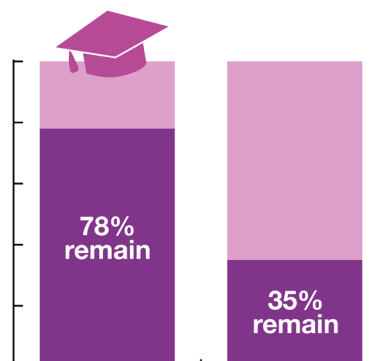
There are some significant social divisions in people's attitudes towards Europe.

- Older people are much more likely than younger people to want to leave the EU.



*British Social Attitudes data show that 25% of 18 to 34 year olds want to leave; 46% of those aged 55 plus

- Graduates are more likely than those with few, if any, qualifications, to want to remain in the EU.

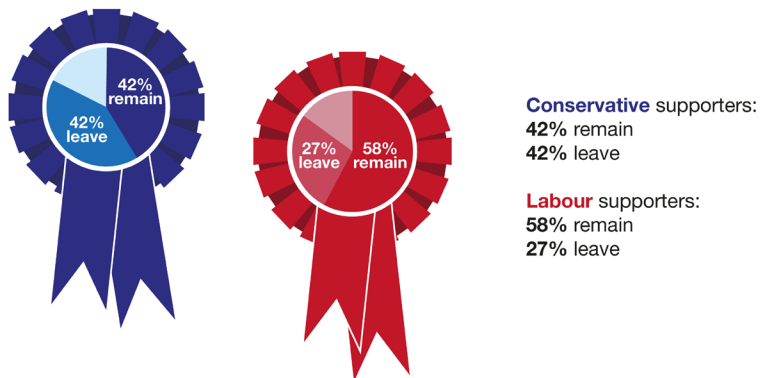


*British Social Attitudes data show that 78% of graduates want to remain, compared with 35% of those with no qualifications

PARTY STANCE CRUCIAL

The stances taken by Conservative and Labour politicians could be crucial to the eventual outcome.

- Both Labour and (especially) Conservative supporters are split on the issue.



*Average of four recent polls

This leaves plenty of scope for both parties to persuade their supporters to change their minds - in one direction or the other.

INTRODUCTION

Now that the 2015 UK party conference season is over, the campaign to persuade us to vote one way or the other in the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union is beginning to get into gear. Organisations that eventually hope to become the official campaigns in favour of 'remain' or 'leave' have now been publicly unveiled. Of course, the shape of the campaign – and, for some people, the decision about which side to campaign on – will depend on the outcome of the UK government's attempts to renegotiate Britain's terms of membership, and that may not be known until sometime next year. Even so, both sides can now be expected to make a determined push to reach out to what they hope are their key audiences.

But what are those key audiences? Amongst which sections of Britain's population is the leave campaign most likely to find support? Who is most likely to want to remain? More broadly, is Britain likely to deliver a single, largely united judgement on the merits of Britain's membership, or is the referendum likely to expose some significant social and political divisions in British society? This paper addresses that question. It does so by looking at the results of recent opinion polls that have put to voters the question that will appear on the ballot paper, together with the findings of two more extended major surveys, NatCen's 2014 British Social Attitudes survey (Ormston and Curtice, 2015) and the post-election wave of a regular panel survey being conducted by the British Election Study.¹

This paper is one of a series of short analysis papers being produced by whatukthinks.org/eu. This website, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under its The UK in a Changing Europe programme (ukandeu.ac.uk), is facilitating access to data on public attitudes towards Europe in the run up to the referendum as well as providing commentary and analysis on the various polls and surveys on the subject.

Not all of the polls and surveys on attitudes to EU membership have uncovered the same overall distribution of responses. Most recent opinion polls have suggested that support for leaving or remaining is quite evenly matched. But one, from ComRes, puts the 'remain' campaign well ahead. Equally, both the 2014 British Social Attitudes survey and the British Election Study wave conducted immediately after the general election found clear majorities in favour of staying (Curtice and Evans, 2015). However, our interest here is not in the level of support for leaving or remaining amongst any one particular group, but rather in the differences in the level of support between different groups. And we discover that despite the differences between the various polls and surveys in the overall level of support for the two sides a remarkably consistent picture emerges as to who is more likely to say they will vote to leave, and who is more likely to indicate that they would prefer to remain.

¹ Further details of the British Election Study can be found at <http://www.britishelectionstudy.com>.

AGE

There is, perhaps, no more striking evidence of this than in the patterns of response given by those in different age groups. In Table 1 we show first of all the proportion of those in each of three broad age groups who in three recent polls said, in response to the question that will appear on the ballot paper², that they would vote to remain in the EU, together with the proportion who said they would vote to leave. In each case those aged under 35 proved to be markedly more likely to say that they would vote to remain than were those who were older – and especially those aged over 55, who prove to be even somewhat more doubtful about remaining in the EU than 35-54 year olds.³

Much the same pattern is found in the two more extended surveys, even though they were conducted some time ago, and despite the fact that they asked a somewhat different question.⁴ In both cases, those aged under 35 were most likely to say they would vote Yes, while those aged 55 and over were least likely to do so.

Table 1. EU Referendum Vote Intention by Age Group

	Remain (%)	Leave (%)
ICM		
18-34	53	28
35-54	42	41
55+	39	46
Survation		
18-34	56	31
35-54	41	40
55+	37	47
ComRes		
18-34	72	21
35-54	51	42
55+	46	43
British Election Study		
18-34	57	21
35-54	44	35
55+	41	44
British Social Attitudes		
18-34	69	25
35-54	58	34
55+	45	46

Table 1: Don't Knows included in the denominator but not shown
Sources: ICM/Vote Leave 7.10.15; Survation/Huffington Post 21-22.9.15; ComRes/Daily Mail 25-28.9.15; British Election Study internet panel wave 6 (May 2015); British Social Attitudes 2014.

² The question reads: 'Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union, or leave the European Union?'

³ The same pattern is also to be found in recent polling undertaken by YouGov, albeit across slightly differently defined age groups. In its Eurotrack survey conducted on the 17th and 18th September, it found that 29% of those aged less than 39 would vote to leave, 44% of those aged between 40 and 59, and 53% of those aged 60 or over.

⁴ The British Election Study asked, 'If there was a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, how would you vote? Leave the EU/Stay in the EU/I would not vote/Don't Know'. The British Social Attitudes survey asked, 'Do you think that Britain should continue to be a member of the European Union or should it withdraw?'

There is something of an irony in this pattern. It is sometimes argued that one reason why the referendum should be held is that anyone aged less than 58 was unable to vote when Britain voted in 1975 to remain. Yet it is younger voters who are keenest on remaining in the EU; indeed, if the franchise were to be restricted to those who were unable to vote forty years ago, the probability that Britain would vote to remain would be markedly greater.

It is, in truth, not surprising that younger people are consistently found to be most likely to say they want to remain in the EU. Brought up in a more diverse society than their parents, they are less concerned about immigration (Ford and Heath, 2013) - and concern about immigration is one of the key motivations behind many people's opposition to staying in the EU. At the same time, the experience of having grown up in an age of widespread international travel and communication may well have served to make the newest generations of Britain's citizens more inclined to accept the principle of international collaboration.

CLASS AND EDUCATION

At the same time, younger people are also more likely to have had a university education. As well as, perhaps, making them more aware of diverse cultures, such an education leaves them better equipped to secure employment in an internationalised labour market, including being able to take advantage of the EU's freedom of movement provisions to find work in another member state. In contrast, those with fewer educational qualifications and in less secure, less well paid employment may well feel that the freedom of movement provisions constitute a threat to their ability to make a living.

There is certainly plenty of evidence to support these expectations. Table 2 shows how referendum vote intentions varied in three recent polls according to people's position on the social grade scheme that is used by most polling companies. Typically, those in 'AB' (managerial and professional) occupations are most likely to favour staying in the EU, while support for leaving is highest amongst those in working class occupations, whether skilled or not.⁵ However, one key group that is not adequately identified by the social grade scheme comprises those running small businesses. According to the British Social Attitudes survey (see Table 3) it is amongst this group that support for leaving is highest, perhaps because those running a small business are well aware of the impact of EU regulation on how they conduct their business but are not in a position to exploit the opportunity to export their products that is created by the existence of EU's single market. Note that many in this group will be classified under the social grade scheme as 'C2s' (skilled workers), and this may help explain why this group appears to be at least as keen on leaving as those classified as 'DEs' (unskilled workers and those dependent on benefits).

⁵ YouGov's data are only broken down by ABC1 and C2DE combined, but the results are in line with those of other surveys. While 45% of ABC1s say they want to remain in the EU, only 29% of C2DEs do.

Even so, irrespective of which classification scheme we use, the kind of job that somebody does seems to matter less than the kind of education that they have received. Both the social attitudes survey and the election survey show that support is highest amongst graduates and lowest amongst those without any educational qualifications (see Table 4), and that the difference between these two groups is greater than that between those in professional and managerial jobs and those in more routine, working class ones. More broadly, there would appear to be a key distinction between those who have received a post-16 qualification, that is, the equivalent of an 'A' level or more, and those who have not, with the former inclined to favour remaining and the latter leaning towards leaving. Britain's debate about its membership of the EU is not just a debate about its relationship with the outside world; it is also a reflection of a social division between those who enjoy the economic status and cultural capital afforded to those who do well in the country's educational system and those who do not.

Table 2. EU Referendum Vote Intention by Social Grade

	Remain (%)	Leave (%)
ICM		
AB	51	35
C1	52	32
C2	37	44
DE	31	49
Survation		
AB	51	35
C1	44	40
C2	32	50
DE	40	41
ComRes		
AB	67	25
C1	59	33
C2	46	46
DE	47	45

Table 2: AB: Managerial, professional and administrative; C1: Clerical and junior managerial etc. C2: Skilled workers
DE: Semi- & unskilled workers plus those reliant on state welfare payments

Source: See Table 1

Table 3. Attitudes towards Britain's Membership of the EU by Social Class

	Remain (%)	Leave (%)
Employers & Managers	67	26
Junior Non-Manual	54	38
Small Employers	45	49
Lower Supervisory	62	30
Routine Workers	51	42

Table 3: Social class is as defined by the NS-SEC schema developed by the Office for National Statistics. Source: British Social Attitudes 2014

Table 4. Attitudes towards Britain's Membership of the EU by Highest Educational Qualification

	British Social Attitudes		British Election Study	
	Continue (%)	Withdraw (%)	Stay (%)	Leave (%)
Degree	78	15	58	26
Higher ed below degree	59	36	48	33
A level	62	35	51	30
O level/GCSE A-C	45	44	33	43
CSE/GCSE D-G	51	39	35	44
None	35	55	29	52

Table 4: Source: British Social Attitudes 2014; British Election Study Internet Panel wave 6 (May 2015)

GENDER

One of the most marked features of attitudes during the Scottish independence referendum was that women were persistently less keen than men on leaving the UK, not least perhaps because they were less sure what the consequences of independence would be (Ormston, 2014). As of yet, however, there is not any consistent sign of an equivalent gender gap in attitudes to remaining in or leaving the EU.

True, as Table 5 shows, most polls find that women are less likely than men to say that they are inclined to vote to remain. But equally, most also find that women are less likely to say that they will vote to leave. If we calculate the average level of support for the two options amongst men across all six readings in Table 5, we obtain figures of 50% in favour of remaining, 40% of leaving, a gap of ten points. If we then perform the same calculation for women we find 45% wish to remain, 36% leave - a near identical gap of nine points. In other words, what distinguishes women so far as attitudes towards the referendum are concerned is not the balance of support for remaining and for leaving but, rather, a much higher proportion saying they do not know which way they will vote – a characteristic that in fact was also in evidence during the Scottish independence referendum.

Table 5. EU Referendum Vote Intention by Gender

	Remain (%)	Leave (%)
ICM		
Men	49	40
Women	39	39
Survation		
Men	45	45
Women	41	35
YouGov		
Men	40	43
Women	36	39
ComRes		
Men	55	40
Women	56	34
British Election Study		
Men	51	35
Women	43	34
British Social Attitudes		
Men	59	37
Women	55	34

Table 5: Sources: See Table1 except YouGov: YouGov Eurotracker 17-18.9.15

IDENTITY AND LOCATION

We might anticipate that people's attitudes towards the EU depend on not just characteristics such as their age and educational background, but also how they think of themselves when it comes to their national identity. Those who think of themselves as 'European' might be expected to be more inclined to remain in the EU than those who do not. In addition we might wonder for voters residing in England whether it makes a difference whether they primarily feel 'British' or whether they consider themselves above all to be 'English'. The former identity has long been promoted as a multicultural identity, whereas the latter tends to be associated with a more conservative outlook on issues of race and immigration (Curtice and Seyd, 2001; Curtice and Heath, 2009).

The British Social Attitudes survey confirms these expectations. It finds that no less than 92% of those who say they feel European (either exclusively or alongside also feeling British, English etc.) want Britain to continue to be a member of the EU, while just 8% wish to withdraw. However, the proportion of those who feel in any way European is no higher than 15%. At the same time we find that there is somewhat greater support for remaining in the EU and less support for leaving amongst those who, if forced to choose just one identity, say that they are British (56% wish to remain, 37% to leave) than there is amongst those who say they are English (49% remain, 43% leave).

This link between English identity and a rather greater level of support for leaving the EU raises the question as to whether attitudes in England are different from those in the rest of Britain. Certainly, it has long appeared to be the case that Scotland is somewhat more Europhile than the rest of the UK, not least perhaps because of the pro-EU stance adopted since the early 1990s by the country's nationalist party, the SNP (Mahendran and Maclver, 2007).

Three of the four recent polls that we have been examining in this paper find a higher level of support in Scotland for remaining in the EU, though we should bear in mind that the sample sizes of these polls mean that in some cases they interviewed fewer than 100 people north of the border. However, no such limitation affects the British Election Study, which interviewed 30,000 people across Britain as a whole, including booster samples in Scotland and Wales. This exercise finds that, whereas in England 45% said that they wanted to stay in the EU and 35% to leave,⁶ in Wales support for staying in the EU was somewhat higher – 50% wanted to stay, 33% to leave – while in Scotland, no less than 58% backed staying and only 28% wanted to leave. Should the UK as a whole vote narrowly to leave the EU, it seems highly likely that Scotland and perhaps Wales will have voted at least narrowly in the opposite direction, thereby potentially creating new debates about the future of the United Kingdom.

PARTISANSHIP

The referendum is being held as a result of the rise of UKIP during the last parliament, and the apparent threat that that success posed to the Conservatives' electoral prospects in particular. And given that opposition to Britain's membership of the EU represents UKIP's *raison d'être*, we would anticipate that almost everyone who supports UKIP is opposed to remaining in the EU. In contrast, at the other end of the spectrum, the Liberal Democrat Party (and before then the Liberal Party) was the first party in Britain to support joining the EU and it has long been the most pro-European in its policy stances. So we would expect this party's (now much diminished band of) supporters to be keenest on remaining in the EU.

⁶ Within England, support for remaining was highest in London, where 48% said they would vote to stay and 32% that they would back the proposition to leave.

However, Europe has long been a divisive issue inside the Conservative and Labour parties. While the latter has more recently been the more pro-European of the two, it was opposed to Britain's membership for much of the 1980s. Meanwhile, although it was a Conservative government that took Britain into the EU in the first place, during the last two decades the party has become increasingly sceptical about an EU that many Conservative MPs feel has become too powerful vis-à-vis its member states. We thus might anticipate that supporters of these two parties are divided in their views on the EU, albeit with Conservative supporters on balance keener than Labour voters to remain in the EU.

These expectations are confirmed by Table 6. Very few UKIP supporters wish to remain in the EU. Most polls find that Liberal Democrat voters are keenest on remaining in the EU, though they are not as united in their support as UKIP supporters are in their opposition. Meanwhile, Conservative and Labour supporters are heavily divided on the issue, though with the former somewhat more inclined than the latter to vote to leave. Indeed, on average across these four polls, the 42% of Conservative voters who say they would vote to remain are exactly matched by the 42% who say they would prefer to leave; the equivalent figures for Labour are 58% and 27% respectively. These patterns are also reflected in the British Social Attitudes and the British Election Study data (see Table 7), the latter of which contains enough Green and nationalist supporters to provide a sound basis on which to assert that these groups are also relatively keen on remaining in the EU.

Table 6. EU Referendum Vote Intention by Party Support

	Remain (%)	Leave (%)
ICM		
UKIP	7	88
Conservative	42	41
Labour	55	27
Liberal Democrat	70	19
Survation		
UKIP	14	78
Conservative	40	45
Labour	51	33
Liberal Democrat	67	19
YouGov		
UKIP	2	88
Conservative	29	48
Labour	53	27
Liberal Democrat	66	23
ComRes		
UKIP	17	80
Conservative	56	35
Labour	73	21
Liberal Democrat	67	30

Table 6: Figures based on the party for which the respondent voted in May 2015, except in the case of ComRes where they are based on current vote intention.

Source: See Table 1 except YouGov: YouGov Eurotracker 17-18.9.15

In deciding which way to vote in a referendum, voters do not simply make up their minds by themselves. They take notice of the arguments being put before them – and not least of who is making those arguments. For example, Conservative supporters are particularly likely to take notice of the arguments put forward by David Cameron, as indeed proved to be the case when they were making up their minds on which way to vote in the referendum in 2011 on whether the electoral system for the House of Commons should be changed to the Alternative Vote (Curtice, 2013). The existing divisions amongst Conservative and Labour supporters suggest that both parties have plenty of scope for effective persuasion should either of them support one option or the other in a determined and united fashion. What remains in doubt is the extent to which either party will be willing and able to do so, and especially if the Prime Minister were to be judged by his fellow Conservative parliamentarians to have failed to secure an adequate renegotiation package from Brussels.

Table 7. Attitudes towards Britain’s Membership of the EU by Party Support

	British Social Attitudes		British Election Study	
	Continue (%)	Withdraw (%)	Stay (%)	Leave (%)
UKIP	17	82	7	85
Conservative	52	44	36	44
Labour	62	31	61	22
Liberal Democrat	78	14	71	15
Greens	-	-	73	13
SNP	-	-	64	24
Plaid Cymru	-	-	67	20

Table 7: In the case of the British Social Attitudes survey, party support is based on the party with which the respondent identified. In the case of the British Election Study, it is based on the party for which the respondent voted in May 2015. Source: British Social Attitudes 2014; British Election Study Internet Panel wave 6 (May 2015)

CONCLUSION

Britain is seriously divided in its attitude to Europe. At one end of the spectrum younger people who have enjoyed a university education are seemingly quite keen for Britain to remain a member of the EU. In contrast, older people with few, if any educational qualifications are strongly inclined to vote to leave. The referendum looks set to expose a significant social division between those who appear capable of benefitting from the consequences of an international labour market and feel comfortable living in a relatively diverse society, and those who do not possess either characteristic. As a result, the referendum is not just about Britain's relationship with the EU but is also a debate about what kind of a country Britain can and wants to be. We will have to wait until polling day to see which choice it opts to make.

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