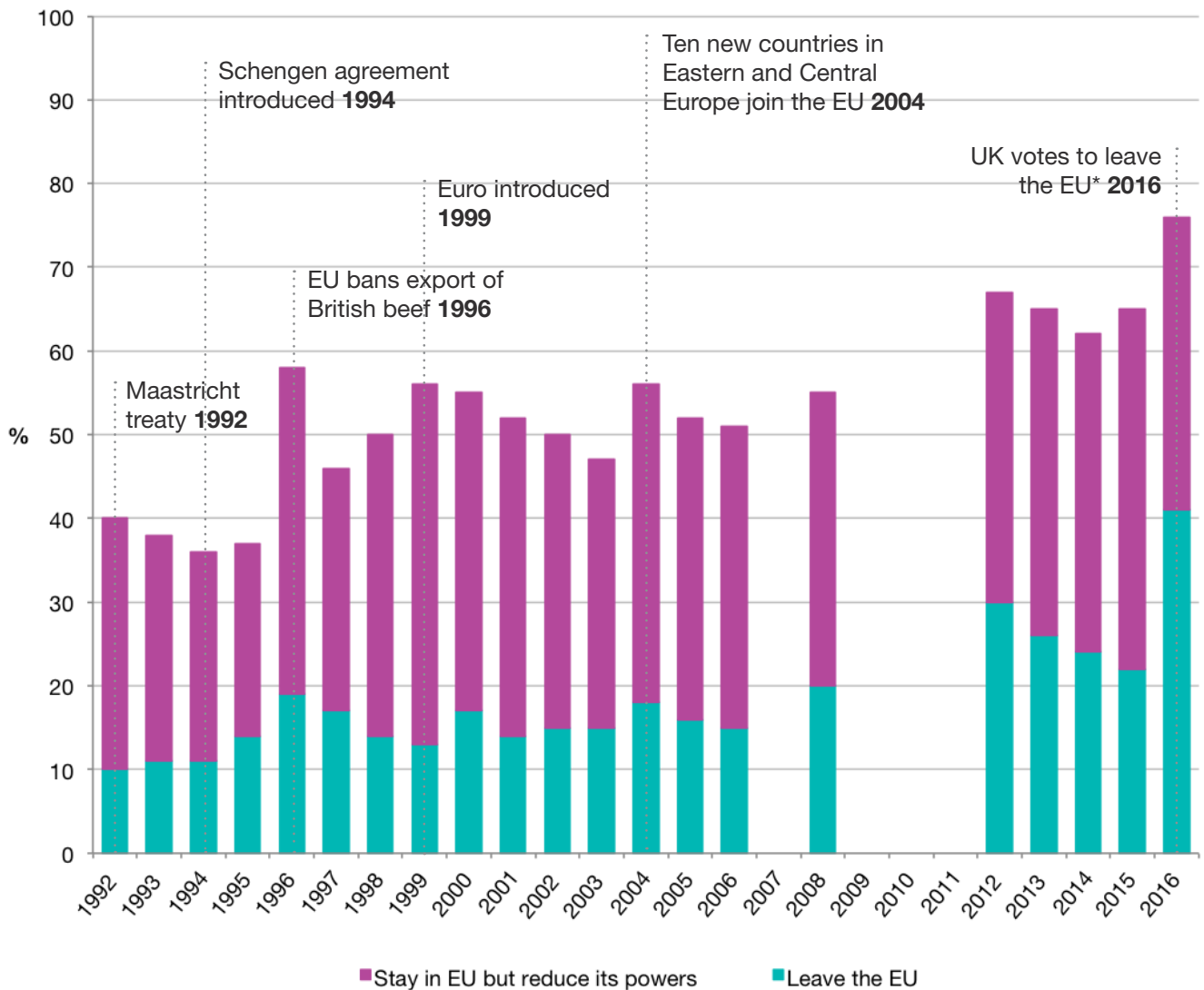


The vote to leave the EU

Litmus test or lightning rod?

We are more Eurosceptic than ever, with long term trends in Euroscepticism continuing to rise after the referendum in June 2016.

Post Brexit, Britain is more Eurosceptic than ever



*Data collected between July and November 2016

Overview

This chapter considers two popular explanations for the vote by the British public in June 2016 to leave the EU. The first is that the vote reflects the concerns of more ‘authoritarian’, socially conservative voters about the social consequences of EU membership – and especially about immigration. The second is that the vote was occasioned by general public disenchantment with politics. The chapter suggests that the first of these two provides the better explanation. The EU referendum can therefore be characterised as a litmus test of the merits of the EU project, and perhaps of globalisation more generally, rather than as a lightning rod for wider political discontent.

Social consequences of EU membership

Concerns about the social consequences of EU membership were key in influencing how people voted in the EU referendum.

- 73% of those who are worried about immigration voted Leave, compared with 36% of those who did not identify this as a concern.
 - 72% of those holding ‘authoritarian’ views voted to leave, compared with 21% of those holding ‘libertarian’ views.
 - Multivariate analysis found that, for the most part, only items associated with people’s sense of national identity and cultural outlook were significantly associated with vote choice.
-

Dissatisfaction with politics

Dissatisfaction with politics was less important in influencing how people voted in the EU referendum.

- 45% of those who trust government a great deal or tend to trust it voted to leave, compared with 65% of those who distrust it greatly.
- However, there was a greater increase in turnout among those with little interest in politics, as compared with the 2015 general election. 43% of those with no interest in politics voted in the EU referendum, up from 30% in the 2015 general election. Nevertheless, these proportions remain markedly lower than those for people with a “great deal” (90% in 2016 and 88% in 2015) or “quite a lot” of interest in politics (89% and 86%).

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Why in the end did a majority of voters back leaving the EU, thereby instigating the most important rejection of a government policy in any referendum held to date in the UK?

Introduction

The outcome of the European Union (EU) referendum, in which a majority of 52% to 48% voted to leave the EU, came as a surprise to most commentators and many voters. Indeed, although previous chapters in the series had reported an increase in scepticism about Europe, they also suggested that the majority of voters were still minded to stay in the EU (Curtice and Evans, 2015; Curtice, 2016). Scepticism was expressed primarily in support for the proposition that Britain should stay in the EU while trying to reduce its powers rather than in the form of outright opposition to continued membership. And it was that sentiment to which the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, appeared to be appealing when he prefaced the referendum with a renegotiation of the UK's terms of membership, on which agreement was reached with the EU in February 2016 (European Council, 2016). So why in the end did a majority of voters back leaving the EU, thereby instigating the most important rejection of a government policy in any referendum held to date in the UK? That is the question this chapter endeavours to address.

In so doing we focus in particular on two principal explanations, both of which are rooted in previous research on why people (not just in Britain, but across the EU) express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the EU. While one of these suggests that the explanation lies – as one might immediately anticipate – in people's evaluations of the EU itself, the other suggests – less obviously – that it may have little or nothing to do with the purpose or operation of the institution at all. So, in part we are going to examine whether the outcome of the referendum necessarily represents a rejection of the EU at all.

Our first possible explanation starts from the observation that the EU is a supra-national organisation that distributes resources across sovereign nation states and creates regulations with which those states have to comply. It has also created a single market that not only means that goods manufactured in one country can be sold in any other EU country but also that citizens of any one EU country have the right to live and work in any other part of the EU. It has thus, to some extent at least, taken on powers and responsibilities that would usually be regarded as the preserve of individual states, while acting as a conduit through which some of the forces of globalisation have been able to flow.

Not everyone is necessarily happy with this development, however. In taking on some of the attributes and characteristics of a state and creating a degree of uniformity across Europe, people may feel that their distinctive national identity and the culture that they associate with that identity are being undermined (Carey, 2002; Deflem and Pampel, 1996; McLaren, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Taggart, 1998). That might particularly prove to be the case if, as has happened recently in the UK, the EU's freedom of movement provisions have served to facilitate relatively high levels

of immigration (Vargas Silva and Markaki, 2016). The new migrants may well speak their own language among themselves and certainly may not be immediately well acquainted with the cultural peculiarities and social mores of the society that they have now joined. For some existing residents at least, this social change may represent a challenge that makes them feel uncomfortable – and a litmus test for what they think of the European Union (Ford and Goodwin, 2017; Sides and Citrin, 2007).¹

However, the EU is for the most part a relatively remote institution. Few voters have a deep appreciation of what it does, of how it operates, or of the personnel that occupy its principal political positions. In contrast, most will have at least some acquaintance with their principal domestic politicians and political institutions. So when they are asked what they think about the EU, voters might be inclined to think about how they are being governed in general, rather than about the EU in particular. And if their view is that they are not in fact being governed that well, they may decide that at least part of the blame lies with an EU they do not understand but seemingly enables its politicians and bureaucrats to enjoy a comfortable life. In short, the EU becomes a lightning rod for their discontent (Anderson, 1998).

So, perhaps on the one hand, a majority of voters in the UK wanted to leave the EU because they were concerned about the cultural consequences of EU membership, including not least what they regard as the adverse consequences of immigration. Or perhaps the vote represented a more general dissatisfaction with the way in which voters feel that they are being governed. Moreover, not only might these perspectives help us understand what distinguished Leave and Remain voters as they cast their ballots in the referendum, but also how voters' views evolved and developed during the course of the referendum campaign.

We begin our analysis by looking at who turned out to vote, before turning to examine who voted to Remain and Leave and why they appeared to do so. We then consider how attitudes shifted during the course of the referendum campaign before considering the implications of the referendum result for the political parties and the debate about what relationship the UK should seek to have with the EU after it has left.

Turnout

According to the official result declared by the Electoral Commission no less than 72% of those eligible to vote participated in the referendum. By historical standards, this is not particularly impressive – until 2001 post-war elections were always graced by a turnout of more than 70%. However, turnout at each of the last four general elections was well below that level. Further, when the UK as a whole was last invited to vote in a referendum – on whether the House of

¹ Of course, immigration may also be thought to pose an economic challenge, both in terms of its impact on the labour market and on public services. Such concerns can also lead to the 'othering' of migrants, and a concern about a loss of national control over immigration.

If more people voted in the referendum than at other recent ballots, does this also mean that the kind of voter who made it to the polling station was a little different too?

Commons should be elected using the Alternative Vote (AV) rather than the existing single member plurality system – just 42% made it to the polls. In short, by recent standards at least, a relatively large number of voters voted in the referendum.

But if more people voted in the referendum than at other recent ballots, does this also mean that the kind of voter who made it to the polling station was a little different too? Perhaps those with little interest or engagement in the political process regarded the ballot as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the way they were governed and thus turned up in greater numbers than was previously the case. Such a pattern is certainly what we might anticipate if voters were using the referendum to express their dissatisfaction with how they were governed in general.

The role of political interest

Nearly all of the increase in turnout occurred among those with “not very much” or no interest in politics at all

Of this, Table 1 suggests that there is some evidence. Nearly all of the increase in turnout as compared with the 2015 UK general election occurred among those with “not very much” or no interest in politics at all. In contrast, turnout barely increased at all among those with at least some interest in politics. This, of course, to some extent is almost arithmetically inevitable, as turnout among those with “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of interest in politics was already close to 90% and thus could not increase much further. Indeed, we can see that as compared with the 2011 referendum on the Alternative Vote, when turnout was much lower irrespective of how interested someone was in politics, the participation rate this time around was more than 20 points above what it was in 2011 across all categories in Table 1. Still, even this comparison suggests that those with less interest in politics were relatively speaking a little more likely to have voted in the referendum on the EU than in the one on AV – though it was still the case that those with “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of interest in politics were much more likely to have voted than those with no interest at all.

Table 1 Turnout in 2011 AV Referendum, 2015 UK General Election and 2016 EU Referendum, by interest in politics²⁺

	% Turnout				
	2011	2015	2016	Change since 2011	Change since 2015
Interest in politics					
Great deal	69	88	90	+21	+1
Quite a lot	67	86	89	+22	+3
Some	55	77	78	+23	+2
Not very much	40	54	65	+25	+11
None at all	14	30	43	+28	+13

Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of turnout.

Older people tend to be more interested in politics than their younger counterparts. We thus might anticipate from the evidence that we have seen so far that the increase in turnout among younger people was more marked than among older people. Of this however, there is no more than a hint, as Table 2 shows. Turnout was up by 9 points as compared with the general election among those aged under 35, while it increased by a more modest 5 points among those aged 65 or over. Comparison of the increase in turnout on the 2011 referendum in these two groups also points to a somewhat bigger increase among younger people. That said, it remained the case that younger people were much less likely to vote than their older counterparts, even though it might be felt that it was their futures above all that would be affected by the outcome of the referendum.

Table 2 Turnout in 2011 AV Referendum, 2015 UK General Election and 2016 EU Referendum, by age group⁺

	% Turnout				
	2011	2015	2016	Change since 2011	Change since 2015
Age group					
18-34	33	55	64	+31	+9
35-64	53	73	80	+26	+7
65+	69	84	89	+21	+5

Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of turnout.

Thus it appears that the EU referendum was somewhat more successful at bringing the reactively uninterested and disengaged to the polls, including some younger voters – but no more than that. Many of the demographic differences in turnout that are in evidence

² Figures showing change over time in this table are calculated from the exact data, rather than the rounded figures that appear in the table. As a result they will sometimes appear to be incorrect by +/-1%. This applies to all similar tables in this chapter.

It remained the case that younger people were much less likely to vote than their older counterparts

in almost every ballot in the UK once again made an appearance. Thus, for example, not only were younger voters still much less likely to vote than older voters, but so equally were graduates (83% of whom voted) more likely to participate than those without any educational qualifications (68%). And in this case, there is little evidence that the demographic divide in participation narrowed much at all.

The importance of education and age

Traditional though they might have been, these demographic differences in turnout by age and education potentially had particular significance in the EU referendum. For among those who did vote, younger voters were far more likely than older voters to say they voted Remain, while graduates were more likely to do so than were those without any educational qualifications. As Table 3 shows, just 22% of graduates voted to leave the EU, compared with 72% of those without any educational qualifications. Equally, if only a little less dramatically, just 28% of those aged 18 to 24 voted to leave whereas 63% of those aged 65 and over did so. This was evidently a referendum marked by some strong social divisions.

Younger voters were far more likely than older voters to say they voted Remain, while graduates were more likely to do so than were those without any educational qualifications

Table 3 EU Referendum vote, by age group and highest educational qualification+

		EU Referendum vote		
		Leave	Remain	Unweighted base
Age group				
18-24	%	28	72	108
25-34	%	37	63	254
35-44	%	37	63	326
45-54	%	47	53	406
55-64	%	55	45	425
65+	%	63	37	732
Highest educational qualification				
Degree	%	22	78	569
Higher education below degree	%	53	47	271
A-level	%	41	59	387
GCSE A-C	%	62	38	419
GCSE D-G	%	69	31	166
None	%	72	28	405

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of voting behaviour.

The differences in referendum vote choice by social class are less marked than those in respect of education

Education is, of course, linked to social class. Someone with a degree is quite likely to be in a professional or managerial occupation, while someone without any qualifications at all is most likely employed in a routine or semi-routine (working class) occupation. However, the differences in referendum vote choice by social class are less marked than those in respect of education. While 36% of those in a professional or managerial occupation voted to leave, the proportion among those in a routine or semi-routine job was 60% - the resulting difference between these two groups of 24 points is much less than the 50 point difference evident in Table 3 between graduates and those without any educational qualifications. Thus, it would seem that it is educational experience rather than class position that primarily shaped people's attitudes towards the EU.

At the same time though education is also intertwined with age – younger voters are more likely than older voters to have been to university and less likely not to have any qualifications at all. We thus might wonder whether one of the patterns that we can see in Table 3 is simply occasioned by the other. To examine whether or not this is the case in Table 4 we show the level of support for Remain broken down by age and highest educational qualification combined. From this it is clear that, of the two, it is educational background that is by far the more important. Within each age group, there is a big difference between graduates and those whose highest qualification is a GCSE or less in the level of support registered for staying in the EU. In the case of those aged between 35 and 54, for example, as many as 81% of graduates voted to remain, compared with just 37% of those whose highest qualification is a GCSE or less; a difference of 44 points. In contrast, older graduates were only 10 points less likely than younger ones to vote for Remain, while the age gap among those with a GCSE or less is only 7 points. Only among those whose highest qualification is less than a degree but more than a GCSE is there a substantial age difference. Even so, at 30 points, it is less than the gap within all of our age groups between graduates and those with a GCSE or less.

Table 4 Percentage voting Remain, by age and highest educational qualification combined

% Remain	Age group		
	18-34	35-54	55+
Highest educational qualification			
Degree	80	81	70
Higher below degree/A-level	71	54	41
GCSE or less	37	37	30

*Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of turnout.*

Such a pattern is precisely what we would expect to find if voters' choices reflected their views about immigration

The pattern of voting in the EU referendum reflected then, above all, an educational divide. At one end of the spectrum most graduates voted to remain in the EU – at the other, most with few, if any educational qualifications voted to leave. To that was then added something of a generational divide. Such a pattern is precisely what we would expect to find if voters' choices reflected their views about immigration. Graduates and younger people tend to be less concerned about both the economic and cultural consequences of immigration (Ford and Heath, 2014), a pattern that is consistent with their tendency to have more liberal views generally about social and moral issues (Park and Rhead, 2013; Park and SurrIDGE, 2003). On the other hand, those with fewer educational qualifications also tend to be less interested in politics or to feel that they cannot do much to influence politics (Lee and Young, 2013), and indeed it can also be shown that they are rather less likely to trust politicians. So the demographic division in the referendum appears to be consistent with both of the possible explanations of the referendum vote that we outlined at the beginning of this chapter. We thus need to look more directly at which appears to provide the better explanation.

Motivations

Views on the implications of EU membership

Our first potential explanation is that those who voted for Remain and those who voted Leave can best be distinguished by their attitudes towards the implications of EU membership for the country's culture and identity, as epitomised above all by people's attitudes towards immigration. That those who voted for Remain and those who voted to leave have very different views about immigration is certainly clear. In our survey, respondents were presented with a list of a dozen items about which they might possibly be worried, ranging from more immediate personal issues such as their health and their family, to wider social issues such as crime and immigration. Among those who named immigration, as many as 73% voted to leave; among those who did not cite this as a concern just 36% did so.

One of the particular issues in the debate about migration from the EU has been the level of access that EU citizens living in the UK should have to welfare benefits. Willingness to grant someone access to welfare may be regarded as an indication that they are thought to be part of the same society and thus as someone who is entitled to support from the rest of that society in a time of need. Conversely, those who consider EU migrants to be 'different' may well be reluctant to extend such support. Indeed, this issue was one of the central topics in the renegotiation of Britain's terms of membership in which David Cameron engaged in advance of the EU referendum. Those talks secured the concession that EU citizens would have to have lived in the UK for at least four years before they could have the same level of entitlement as a British citizen.

Attitudes towards this aspect of the immigration debate were also related to how people voted in the referendum. The longer a voter felt that an EU migrant should have to have lived here before being entitled to the same level of welfare benefit as a British citizen, the more likely they were to vote to leave the EU. Among those who felt that EU citizens should have had to have lived here for four years, or who felt that they should never be granted the same level of entitlement, 67% voted to leave the EU. In contrast, among those who felt the time period should be no more than two years (including, perhaps, not at all), just 31% voted to leave. Meanwhile, among those who lay between these two extreme positions and reckoned a three to four year time period was appropriate, 54% voted to leave.

Concern about immigration can also be thought to be an indicator of a wider set of attitudes about the kind of society in which people wish to live. Some may feel that everybody in society should acknowledge and accept a common set of social mores and cultural practices, as this helps to maintain a more cohesive society. Others may feel that people should largely be free to choose their own moral and cultural compass and thus feel relatively happy about living in a diverse society. This distinction has long been captured by BSA in a set of questions that are designed to tap whether somebody is an 'authoritarian' or a 'libertarian'. Full details of these questions can be found in the technical appendix to this report. Here we use these questions to divide our respondents into three groups: those whose responses to our questions place them among the one-third or so who are most 'authoritarian'; those who by the same criterion belong to the one-third most 'libertarian'; and the remaining one-third who fall in between.

There is a sharp difference between the voting behaviour of these three groups. No less than 72% of the most 'authoritarian' group voted to leave, while just 21% of the most 'libertarian' group did so. Meanwhile, those falling in between these two groups leaned just slightly in favour of leaving, with 53% voting that way. How people voted in the referendum thus not only exposed a big social divide between graduates and those with few, if any, educational qualifications, but also a major cultural divide between those who prefer a relatively homogenous society and those who are content with a more diverse one.

But there is also clearly a link between how people voted in the EU referendum and their sense of identity more broadly. Every year BSA presents its respondents with a list of all of the national identities associated with one or more parts of the islands of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and invites them to select as many of them as they wish as applying to themselves. Among those who included European in their selection, just 15% voted to leave. However, this group represented just 18% of all respondents to the latest survey and thus had relatively little influence on the eventual outcome. Still, the fact that relatively few feel that way – albeit that slightly more do so now than ever before (Curtice, 2016) – helps explain why for many

No less than 72% of the most 'authoritarian' group voted to leave, while just 21% of the most 'libertarian' group did so

Among those who described themselves as 'British', only 45% voted to leave the EU

voters membership of the EU might be felt to represent a challenge to their sense of identity.

However, whether or not someone felt European was not the only way in which their attitudes were linked to their sense of identity. Among those who described themselves as 'British', only 45% voted to leave the EU. In contrast, among those who included 'English' among their selection of identities, 54% voted to leave. This is not simply a reflection of the fact that a majority of voters in England voted to leave, whereas in Scotland the opposite was the case. Within England itself, those who felt British (46%) were less likely than those who felt English (54%) to vote to leave.

This link between feeling English and feeling British becomes even clearer if we look at the link between how people in England voted and a different measure of national identity, the so-called Moreno question (Moreno, 2006) that asks:

Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?

English, not British,

More English than British

Equally English and British

More British than English

British, not English

Table 5 shows that those who said their sense of being English was more important than their sense of being British were more likely to vote to leave than were those whose British identity was the more important. Indeed, among those who said they were English and denied that they were British, nearly three-quarters (74%) voted to leave, whereas less than two in five (38%) of those who rejected feeling English did so. This should not come as a surprise. Within England at least, Britishness rather than Englishness has long been promoted as a 'multi-cultural' identity, and thus there has also long been a link between feeling British and holding a more liberal attitude towards migrant minorities (Curtice and Heath, 2000). It is thus unsurprising that this group should also be more inclined to back the EU. Even so, we should also bear in mind that for many people their sense of Britishness is closely intertwined with their sense of being English, with as many as 42% saying they feel equally both, and thus this aspect of identity can hardly be said to have played an important role for many voters.

Table 5 Referendum vote, by national identity (England only)

		EU Referendum vote		
		Leave	Remain	Unweighted base
National identity (England only)				
English, not British	%	72	28	306
More English than British	%	57	43	212
Equally English and British	%	53	47	853
More British than English	%	50	60	171
British, not English	%	38	62	269

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of voting behaviour.

So there does then appear to be considerable support for the expectation that how people voted in the referendum reflected their sense of national identity and the extent to which EU membership might have been regarded as a challenge to that sense of identity, not least as a result of migration. But that, of course, does not mean that people's vote in the referendum also reflected wider concerns about the way they are being governed.

Views on how we are being governed

There certainly does appear to be some link. This emerges first of all if we look at the link between how people voted in the referendum and the extent to which people say they trust some of the country's political institutions. Respondents were asked whether they tended to trust or distrust (a) government, and (b) parliament. As can be seen in Table 6, in both cases those who said they distrust the institution greatly were around 20 points more likely to have voted Leave than were those who said they trusted the institution. However, this gap is rather less than we have seen so far when we have divided people according to their sense of identity or their attitudes to immigration, where we have observed differences of up to 50 points.³

³ The BSA survey asks respondents a second question about trust in government in which they are asked whether they trust "British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party". The pattern of voting in the EU referendum when broken down by responses to this question proved to be much the same; just 37% of those who said they trusted governments "just about always" or "most of the time" voted to leave the EU, compared with 60% of those who said they "almost never trusted governments".

Table 6 Percentage voting Leave, by trust in government and Parliament

	% voting Leave	<i>Unweighted base</i>
Trust in Government		
Trust a great deal/tend to trust	45	638
Tend to distrust	46	554
Distrust greatly	65	266
Trust in Parliament		
Trust a great deal/tend to trust	43	698
Tend to distrust	50	541
Distrust greatly	62	215

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of voting behaviour.

Among those who agree with the statement that “voting is the only way people like me can have any say about how the government runs things”, 50% voted to leave, whereas among those who disagreed just 34% did so

A similar picture of a clear but rather weaker link emerges when we look at the link between how people voted in the referendum and their sense of ‘political efficacy’, that is, the extent to which they feel able to have some influence on what politicians and government do. For example, among those who agree with the statement that “voting is the only way people like me can have any say about how the government runs things”, 50% voted to leave, whereas among those who disagreed just 34% did so. Similarly, among those who agree that “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does” 55% voted to leave, while among those who disagreed, 37% did so. Meanwhile, in a similar vein, perhaps, while 62% of those with not very much or no interest at all in politics voted to leave, only 40% of those with quite a lot or a great deal of interest did so. Meanwhile when it came to questions that asked people to agree or disagree that “I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country” or that “people we elect as MPs try to keep the promises they have made during the election”, the difference in their level of support for leaving the EU between those who agreed and those who disagreed was no more than five points.

Still, perhaps there is another sense in which how people voted in the referendum reflected discontent with the direction of government in Britain, as opposed to their views about the EU. Perhaps, for example, those who would like the government to be more active in creating a more equal society or to improve the economy took the opportunity to protest about that? Of the former possibility there is certainly little sign. As in the case for ‘libertarianism’ versus ‘authoritarianism’, each year the BSA survey carries a suite of questions designed to ascertain whether or not people would like to see greater equality and whether they would like the government to do something about it. Those who would like greater effort at reducing inequality can be regarded as being on the ‘left’ while those who take the opposite view may be described as being on the ‘right’ (again, the details can be found in the technical appendix to this

There is little sign that the Leave vote was motivated by a wish to see greater government intervention in the economy

report). But if as in the case of our ‘libertarian-authoritarian’ scale we divide our sample into the one-third most ‘left-wing’ and the one-third most ‘right-wing’, we find relatively little difference between them in terms of how they voted in the EU referendum. The 52% level of support for leaving among those with left-wing views is only a little higher than the 45% support to be found among those with right-wing views.

Meanwhile, there is little sign that the Leave vote was motivated by a wish to see greater government intervention in the economy. If anything, the opposite was the case. Support for leaving was actually rather higher among those who favour “less government regulation of business” (55%) than oppose the idea (34%). Equally, support was also rather higher among those who favour “cuts in government spending” (55%) than among those who are opposed (37%). In any event the differences are rather small, while we might note that support for leaving was actually higher among those who favour “support for declining industries to protect jobs” (50%) than it was among those who are opposed (39%).

But to establish more clearly which of our two sets of motivations are the more strongly associated with which way people voted in the EU referendum we need to undertake a multivariate analysis in which we can assess the strength of the relationship between vote choice and each of the variables discussed above⁴, after taking into account all of the other important relationships we identify. Might it be the case, for example, that the links that we have found between people’s attitudes towards politics and government and the way that they voted in the referendum actually prove to be relatively important once we take into account people’s sense of identity and their cultural attitudes? Or, weaker though they may be at first glance, did they still play an independent role in shaping the way people voted in the referendum?

The full results of the multivariate analysis are shown in the appendix to this chapter. The headline, however, is straightforward. For the most part, only those items associated with national identity and cultural outlook proved to be significantly associated with vote choice. Where someone stands on the libertarian-authoritarian scale, whether they are concerned about immigration, whether or not they feel European, and how long they think an EU citizen should have to have lived here before being entitled to welfare benefits all prove to be significantly and independently associated with which way people voted. Otherwise only the extent to which people trust government

⁴ All the variables discussed in the section on motivations were available for inclusion in the model except Moreno national identity (only available for respondents in England) and the item on whether voting is the only way that people can influence things (asked on a different version of the questionnaire from other variables). The initial stepwise analysis only selected for inclusion in the model items that had all appeared on the same two versions of the questionnaire and excluded those that had only appeared on one of those versions. In order to increase the sample size on which it was based the model was then re-run with only those items that appeared in the same two versions being eligible for inclusion on the model. It is this version for which full detail are given in the appendix to this chapter.

made an entry into our model, suggesting that people's attitudes towards government only played a small role in shaping the outcome of the EU referendum.

Dynamics

But leaving aside what motivated voters to make the choices they did, what impact did the debate about European membership have on attitudes towards the EU? In particular, is there any reason to believe that, in the end, Britain voted to leave because public opinion moved in a more sceptical direction in the weeks and months leading up to the ballot? To address this issue, we need to look at the answers to a broader question than whether people were for or against EU membership and one that has been asked on a regular basis over many years. We ask respondents:

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 only minor change that had to be made to this question for our most recent, post-referendum survey was to introduce the question by saying, "Leaving aside the result of the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, what do you think Britain's policy should be...".

Table 7 Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 1992-2016

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	10	11	11	14	19	17	14	13	17	14	15
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	30	27	25	23	39	29	36	43	38	38	35
Leave things as are	16	22	20	20	19	18	23	20	19	21	23
Stay in EU and increase its powers	28	22	28	28	8	16	9	11	10	10	12
Work for single European government	10	9	8	8	6	7	8	6	7	7	7
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2855	1461	1165	1227	1180	1355	1035	1060	2293	1099	3435

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2008	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	15	18	16	15	20	30	26	24	22	41
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	32	38	36	36	35	37	39	38	43	35
Leave things as are	27	23	24	27	24	16	19	18	19	16
Stay in EU and increase its powers	11	7	10	9	9	9	6	10	8	4
Work for single European government	6	5	4	4	3	2	3	4	3	2
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2293	3199	4268	1077	1128	1103	2147	971	1105	1965

Source: 1992: British Election Study

Britain emerged from the referendum far more sceptical about the EU than it had ever been previously

Table 7 reveals that Britain emerged from the referendum far more sceptical about the EU than it had ever been previously. By the time the referendum was over, as many as three in four voters (75%) felt that Britain should either leave the EU or that if it stayed the institution's powers should be reduced. This represented an increase of 11 points in the proportion feeling that way as compared with 12 months earlier, and a 9 point increase on the previous all-time high recorded by the BSA survey, of two-thirds (67%) in 2012⁵. More importantly, however, whereas previously most Eurosceptics said that Britain should stay in the EU while endeavouring to reduce its powers, by the time that the referendum was over the majority felt that we should leave – and as a result the proportion who took that

5 It should of course be borne in mind that as our most recent survey was conducted after the referendum, people's responses may have been influenced by the outcome of the ballot as well as the campaign beforehand, even though they were asked to leave that consideration behind. Even so, it is unlikely that the referendum campaign did anything but reinforce the already predominantly Eurosceptic mood among the electorate.

view (41%) was nearly double the proportion recorded in the previous year (22%). As one might anticipate, no less than 95% of this group voted to leave the EU, and unsurprisingly they constituted the vast bulk (87%) of all those in our sample who voted to leave.

The increase in support for leaving the EU, as measured by this question was far from uniform. Rather, as Table 8 exemplifies, it increased most among those groups, such as those with relatively few educational qualifications and those with a relatively authoritarian outlook, where support for leaving was already relatively high. The social and ideological division that we have seen underpinned how people voted in the EU referendum seems to have sharpened considerably during the referendum campaign.

Table 8 Support for leaving the EU, by highest educational qualification and position on the libertarian-authoritarian scale, 2015 and 2016

Britain's long-term policy should be to leave the EU	2015	2016	Change since 2015
Highest educational qualification			
	%	%	
Degree	13	20	+7
At least GCSE A-C	23	43	+20
GCSE D-G or less	28	58	+30
Libertarian—authoritarian scale			
Libertarian	8	21	+12
Neither	20	45	+25
Authoritarian	36	63	+28

Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

So it appears that the referendum campaign had profound consequences. First, it seems to have moved public opinion as a whole in a more sceptical direction. Given the fact that in the event there was a small majority in favour of leaving the EU, it seems quite possible that this movement was crucial in determining the overall outcome of the referendum. Second, the campaign seems to have exacerbated the social and cultural division about the merits of EU membership that already existed in British society and which appears to be rooted in concerns about the social consequences of the UK's membership. As a result, the country emerged from the referendum not only split almost evenly down the middle but also seriously divided about the merits of the decision that was eventually made.

The partisan divide

We have already seen that how people voted in the EU referendum was related above all to whether people have a libertarian or an authoritarian outlook, together with their sense of identity and degree of concern about immigration. In contrast, there was little

The campaign seems to have exacerbated the social and cultural division about the merits of EU membership that already existed in British society and which appears to be rooted in concerns about the social consequences of the UK's membership

or no relationship with whether someone holds views that put them on the left or on the right of the political spectrum. Yet at general elections the issues that tend to predominate are ones about equality and fairness and what the government should do about them, not questions about whether the country should become a little more or a little less liberal. This is reflected in the pattern of voting in elections. For example, in 2015 there was as much as a 22 point difference between those on the left and those on the right in the proportion who voted Conservative in the general election, whereas there was only a three-point difference between those who might be regarded as libertarian and as authoritarian.

The EU referendum therefore presented a challenge to nearly all of the parties as they attempted to persuade their supporters to vote one way or the other

The EU referendum therefore presented a challenge to nearly all of the parties as they attempted to persuade their supporters to vote one way or the other. In fact, the only party of any size that recommended that people should vote to leave was UKIP; withdrawing from the EU was, after all, the party's *raison d'être*, and it was remarkably successful in persuading its supporters to do so. In our survey, every single respondent who said they identified with or supported UKIP and who turned out to vote in the referendum stated that they voted to leave. Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens all recommended that people voted to remain in the EU, but in each case substantial minorities of their supporters, including not least one in three Labour identifiers, voted to leave⁶. Still, they were all more successful than the Prime Minister in persuading their supporters to vote to stay. The Conservative party itself remained officially neutral on which way to vote, despite the fact that the official recommendation of the Conservative government was to vote to remain in the EU. In the event rather more Conservative identifiers voted to leave the EU than to remain. Contrary to the experience of many referendums, this was not a ballot in which the recommendations or cues from the parties had a great deal of influence (Hobolt, 2009; Le Duc, 2003).

⁶ Caution needs to be applied to this statement in respect of Green Party supporters as fewer than 100 of them took part in BSA 2016.

Table 9 EU Referendum vote, by party identification

Party Identification		EU Referendum vote		
		Leave	Remain	Unweighted base
Conservative	%	54	46	880
Labour	%	33	67	688
Liberal Democrat	%	27	73	139
UKIP	%	100	-	125
Green	%	21	79	54
Other	%	42	58	106
None	%	64	36	237

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of voting behaviour.

Given that Conservative supporters were the most divided of all in how they voted in the referendum, we might anticipate that the Conservative party would have found it relatively difficult to heal its wounds after the referendum. In practice, the opposite proved to be the case. In the months after the referendum the Conservative party largely united around the idea that the United Kingdom should not only leave the EU, but also that in so doing it should also leave the single market and the Customs Union (HM Government, 2017). Labour, in contrast was divided in what stance to take, with some MPs concerned to reconnect with the party's traditional working-class base that seems to have been inclined to vote to leave because of concerns about immigration, while others wanted to oppose the government's supposedly 'hard' interpretation of what Brexit should mean (O'Hara, 2017).

However, a closer look at the views of those Conservative supporters who voted to remain in the EU helps explain why the division in the party's ranks was perhaps not as serious as first seems. In Table 10, we present the proportions of people identifying with each political party who were 'keen' Remainers (that is, those who in response to our more nuanced question said that Britain's long-term policy should be to leave things as they are or to increase the EU's powers) and who were 'Reluctant' Remainers (that is, those who said they favoured leaving the EU or trying to reduce its powers). Of those Conservative identifiers who voted to remain, over half (53%) can be classified as 'reluctant Remainers' – in most cases saying in response to our more nuanced question about the EU that, while Britain should remain in the EU, it should seek to reduce the institution's powers. This means that, overall, no less than 78% of Conservative identifiers either voted to leave or can be regarded as 'reluctant Remainers'. In short, relatively few Conservative supporters showed much enthusiasm for the EU.

Of those Conservative identifiers who voted to remain, over half (53%) can be classified as 'reluctant Remainers'

Table 10 The character of the Remain vote, by party identification

Party Identification		Keen	Reluctant	Unweighted base
Conservative	%	47	53	390
Labour	%	62	38	432
Liberal Democrat	%	64	36	97
None	%	50	50	83

It is perhaps rather less surprising that Labour should have found it more difficult to identify a stance on Brexit with which it was comfortable

In contrast, less than two in five Labour Remain voters (38%) were 'reluctant Remainers'. As a result, a little under three in five of all Labour identifiers (59%) either voted to leave the EU or voted to remain in the EU while wanting to see it become less powerful. Meanwhile, over two in five (41%) not only wanted to remain in the EU but did so with a degree of enthusiasm. Looked at in this way, it is perhaps rather less surprising that Labour should have found it more difficult to identify a stance on Brexit with which it was comfortable.

Conclusion

Suggestions that the EU referendum represented a lightning rod for a general disenchantment with politics are largely wide off the mark

Suggestions that the EU referendum represented a lightning rod for a general disenchantment with politics are largely wide off the mark. True, those with less interest in politics may have, relatively speaking, been a little more likely than usual to make it to the polls, while those who trust government less were a little more likely to vote to leave. But for the most part the outcome of the referendum reflected the concern of more 'authoritarian', socially conservative voters in Britain – that is, primarily older voters and those with few, if any, educational qualifications – about some of the social consequences of EU membership, most notably in respect of immigration. In a society in which relatively few have ever felt a strong sense of European identity, the debate about EU membership seems to have brought that concern to the fore such that in the event a narrow majority voted to leave. In short, the EU referendum was a litmus test of the merits of the EU project, and perhaps indeed of globalisation more generally – a test that, on this occasion, the EU was deemed by a majority to have failed.

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Appendix

The bases for Table 1 can be found below.

	2011	2015	2016
Interest in Politics			
Great Deal	253	482	417
Quite a Lot	531	1054	795
Some	661	1403	916
Not very much	464	852	530
None at all	275	369	244

The bases for Table 2 can be found below.

	2011	2015	2016
Age group			
18-34	474	924	587
35-64	1119	2202	1462
65+	580	1190	846

The bases for Tables 4 can be found below.

% Remain	Age group		
	18-34	35-54	55+
Highest educational qualification			
Degree	136	138	83
Higher below degree/A-level	238	242	244
GCSE or less	192	278	663

The bases for Table 8 can be found below.

Table A.4 Support for Leaving the EU, 2015 and 2016, by highest educational qualification and libertarian-authoritarian scale position, 2015 and 2016

Leave the EU	2015	2016
Highest educational qualification		
Degree	271	470
At least GCSE A-C	514	889
GCSE D-G or less	290	552
Libertarian – Authoritarian Scale		
Libertarian	253	483
Neither	384	581
Authoritarian	305	469

Table A.5. Logistic regression of Leave versus Remain vote+

	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value
Libertarian-authoritarian Scale			
Libertarian	** -1.44	.19	.00
Neither (Authoritarian)	** -0.58	.17	.00
Concern about immigration			
Concerned (Not concerned)	** -1.08	.15	.00
European identity			
Yes (No)	** -1.43	.21	.00
EU citizen welfare wait			
2 years or less 3-4 years (More than 4 years/never)	** -0.77 -0.06	.17 .18	.00 .74
Trust in government			
Trust Tend to distrust (Distrust greatly)	** -0.80 ** -0.78	.21 .22	.00 .00
Constant	-0.11	.11	.33
Naglelkere R-squared	= 37%		

Unweighted base: 1203

*=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level

+ Variables shown in the order in which they were entered via a forward stepwise procedure. Only those variables that were significantly associated with the dependent variable at the 5% level of significance were actually included.