

Young people and Brexit

Open Britain has teamed up with Youthsight, the experts in researching Millennials, to examine the attitudes of students towards Brexit.

We believe that young people have the most to lose or gain from Brexit: they will experience its ramifications for longest, and decisions made over the economy which affect opportunities and life chances today will determine their futures forever. But, shamefully, they are the generation with the quietest voice in influencing political decision-making.

The aim of this opinion research was to identify how young people feel about Brexit to date and what they want and expect from negotiations, in order to help ensure their priorities are on our political decision-makers' radar.

YouthSight surveyed 1,023 full time undergraduate students to see how they voted, how they feel about their vote now, what their views are on key topics related to Brexit, whether they feel pessimistic or optimistic about the outcome of Brexit, and how they feel about the Government's engagement with young people to date. Below are our central findings.

- **Pro-European.** The overwhelming majority of students voted Remain. Those who did so feel more secure in their vote than those who voted Leave and there are no signs of regret. To the extent there is, it is amongst those who didn't vote, the vast majority of whom would now vote Remain. This suggests that anxiety about the implications of Brexit, whether over the economy or ability to travel and study abroad, have not abated.
- **Economy is the priority.** Regardless of how they voted, students prioritise the economy. For both Remain and Leave voters, protecting jobs and future employment opportunities was the top priority for the outcome of Brexit negotiations. This dynamic can be seen in the majority of students supporting 'soft' Brexit over 'hard' Brexit, where this is understood as retaining a degree of access to the single market in return for some concessions on EU migration, versus no access and full border control.
- **They want their voice to be heard.** Young people are extremely pessimistic about the outcome of Brexit negotiations. They are fearful about the economy and by more than five to one they think their prospects will change for the worse rather than for the better. This pessimism drives two other key findings. First, by fourteen to one young people think that the Government are engaging with young people badly, suggesting the Government needs to change tack and demonstrate how their Brexit 'plan' will serve the interests of young people. Second, young people want to make their voice heard, with over 80% saying they want to have a say over the final Brexit deal. If the Government's approval ratings were higher and confidence over the future not as bleak, this huge desire to provide a democratic backstop against the Government may not be as high as it is.

The overall conclusion from the above is that if Government action better reflected young people's views they would not be pursuing hard Brexit, putting our economy at risk, and their failure to do so means our next generation is not prepared to give the Government a blank cheque on Brexit and accept whatever deal is brought forward, no matter the cost.

Results in detail

Students are overall heavily pro-Remain

- 84% of students who voted Remain; 16% voted Leave

There is little sign of 'Bregret', though it is more prominent amongst Leave voters

- 99% of those who voted Remain feel happy about their vote; 1% regret it.
- 91% of those who voted Leave feel happy about their vote; 9% regret it

Non-voters would overwhelmingly back Remain

- Of those who didn't vote 80% said they would now do so. 67% would vote Remain, 13% would vote Leave.

Jobs are the priority for young voters

- Protecting jobs and future employment opportunities is the top priority for Remain (76%) and Leave voters (64%). Second is no cuts to education: Remain 74%, Leave 42%. Both Leave (59%) and Remain (66%) voters expect that pledges of increased NHS funding are delivered.

Voters are split on migration

- On keeping free movement of people, 71% of Remain voters want to keep it against just 17% of Leave voters who feel the same. By contrast, 61% of Leave voters want to prioritise controlling out borders against 12% of remain voters.

There is little optimism about the outcome of Brexit negotiations

- Young people are fearful about the economy. The economy suffering was the fear most commonly cited (28%); followed by the debate around migration becoming xenophobic (26%); and losing current opportunities to travel and work across Europe (26%). These figures are broadly consistent across young Remain and Leave voters.
- 13% think their prospects will change significantly or slightly for the better; 72% think they will change significantly or slightly for the worse

Young people overwhelmingly want to have a final say over the Brexit deal, with a majority backing a second referendum

- 83% think they should have a say over the final Brexit deal. This is split between 58% who think this should be through a second referendum and 25% who think this should be through elected representatives in Parliament.

The majority of young people support a soft Brexit, though this is heavily split between Leave and Remain voters

- 72% want a soft Brexit; 17% want a hard Brexit. Though there is a divide, with 64% of Leave voters opting for hard Brexit and 82% of Remain voters opting for soft Brexit.
'Soft Brexit' – where the UK retains a degree of access to the single market in return for giving some concessions to the EU in terms of immigration to the UK.
'Hard Brexit' – where the UK leaves the single market and gains full control over all aspects of immigration.

A huge majority of young people think the Government are engaging with young people badly

- 5% think the Government are listening and engaging with young people well or very well; 72% think they are engaging badly or very badly. This is also broadly true of Leave voters: 44% think they are engaging badly or very badly; 13% think they are doing so well or very well.