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# HOW DEEPLY DOES BRITAIN'S EUROSCEPTICISM RUN?

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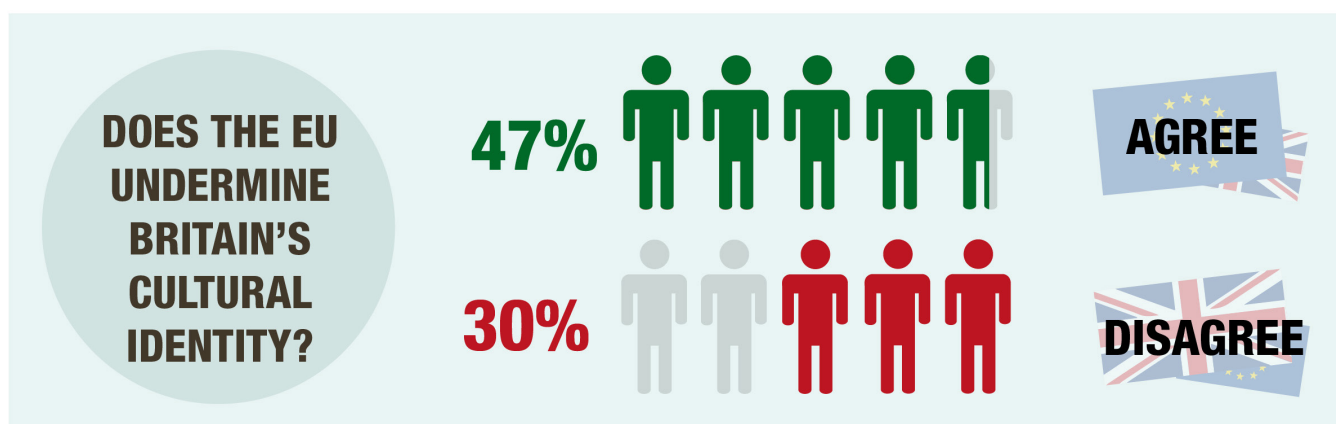
# How deeply does Britain's Euroscepticism run?

What lies behind our attitudes towards Europe? This paper addresses this question using newly published data from the latest British Social Attitudes survey. It reveals that while scepticism about the EU and a wish to curb its powers are widespread, reflecting not least a concern about the cultural consequences of EU membership, this does not necessarily translate into support for leaving the EU. For that to happen voters also need to be convinced of the economic benefits of exiting.

While 65% are sceptical about the EU, and want it to have less power, only 30% support Britain's withdrawal from the EU.



Nearly half agree that being a member of the EU is 'undermining Britain's distinctive identity' while only around a quarter think Britain's economy would be better off if we left the EU.



**IMPACT ON  
BRITAIN'S  
ECONOMY IF  
BRITAIN LEFT  
THE EU**

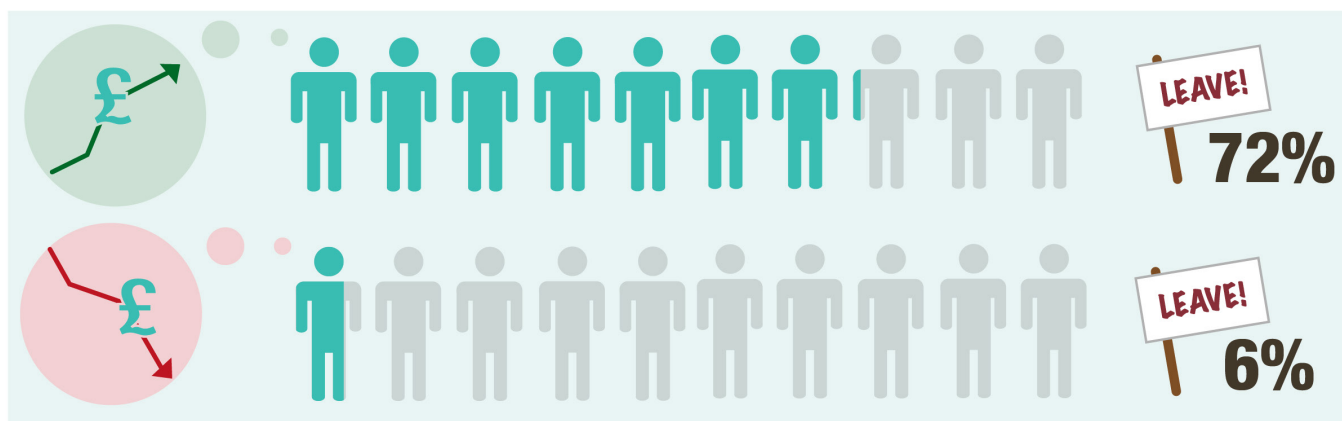
**24%**



**40%**



Amongst those who do think Britain's economy would be better off if we left the EU, 72% support withdrawing. In contrast, amongst those who believe the economy would be worse off, just 6% support leaving.



## INTRODUCTION

The UK is in the midst of an important process. The UK government has been renegotiating aspects of Britain's terms of membership of the European Union (EU) with a view to putting those revised terms to a referendum vote in which people will be invited to choose between remaining in the EU or leaving. A wide range of issues have been discussed during the course of this process so far, including the impact of EU membership on migration, Britain's economy, the country's welfare bill, and the sovereignty and security of the UK. But which of these issues is likely to matter most when people come to decide whether to vote to Remain or to Leave? What changes would people like to see made to the way in which the EU works? And how does the overall mood towards Britain's membership now compare with that in previous years – does the fact that a referendum is being held at all reflect an unparalleled level of scepticism about the institution and the way in which it works?

These are the questions addressed in this paper, the fifth in an occasional series being published by the [whatukthinks.org/eu](http://whatukthinks.org/eu) website in the run up to the referendum. It analyses the responses to a suite of questions that were included on the 2015 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, an annual survey that typically interviews a random sample of around 3,000 people face to face (Ormston and Curtice, 2015).<sup>1</sup> Unlike opinion polls, this survey is not conducted in just a few days but rather over an extended period of months, in this case between July and the beginning of November last year. The advantage of this extended approach, together with the use of random sampling, is that it is more likely to secure a representative sample. As we have shown elsewhere (Curtice, 2016a) the reported general election voting behaviour of those who responded to the 2015 survey is reasonably close to the actual election result. This suggests that the views of those who participated in the survey on other political subjects, such as Europe, are also likely to be representative of the country as a whole.

However, the length of the period over which the survey was conducted means that it cannot tell us how the public have responded to the latest twists and turns in the renegotiations or the wider referendum debate. Indeed, the survey was designed and interviewing began well before the Electoral Commission had published its recommendation as to the question that should appear on the ballot paper (Electoral Commission, 2015). On the other hand the survey asked about far more than whether people want to be in or out of the EU. In particular, it is to date the only survey to have ascertained both what people think are the instrumental, economic consequences of being in or out of the EU and what they consider to be the cultural consequences of membership and the implications for immigration (Curtice, 2016b). It thus gives us a unique ability to ascertain the likely relative importance and role that these two key strands play in the Europe debate, and the role that they are likely to play in voters' minds as they decide which way to cast their vote.

We begin by looking at our overall attitude towards the EU, and how this has changed during the course of the last 30 years. After that we assess the extent to which people would like to see the EU's remit changed and reformed. We then turn to what voters consider to be the consequences of being in or leaving the EU before finally examining how these perceptions shape people's overall stance towards the EU.

<sup>1</sup> Most of the questions analysed here were administered to a random sub-set of 1,105 respondents to the 2015 BSA survey, which overall secured a response rate of 51%.

## HOW EUROSCEPTIC ARE WE NOW?

We begin by assessing how Eurosceptic or otherwise the climate of British public opinion appears to be as the country approaches a referendum on the subject. First of all respondents were asked the simplest question of all, namely whether Britain should remain in or leave the EU. Specifically we posed a question that was initially asked on the first BSA survey in 1983, was asked on a relatively regular basis in the years immediately thereafter, and has more recently been revived. It reads:

**Do you think Britain should continue to be a member of the European Union or should it withdraw?**

As Table 1 shows, twice as many now say that they think Britain should continue to be a member of the EU as respond that they think it should withdraw. That would seem to suggest that Euroscepticism is but a minority outlook in the UK. However, we should note that the plurality answer in response to this question has always been 'continue', not least perhaps because 'withdraw' might be thought a word with rather negative connotations. Meanwhile, although the 60% in favour of continuing Britain's membership is higher than it was in the mid-1980s, it still suggests that public opinion is less supportive of membership than it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

**Table 1 Attitudes towards Britain's membership of the EU, 1983-2015**

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1992	1997	2014	2015
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Continue	53	48	56	61	63	68	76	77	72	54	57	60
Withdraw	42	45	38	33	32	26	19	17	22	28	35	30
<i>Unweighted sample size</i>	1761	1675	1804	3100	2847	3029	2797	1445	2855	1355	971	1105

Source: 1992: *British Election Study*

Since the beginning of the 1990s BSA has also regularly asked a second question that presents respondents with a more nuanced set of choices than whether they wish to be in or out of the EU. This reads as follows:

**Do you think Britain's long-term policy should be...**  
**... to leave the European Union,**  
**to stay in the EU and try to reduce the EU's powers,**  
**to leave things as they are,**  
**to stay in the EU and try to increase the EU's powers,**  
**or, to work for the formation of a single European government?**

The answers to this question paint a rather different picture. True, only 22% say they think Britain's long-term policy should be to leave the EU, suggesting that the proportion that have a firm commitment to that course of action is, indeed, relatively small. However, no less than 43% say that, while the country's policy should be to remain in the EU, it should also be to try and reduce the EU's powers. That arguably is the path that David Cameron is trying to tread, and its relative popularity certainly helps explain why the Prime Minister felt it advisable to try and renegotiate the country's terms of membership in advance of holding a referendum. All in all, almost two-thirds of voters (65%) would like Britain's relationship with the EU to be a looser one than it has been up to now and thus, defined in this way, Euroscepticism is relatively common in Britain.

**Table 2 Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 1992-2015**

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	10	11	11	14	19	17	14	13	17	14
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	30	27	25	23	39	29	36	43	38	38
Leave things as are	16	22	20	20	19	18	23	20	19	21
Stay in EU and increase its powers	28	22	28	28	8	16	9	11	10	10
Work for single European government	10	9	8	8	6	7	8	6	7	7
<i>Unweighted sample size</i>	<i>2855</i>	<i>1461</i>	<i>1165</i>	<i>1227</i>	<i>1180</i>	<i>1355</i>	<i>1035</i>	<i>1060</i>	<i>2293</i>	<i>1099</i>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2008	2012	2013	2014	2015
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	15	15	18	16	15	20	30	26	24	22
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	35	32	38	36	36	35	37	39	38	43
Leave things as are	23	27	23	24	27	24	16	19	18	19
Stay in EU and increase its powers	12	11	7	10	9	9	9	6	10	8
Work for single European government	7	6	5	4	4	3	2	3	4	3
<i>Unweighted sample size</i>	<i>3435</i>	<i>2293</i>	<i>3199</i>	<i>4268</i>	<i>1077</i>	<i>1128</i>	<i>1103</i>	<i>2147</i>	<i>971</i>	<i>1105</i>

Source: 1992: British Election Study

Indeed, it appears to be as common now as it has ever been. Only in 2012 was the combined tally of those who wanted to leave and those who wanted to reduce the EU's powers slightly (and thus insignificantly) higher than it is now. Indeed this combined tally has consistently been above 60% ever since 2012, whereas previously it had never been above 57% (in 1999).

This kind of scepticism is even quite common in Scotland, where both previous survey research and more recent opinion polls have suggested that those living north of the border hold a rather more favourable view of the EU (Ormston, 2015). Table 3 is based on the Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA), a survey that is conducted each year in much the same way as BSA.<sup>2</sup> It shows that 60% of people in Scotland can also be classified as 'Eurosceptic', just five points below the figure for Britain as a whole and higher than recorded by any previous SSA survey. It appears that the mood for a looser relationship with the EU is pervasive throughout Britain.

**Table 3 Attitudes in Scotland towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 1999-2015**

	1999	2000	2003	2004	2005	2013	2014	2015
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	10	11	11	13	14	19	17	17
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	30	27	25	23	39	29	36	43
Leave things as are	16	22	20	20	19	18	23	20
Stay in EU and increase its powers	28	22	28	28	8	16	9	11
Work for single European government	10	9	8	8	6	7	8	6
<i>Unweighted sample size</i>	<i>1482</i>	<i>1663</i>	<i>1509</i>	<i>1537</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1497</i>	<i>1501</i>	<i>1288</i>

*Source: Scottish Social Attitudes survey*

## WHAT CHANGES TO THE EU WOULD WE LIKE TO SEE?

But if there is a widespread wish for a looser relationship, in what ways would the public like to see the EU reformed? The answer appears to be quite radically. In Table 4 we show how respondents reacted when presented with a variety of ways in which how the EU works could be changed. Some of these, such as reducing the ability of EU migrants to claim welfare benefits and reducing the extent to which the EU regulates companies and businesses, are amongst the issues that have been the subject of Mr Cameron's renegotiations. Others, however, have not been – or in some instances, such as ending the reciprocal access that EU citizens have to emergency health care – even been widely touted. Yet in every single case at least a half agreed with the proposition while in no instance was the proportion that actually disagreed much above a quarter. It seems that scepticism about Europe ranges widely across what it currently does.

<sup>2</sup> The most recent SSA interviewed a random sample of 1,288 respondents between July 2015 and January 2016. The survey also found that just 22% want Britain to 'withdraw' from the EU, though at 61% the proportion who wish it to 'continue' to be a member was much the same as in the BSA survey. Instead rather more (17%) said that they did not know whether Britain should remain or not.

**Table 4 Attitudes towards possible changes to how the EU works**

	% Agree	% Neither	% Disagree
Reduce the ability of migrants from other EU countries to claim welfare benefits in Britain	68	8	17
Reduce how much the EU regulates companies and businesses	60	18	14
Stop people from other EU countries getting NHS treatment for free	59	12	23
End the ability of the EU to decide the maximum number of hours people in Britain can be expected to work	53	22	17
End the automatic right of people from other EU countries to come to Britain to live and work	51	17	27
<i>Unweighted sample size = 954</i>			

That said, it appears that the question of access to welfare for EU migrants is an issue of particular concern for voters. No less than 68% agree that the ability of migrants to claim welfare benefits in Britain should be curbed, suggesting that the Prime Minister was astute in making this issue one of the central planks of the renegotiations. Introducing such a measure certainly appears to be more popular than abandoning the broader principle of free movement of people, though even here no less than 51% agree that the automatic right of EU citizens to come to Britain to live and work should be ended.

However, that does not necessarily mean that the public believe that EU migrants should have to wait as long as the four years that the Prime Minister has been suggesting they should before they become entitled to welfare. When respondents to BSA were asked for how long a EU migrant 'living, working and paying taxes in Britain' should have to have been working before they became entitled to receive child benefit (a near universal benefit to which most UK citizens with children are entitled), as many as 44% felt that they should become entitled after working for a year, while no less than 60% believed they should be able to claim the benefit after two years. It looks as though the UK government may have pushed in the renegotiations for a longer time period than was necessary to satisfy a majority of voters at least.

## CONSEQUENCES

However, the question that will be put before voters in the referendum will not be how they would like the EU to be reformed, but rather, in the light of the changes that the UK government has negotiated, whether they wish to remain in or leave the EU. Thus their views about what they think would be the consequences of either course of action can be expected to play a central role in the decision that they eventually make.



Previous research has suggested that attitudes towards the EU, not just in Britain but also across the EU, tend to turn on two sets of issues (Curtice and Evans, 2015). The first concerns the economic benefits or otherwise that the EU delivers. Voters who feel that their country benefits economically from its membership of the EU tend to favour its continued membership, whereas those who feel that it loses out are inclined to want to leave (Anderson and Reichart, 1996; Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2004). The second concerns the cultural consequences of EU membership (McLaren, 2002; Sides and Citrin, 2007). Voters who have a strong sense of national identity together with little in the way of European identity are inclined to question the right of EU institutions to 'meddle' in their country's affairs, may well have concerns that their country's distinctive culture is threatened by the EU's activities, and are more likely to be concerned about the impact of EU migration. As a result they are more likely to want to leave the EU. In contrast, others have some sense of a European identity, may even welcome the impact that the EU is having on their country's culture and the opportunity it creates to make decisions together, and are inclined to be welcoming of the more diverse society that immigration might bring. They can be expected to be keener on remaining in the EU.

So far as the economic benefits or otherwise of EU membership are concerned, it seems that more voters think that membership is beneficial rather than harmful, albeit that many are inclined to the view that it does not make much difference either way. This emerges, first of all, when people are asked:

**Would closer links with the European Union make Britain...  
...stronger economically,  
weaker economically,  
or, would it make no difference?**

As Table 5 shows, almost twice as many people (35%) think that closer links with the EU would make Britain stronger economically than believe it would make the country weaker economically. True, the proportion who think that closer links would be economically beneficial is now rather lower (and conversely the proportion who think it would be disadvantageous rather higher) than was the case in the early 1990s when, as we have already seen, the EU was more popular amongst voters than it appears to be at present. However, there has never been an occasion when more people have said that closer links would make Britain weaker economically than have said that they would make it stronger. This would seem to be one area where voters have persistently been inclined to give the EU the benefit of the doubt.

**Table 5 Perceptions of the economic consequences of closer links with the European Union, 1990-2015**

	1990	1991	1993	1994	1995	1997	2014	2015
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Stronger economically	43	43	33	40	32	33	35	35
Make no difference	37	31	32	29	39	32	42	40
Weaker economically	8	13	22	20	20	20	17	18
Don't know	12	13	13	10	9	15	6	8
<i>Unweighted sample size</i>	<i>1397</i>	<i>1445</i>	<i>1461</i>	<i>1165</i>	<i>1227</i>	<i>1355</i>	<i>971</i>	<i>1105</i>

Much the same impression is formed if we ask voters what they think would happen if the reverse scenario were to come about, that is if Britain were to leave the EU. No less than 40% say that Britain's economy would be worse off if that were to happen, while just 24% believe it would be better off. Thirty-one per cent are inclined to the view that it would not make much difference. On the other hand, this does not mean that voters necessarily think that leaving the EU would put jobs at risk. While a quarter (25%) believe that unemployment would be higher if Britain left the EU, almost as many (24%) think it would be lower; 46% simply believe it would not make much difference.

Apart from the economy, voters are also inclined to the view that leaving the EU would diminish Britain's influence in the world. As many as 36% think that Britain would have less influence if it left, while only 17% think it would have more influence. So here also is an area where on balance being in the EU is viewed more favourably than is leaving. But again there is a substantial section of the public, amounting in this case to 44%, who simply think that leaving would not make much difference.

However, when we turn to the cultural consequences of Britain's membership a much less favourable impression of the EU emerges. This is hardly surprising given the pattern of national identity. One persistent feature of British public opinion is that relatively few people have a strong sense of European identity. Invited to choose as many of the identities associated with Britain and Ireland as they wish, only 16% chose European, a figure that has varied little during the course of this century (Table 6). Equally, if we invite people to place themselves on a seven point scale in which '1' means 'not at all European' and '7' that they are 'very strongly European', as many as 27% put themselves at point 1, while just 6% give themselves a 7. On average people give themselves a mark of 3.2 on this scale, noticeably below the mid-point value of 4. In contrast, as many as 68% choose British as one of their identities, 40% describe themselves as 'very strongly British' on an equivalent seven-point scale, while on average people give themselves a score of no less than 5.6.

**Table 6 Trends in ‘free choice’ European identity, 1996-2015**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
European	10	9	12	17	11	12	12	12	11	12
<i>Unweighted sample size</i>	1180	1355	3146	3143	3246	3287	3435	4432	3199	4268
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
European	16	12	14	12	11	12	14	13	15	16
<i>Unweighted sample size</i>	4290	4124	4486	3421	3297	3311	3248	3244	971	4316

Meanwhile, it appears that concerns about the cultural consequences of being part of the EU are widespread. This emerges in respondents’ answers to this question:

**How much do you agree or disagree that being a member of the European Union is undermining Britain’s distinctive identity?**

Nearly half (47%) of those who participated in the 2015 survey agreed with this proposition while just three in ten (30%) disagreed. Relatively few people (20%) said ‘neither agree nor disagree’, perhaps because asking them about what they thought the consequences of being in the EU had been to date was a rather easier question to answer than anticipating what might happen in future if Britain were to leave. In any event, it seems that many do regard being in the EU as a ‘threat’ to what people consider to be a distinctive British identity, including perhaps because of the limitations that membership places on the country’s sovereignty. Here perhaps is an indication that for many Europe is an ‘other’ in which they would prefer to be involved as little as possible rather than an ‘us’ of which they would like to be part.

One reason why EU membership might be regarded as a ‘threat’ to British identity is the level of inward migration it has served to facilitate since the accession of the ‘A8’ central and eastern European states (most notably Poland) in 2004 (Vargos-Silva and Markaki, 2015). Certainly it is widely thought that immigration would be lower if Britain did leave the EU. No less than 57% take this view. Amongst the remainder only 9% actually feel that immigration would be higher, while 31% simply feel it would not make much difference. If we are willing to make the assumption that most people would welcome lower levels of migration (Ford and Heath, 2014), then it would seem that the cultural argument for leaving the EU enjoys widespread support.

## WHAT MATTERS?

We have so far then seen that there are two rather divergent impressions of the EU amongst people in Britain. It seems that on balance we regard being in the EU as economically beneficial, albeit that many are not sure that membership makes much difference either way. But at the same time there is widespread unease about the cultural consequences of membership of a club with which we feel little sense of common feeling or identity. This clearly raises a question about which of these two sets of considerations matter more in shaping attitudes towards Europe.

At the same time we have also found that attitudes towards Europe cannot necessarily simply be packaged into neat categories of ‘support’ and ‘oppose’. On the one hand only a minority appear to be determined to leave the EU. However, twice as many are sceptical about the institution and would at least like its power and influence reduced – and perhaps when it comes to the referendum they will be asking themselves whether the renegotiated terms of membership are good enough to make remaining in the EU worthwhile. We thus should not only try to identify which considerations matter most in persuading someone that Britain should ‘withdraw’ rather than ‘continue’, but also which ones seem to matter most in making someone incline towards a sceptical outlook towards Europe as opposed to being willing to accept that the EU should be as least as powerful as it currently is.

An issue can be said to be an important influence on people’s views about Europe if it helps distinguish sharply between those who want to leave and those who wish to remain and/or if it helps us identify those who are sceptical as opposed to those who are not. One way in which we can do this is to undertake a multivariate statistical analysis in which we construct an equation that summarises the relationship between, on the one hand, the various views that people have about the consequences of being in or out of the EU and, on the other hand, their overall attitude towards the institution. Potential candidates for inclusion in this equation are the various questions on the perceived consequences of being in the EU or of leaving it that we have introduced so far, together with the various measures of people’s sense of identity. In addition, because voters may simply take their cue about what to think about Europe from the party that they support, we also regard as a potential candidate for inclusion, the party with which they say they identify.

**Table 7. Key influences on attitudes towards the European Union**

Dependent variable is	
Continue vs. Withdraw	Eurosceptic vs. Europhile
Undermines identity***	Undermines identity***
Economy if leave***	Immigration if leave
Economy if stronger links	Conservative or UKIP supporter
Immigration if leave	Economy if stronger links
Strength of European identity	Strength of European identity

\*\*\* *Especially strong relationship*

*Eurosceptic: Wishes either to leave the EU or to stay but reduce the EU’s powers.*

*Europhile: Wishes to remain in the EU as it is or with the EU having increased powers.*

*Source: Stepwise binary logistic regression of BSA 2015 data*

Table 7 summarises the results of this approach both when we use it to distinguish between those who wish to continue to remain in the EU and those who want to withdraw and when we use it to identify those who are Eurosceptic rather than Europhile. We list the questions that the statistical procedure identified as (statistically) significantly associated with these two divisions in the order in which they were introduced into the equation. That order reflects the extent to which they help us to distinguish between the two groups of voters in question. We also note the items that prove to be particularly important in differentiating between the two groups even after we have taken into account the discriminatory power of all of the other questions that are included in the equation.

Two key points emerge from this analysis. First of all, it appears that what above all distinguishes those who are relatively favourable towards Britain's membership of the EU from those who are not is whether or not they think Britain's membership of the EU undermines the country's distinctive sense of identity. This is the case irrespective of whether we are trying to distinguish those who wish to withdraw from those who wish to continue, or Eurosceptics from Europhiles. If this concern is also allied with the belief that immigration would be lower if Britain left the EU then it is even more likely that someone would prefer to leave the EU and that they are sceptical about the institution. Evidently, cultural concerns (of which concern about immigration may, it seems, be just a part) are at the heart of the debate about Britain's membership of the EU.

But while concern about identity proves to be important in both of our analyses, people's attitudes towards the economic implications of being in or out of the EU matter apparently much more so far as the choice between remaining in or withdrawing from the EU is concerned than they do to whether or not someone is a Eurosceptic or not. In the case of the former, the perceived economic consequences of leaving the EU are second only in importance to concerns about identity, while people's views about the economic implications of stronger links with the EU also play an additional, if more minor role. In contrast, in the case of whether someone is a Eurosceptic or a Europhile, people's perceptions of the economic consequences of leaving the EU do not enter into the equation at all, while their views about stronger links again are significant but not of great importance.

How does this contrast come about? We can begin to identify the implications of the statistical analysis by looking more directly at how far attitudes towards the cultural and economic arguments about EU membership distinguish between our groups of respondents. First of all in the top half of Table 8 we examine the balance of support for continuing in or withdrawing from the EU broken down by the extent to which people agree or disagree that membership of the EU is undermining Britain's distinctive identity. In the second half, meanwhile, we show the equivalent analysis for whether someone is Eurosceptic or Europhile.

**Table 8 Attitudes towards the EU by level of cultural concern**

(a) Withdraw vs Continue

EU is undermining Britain's distinctive identity					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
Withdraw	80	42	9	4	3
Continue	17	46	75	92	95
<i>Unweighted Sample size</i>	198	350	216	242	65

(b) Eurosceptic vs Europhile

EU is undermining Britain's distinctive identity					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
Eurosceptic	93	82	47	55	27
Europhile	6	17	43	42	68
<i>Unweighted Sample size</i>	198	350	216	242	65

*Eurosceptic, Europhile: See note to Table 7*

The more concerned someone is about the impact of EU membership on Britain's identity, the more likely they are to want to withdraw and the more likely they are to be a Eurosceptic (albeit in the later case those who 'neither agree nor disagree' with the proposition are slightly less likely to be Eurosceptic than those who 'disagree', in part because more of those who 'neither agree nor disagree' are more likely to say they "don't know" what Britain's relationship with the EU should be [percentage not shown]). Cultural concern thus clearly runs strongly behind both a wish to leave the EU and scepticism about the institution.

That said, there are some subtle differences between the two halves of the table that we should note. Support for withdrawing is much lower amongst those who simply 'agree' that Britain's EU membership undermines its identity (42%) than it is amongst those who 'strongly agree' (80%). Meanwhile it stands at less than 10% amongst those who 'neither agree nor disagree', as well as those who actually disagree. Evidently, unless it is felt intensely, cultural concern on its own appears to be an insufficient motivation to ensure that someone is very likely to want to withdraw.

In contrast, Euroscepticism is almost as widespread amongst those who simply ‘agree’ that Britain’s distinctive identity is being undermined by the EU (82%) as it is amongst those who strongly agree (93%). Meanwhile even amongst those who ‘neither agree nor disagree’ or even ‘disagree’ around half can be described as Eurosceptical. In short even a modest degree of cultural concern turns rapidly into Euroscepticism.

This suggests that while cultural concern is both widespread amongst the British public and underlies much of the scepticism that exists about the EU, on its own it is often insufficient to persuade someone that Britain should actually leave the EU. For that to happen someone needs also to be persuaded of the economic disadvantages of EU membership - as can be discerned from Table 9 which shows, in a manner analogous to that in Table 8, how attitudes vary according to what people think the economic consequences of leaving the EU would be.

**Table 9 Attitudes towards the EU by evaluations of the economic consequences of leaving**

(a) Withdraw vs Continue

If Britain left the EU its economy would be...					
	<b>Much better</b>	<b>Better</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Worse</b>	<b>Much worse</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
Withdraw	80	68	31	8	2
Continue	14	26	55	88	98
<i>Unweighted Sample size</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>355</i>	<i>313</i>	<i>103</i>

(b) Eurosceptic vs Europhile

If Britain left the EU its economy would be...					
	<b>Much better</b>	<b>Better</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Worse</b>	<b>Much worse</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
Eurosceptic	89	84	64	60	47
Europhile	5	15	31	38	50
<i>Unweighted Sample size</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>355</i>	<i>313</i>	<i>103</i>

*Eurosceptic, Europhile: See note to Table 7*



In the first half of this table we can see that the likelihood that someone will want to withdraw from the EU varies a great deal depending on what they think would be the economic implications of withdrawal. Not only do four in five (80%) of those who think the country's economy would be 'much better' if it left the EU want to withdraw, but so also do around two-thirds of those who just think that the economy would be 'better'. In contrast, little more than a handful of those who think the economy would be worse following withdrawal wish to withdraw.

But when it comes to the incidence of Euroscepticism (see the second half of Table 9), the pattern is very different. True, those who think the economy would be better if Britain left the EU are somewhat more likely to be Eurosceptic than are those who think it would be worse, but the gap between the two groups is much smaller than in the first half of the table. Even amongst those who think the economy would be 'much worse' if Britain left the EU almost as many can be classified as Eurosceptic (47%) as Europhile. This explains why our statistical procedure did not pick out people's views on the economic implications of withdrawal as a question that helps us much in distinguishing Eurosceptics from Europhiles.

The high level of Euroscepticism in Britain is thus primarily a reflection of the widespread concern about the cultural consequences of membership. But for Euroscepticism to become translated into a demand for withdrawal, it appears that voters also need to be convinced of the economic case for leaving. This is demonstrated further in Table 10 which shows how support for withdrawing varies according to both cultural concern and economic evaluations in tandem.<sup>3</sup> Only two in five (40%) of those who believe that the EU is undermining Britain's identity but are not convinced that the economy would be better say that they wish to withdraw from the EU. But that figure is at least double (82%) amongst those whose cultural concern is married with a belief in the economic benefits of withdrawal. In the absence of that marriage it seems that British voters are inclined to look for a check on the EU's powers rather than take the more dramatic step of leaving.

**Table 10 Support for withdrawing from the EU by cultural concern and economic evaluations**

	EU is undermining Britain's distinctive identity	
	Agree	Neither/Disagree
If Britain left its economy would be...	% say withdraw from EU	
Better	82 (220)	35 (46)
Neither/Worse	40 (308)	3 (453)

*Figures in brackets represent the unweighted sample size on which the percentage immediately above is based.*

<sup>3</sup> In this table 'better' refers to those think the economy would either be 'much better' or just 'better'. Et simile for 'worse'. Similarly, 'agree' includes those who 'strongly agree' and those who just 'agree'. Again, et simile for 'disagree'.



## CONCLUSIONS

We noted earlier that much previous research on attitudes towards Europe has attempted to ascertain whether it is cultural considerations, such as immigration, or instrumental ones, such as the economy, that are more important in determining people's attitudes towards the EU (see also Goodwin and Milazzo, 2015). That, in truth, is the wrong question to ask about British attitudes towards Europe. Rather than one being more important than another, it is how the two interact that matters. While the seemingly widespread cultural concern that exists in Britain is the foundation of many a doubt and grievance about Britain's relationship with the EU, on its own that concern is typically insufficient to persuade someone that Britain should actually leave the EU. Only if they are also convinced of the economic case for withdrawal are people highly likely to want to take that step. But far fewer are convinced of that case than are concerned about the cultural consequences of the EU. It is this that explains why a nation that appears keen on quite radical reductions in the scope of EU-wide activity and entitlement is not necessarily one that will, when the time comes, vote to Leave.

This clearly has important implications for those trying to persuade us to vote one way or the other in the referendum. While a focus on voters' concerns about immigration and identity will certainly not do the Leave campaign any harm, it is unlikely to be sufficient. The Leave campaign needs to win an economic argument about which so far at least, voters are relatively dubious (see also Curtice, 2016b). The Remain campaign, meanwhile, needs to bolster its economic case, for that appears to be the foundation on which its prospects for electoral success are likely to rest, while at the same time doing its best to argue that the renegotiations have at least assuaged some of the doubts and scepticism about the EU that many feel. Neither side, it seems, has an easy task before them.

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