

How much do Labour voters really care about leaving the EU?

According to the British Election Study, just 9% of Labour's total vote in 2017 is likely to have been leave supporters who are most concerned about Brexit. In comparison 30% of Labour's vote seems to have been remain supporters more likely to be concerned by Brexit. Labour's current pro-Brexit strategy, based on this evidence, is likely to do more to hinder than help to retain the numerous voters it gained in 2017.

In August 2017, the British Election Study (BES) released all their data for the most extensive election survey that exists in the UK. While some findings were published, the enormous size of the data means that there were still many insights hidden within it.

Labour's justification for backing the leave view is that the majority of their constituencies backed leave in 2016. But previous analyses have revealed that this is an unfounded myth. The BES data shows that in **every age group, every social grade, every ethnic and religious groups, as well as every region of the country, the majority of Labour voters voted remain in the EU referendum.**

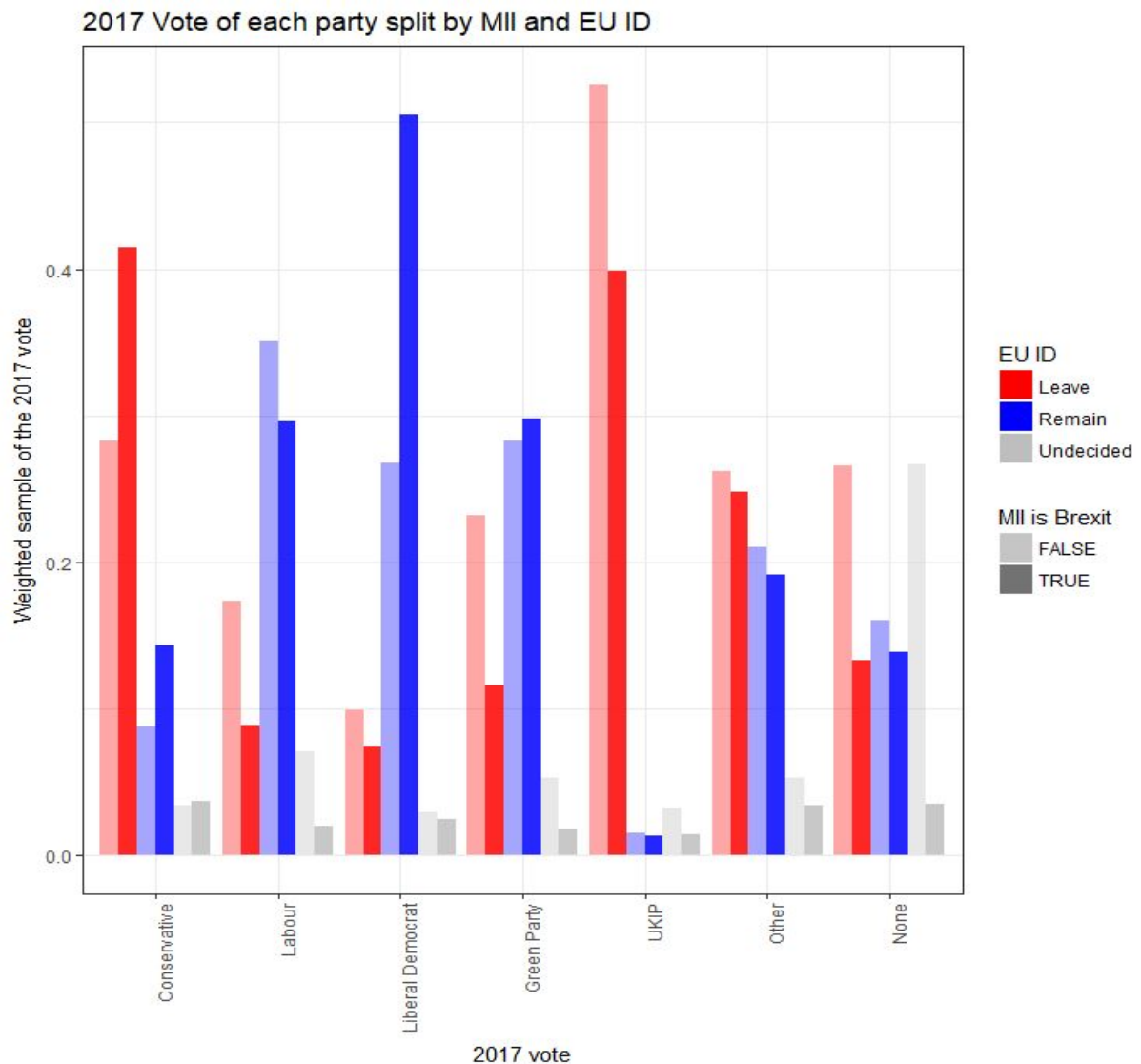
This research aims to assess to what degree Labour voters really care about Brexit, in particular what share of the Labour vote really wants the party to take a pro-Brexit line.

In the BES survey, carried out between April and June 2017, respondents were asked "*As far as you're concerned, what is the SINGLE MOST important issue facing the country at the present time?*" In August, when the BES released the post-election results, they reported that 1 in 3 respondents responded "Brexit". In fact, across all polls during this period (April-June), **47% of respondents mentioned Brexit as the most important issue (MII) for the country.** Thus, we are able to split the respondents of the BES into nearly half whose most important issue was Brexit at some point in the campaign and those whose wasn't. We can hypothesise that those respondents who stated 'Brexit' as their MII were more likely to vote with Brexit as their primary motivation than those who did not. This does not mean that everyone with 'Brexit' as their MII voted because of Brexit, but the difference between the two groups may hint to the behaviour of those voters who did.

Obviously, 'Brexit' means different things to different people. To a leave supporter 'Brexit' means getting out, to a remain supporter 'Brexit' means staying in or a softer Brexit. So defining who is a leave or remain supporter is important but not straightforward. Either we can use a voter's referendum vote, but we must be aware that some voters have changed their mind since then, or we can use the side the respondent claims to be on when they fill in the BES in 2017. We choose to do that. There are a few respondents who fill in different surveys during this period with both remain and leave. We class these respondents as undecided, as well as anyone else who states that they don't know or don't respond.

We look only at BES respondents who took part in the post-election survey and live in England and Wales. This resulted in over 27,000 respondents for the survey.

We split up the votes of each party in 2017 by the voters position on the EU in April-June 2017 and whether 'Brexit' was their MII:



This graph shows that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were dominated by voters concerned about Brexit, whereas **the bulk of Labour's vote came from voters with more important issues than Brexit (or no important issues)**. Labour was also the party with the highest proportion of voters with no opinion on the referendum result or undecided.

Just 9% of Labour's total vote seem to have been leave supporters with Brexit as their MII. In comparison 30% of Labour's vote was remain supporters more likely to be concerned by Brexit. Moreover, while only 34% of Labour's leave supporters stated Brexit as their MII, a closer 46% of remain supporters were concerned about Brexit, suggesting that **remain supporters who voted Labour in 2017 were more likely to be motivated by Brexit than leave supporters.**

Implications for the future

If Labour continues to choose a Brexit policy that represents the views of just 9% of their voters while ignoring those of almost a third of them, they may snatch defeat from the jaws of victory whenever the next election happens.