

# Kent Academic Repository

## Full text document (pdf)

### Citation for published version

Goodwin, Matthew J. and Heath, Oliver (2016) The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate-level Analysis of the Result. *The Political Quarterly*, 87 (3). pp. 323-332. ISSN 0032-3179.

### DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12285>

### Link to record in KAR

<http://kar.kent.ac.uk/60236/>

### Document Version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

#### Copyright & reuse

Content in the Kent Academic Repository is made available for research purposes. Unless otherwise stated all content is protected by copyright and in the absence of an open licence (eg Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher, author or other copyright holder.

#### Versions of research

The version in the Kent Academic Repository may differ from the final published version.

Users are advised to check <http://kar.kent.ac.uk> for the status of the paper. **Users should always cite the published version of record.**

#### Enquiries

For any further enquiries regarding the licence status of this document, please contact:

[researchsupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:researchsupport@kent.ac.uk)

If you believe this document infringes copyright then please contact the KAR admin team with the take-down information provided at <http://kar.kent.ac.uk/contact.html>

# The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate-Level Analysis of the Result

Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath

## *Abstract*

Why did the country vote for Brexit? What was the relative importance of factors such as education, age, immigration, and ethnic diversity? And to what extent did the pattern of support for Brexit across the country map on to past campaigns by Eurosceptic parties, such as Ukip? In this article we draw on aggregate-level data to conduct an initial exploration of the vote. First, we find that turnout was generally higher in more pro-leave areas. Second, we find that public support for Leave closely mapped past support for Ukip. And third, we find that support for Leave was more polarized along education lines than support for Ukip ever was. The implication of this finding is that support for Euroscepticism has both widened and narrowed – it is now more widespread across the country, but it is also more socially distinctive.

Writing in the aftermath of Britain's first referendum on its membership of the then-European Community, held on June 5 1975, David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger observed how that earlier vote was of interest for mainly three reasons. First, it had delivered an unambiguous public endorsement of Britain's continued participation in the Common Market. With 67 percent of voters opting to stay in the European Community the public had returned a level of support that was 'beyond the dreams of pro-Europeans'. Second, for observers of party politics at the time the vote also represented an historical episode of peculiar fascination, cutting across established patterns of party competition, in particular with regard to the Labour Party that had seen the referendum crystallize and exacerbate internal ideological conflicts. Third, the vote was a distinct innovation in British constitutional practice, being the first nationwide referendum in the country's entire history.<sup>i</sup>

Forty-one years later, on June 23 2016, Britain held a second referendum on its relationship with Europe and one that impacted directly on all three of these areas, albeit in profoundly different ways. If the result of the referendum in 1975 had delivered a level of public support for the pro-Europeans that had been beyond their dreams then the result that arrived forty-one years later realized their nightmares. When all votes had been counted 51.9 percent of the electorate had voted to leave the European Union and 48.1 percent had opted to

remain. Leave won the vote in the United Kingdom by 3.8 percentage votes but its lead was even more striking in England, where it extended to nearly 7 points. Leave also won the popular vote in Wales, securing 52.5 percent and only one month after the insurgent UK Independence Party (Ukip) had won its first (seven) seats on the devolved Welsh Assembly. Only in Scotland, Northern Ireland and London did the Leave vote fail to surpass 50 percent. The result sent shockwaves around the world, wiping more than three trillion dollars off the value of financial markets in only a few days and prompting Eurosceptic parties in at least seven other member states to demand similar ‘British-style’ referendums.

As in 1975, the outcome of the 2016 referendum also shed light on tensions that had long been evident within domestic party politics. In the aftermath of a defeat that had been partly engineered by the Eurosceptic tradition within his own party, David Cameron, the Conservative Prime Minister since 2010, promptly resigned. The act triggered a leadership election that would not only determine the next Prime Minister but also push the centre-right party –and the country- down a more overtly Eurosceptic path. The Labour Party, meanwhile, which had officially campaigned to remain in the EU, descended into turmoil as Jeremy Corbyn, its newly-elected but unpopular leader, faced immediate pressure to also resign. Labour MPs argued that Corbyn had failed to demonstrate leadership and communicate a

compelling case for why Britain should remain in the EU, claims that were supported by polling data released only weeks before the referendum and which suggested that nearly one in two Labour voters were unaware that Labour was advocating a Remain position.<sup>ii</sup> Amid the new landscape the only unified parties appeared to be the pro-EU Liberal Democrats, who quickly pledged to campaign at the next general election for Britain to re-join the EU, the insurgent Ukip that twenty-three years after its formation had achieved its defining goal of withdrawal from the EU, and the Scottish National Party (SNP), which argued that the result revealed the need for a second independence referendum in Scotland.

Lastly, and as reflected in the positioning of the SNP, while the 1975 vote attracted interest because of its constitutional innovation the referendum result in 2016 posed a direct and far more profound challenge to the British constitutional settlement. In the first instance the result required parliament to sustain a pro-Brexit policy that was opposed by most MPs, which as Vernon Bogdanor has observed is an event without precedent in British history.<sup>iii</sup>

While it has been estimated that 421 of the 574 constituencies in England and Wales voted to leave the European Union, we calculate that only 148 MPs in England and Wales voted the same way.<sup>iv</sup> Meanwhile, that Northern Ireland and Scotland voted to remain in the EU as England and Wales voted to Leave has not only revived calls for Scottish independence but

sparked new concerns about how the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic will be managed.

These introductory observations underscore the need to make sense of Brexit and explain the 2016 referendum result. In this article we draw on aggregate-level data to conduct an initial exploration of the vote and identify areas that future individual-level research will want to explore in greater depth. Why did the country vote for Brexit? What was the relative importance of factors such as social class, age, immigration, and ethnic diversity? And to what extent did the pattern of support for Brexit across the country map on to past campaigns by Eurosceptic parties, such as Ukip? While attempting to shed light on the possible answers to these questions we will also reflect on what the result reveals about broader fault lines that run through contemporary British politics and society.

### **Brexit Britain: An overview of the results**

The result of the 2016 referendum revealed a society which had on the issues of EU membership and immigration become divided by social class, generation and geography. The Leave campaign, which in the final weeks focused heavily on immigration, received its strongest support in the West Midlands (59.3 per cent), a historic bastion of Eurosceptic and

anti-immigration sentiment, followed by the East Midlands (58.8 per cent), the North East (58 per cent), Yorkshire and the Humber (57.7 per cent) and Eastern England (56.5 per cent). The Leave campaign attracted its weakest support in Scotland (38 per cent), London (40.1 per cent) and Northern Ireland (44.2 per cent). Leave surpassed 70 per cent of the vote in 14 local authorities, many of which had at previous elections been targeted by Ukip at local, European and general elections. In descending rank order authorities that delivered the strongest Leave vote were Boston, South Holland, Castle Point, Thurrock, Great Yarmouth, Fenland, Mansfield, Bolsover, East Lindsey and North East Lincolnshire. Leave also polled strongly in a large number of northern and often Labour-held authorities, recruiting at least 65 per cent of the vote in Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Blackpool, Burnley, Stoke-on-Trent, Walsall, Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham, and also traditionally Labour-held areas in parts of Wales, such as Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil. At the constituency level it has been estimated that while three-quarters of Conservative-held constituencies voted to Leave the EU seven in ten Labour-held seats voted the same way.<sup>v</sup>

Such areas reveal how Leave won its strongest support in specific types of areas; communities that tend to be more economically disadvantaged than average, where average levels of education are low and the local population is heavily white. Such areas contrast very

sharply with those that gave Remain its strongest support. Aside from Gibraltar, where 95.9 per cent voted Remain, the vote to remain in the EU was strongest in the London authority of Lambeth, followed by Hackney, Foyle in Northern Ireland, Haringey, the City of London, Islington, Wandsworth, Camden, Edinburgh and then East Renfrewshire in Scotland, and the young and affluent city of Cambridge. Of the 50 local authorities where the Remain vote was strongest 39 were in London or Scotland.

These results point clearly toward the importance of deeper divides in British society. In this respect one useful starting point for interpreting the result is earlier research on the bases of support for Ukip and Euroscepticism in Britain. In *Revolt on the Right*, Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin demonstrated how changes to Britain's economic and social structure had pushed to the margins a class of 'left behind' voters – older, working-class, white voters, citizens with few qualifications, who live on low incomes and lack the skills that are required to adapt and prosper amid the modern, post-industrial economy.<sup>vi</sup> But this research also emphasized the importance of long-term generational change in the values that shape the outlook of voters toward a range of social and cultural issues, including but not limited to immigration, national identity and EU membership. These generational differences in values were also exacerbated by changes in party competition, including how the established parties



had shifted toward a ‘liberal consensus’ on EU membership and immigration, which fueled this underlying value conflict.<sup>vii</sup> Whereas political and media elites broadly shared values that translated into support for social liberalism, multiculturalism and EU membership, left behind working-class voters and older social conservatives were united by an altogether different set of values that translated into support for a more authoritarian and nativist response.

Building on this research we will now examine the results of the 2016 referendum in more-depth, exploring whether authorities with high concentrations of ‘left behind’ groups were also more likely to vote to leave the EU. In doing so we seek to answer two questions. Do the results of Britain’s 2016 referendum suggest a hardening of the lines between the ‘haves and the have-nots’ that in earlier years had underpinned the rise of Ukip? Or has Britain’s Eurosceptic movement broadened its social appeal, making these lines of conflict between different social groups less distinctive? To examine the extent to which these factors are associated with the Leave vote we draw on local authority data from 380 out of the 382 counting regions in the United Kingdom and link this to census data from 2011 (we exclude the counting regions of Gibraltar and Northern Ireland for which we lack comparable data on some variables). Clearly, as our analysis is based on aggregate data we need to be cautious about drawing inferences about the attitudes and voting behaviour of individuals. Nonetheless,

these data still provide a useful snapshot about the kinds of factors that might have influenced the overall outcome and, ultimately, led to Brexit.

## **Turnout**

We can start by considering turnout. At 72 percent the overall level of turnout was the highest recorded in a nationwide vote for many years – and was the highest since the general election of 1992. Over 33 million votes were cast across the country, making the 2016 referendum one of the largest exercises in democratic decision making that Britain has ever seen. Yet turnout was not even across the country. Throughout the campaign Remain organizers had devoted significant attention to targeting urban, more densely-populated, younger, more diverse and typically more affluent cities, including London and the university towns. However, in the shadow of the results it became clear that turnout in cities such as Glasgow, Manchester, Nottingham, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester and authorities in London such as Newham, Hackney, Lewisham, Barking and Dagenham and Camden was at least six points below the national average. Of the 50 areas that recorded the lowest turnout exactly half were in London or Scotland. The level of turnout across all authorities in London was 70 per cent, 2 points below the average. Turnout tended to be high in authorities that had also given above average

support to Ukip at the 2014 European Parliament elections, such as the south eastern areas of Chiltern, East Hampshire, Horsham, Sevenoaks and Wealdon. Turnout was also noticeably high in authorities that have a large population of pensioners, such as East Dorset, the Derbyshire Dales, South Lakeland and South Hams, and where there is a large proportion of people with qualifications, such as Richmond upon Thames, St Albans, Winchester and South Cambridgeshire.

Table 1 presents the results of a multivariate analysis of turnout. Across the country turnout was higher in predominantly white areas where Ukip had polled strongly in the past and where there were large numbers of pensioners. Turnout was also higher in areas where it had also been high in the European Parliament elections (which itself may have signaled a protest vote against Europe). Overall then, high turnout might have helped the Leave vote, as turnout was generally higher in more pro-leave areas. However, we should treat these results with caution as it does not necessarily follow that it was Leave voters who were disproportionately more likely to turnout and vote. There could also have been a ‘counter-mobilization effect’ whereby Remain supporters were more likely to vote when they were motivated by the awareness that Leave was popular in their local area

Table 1            Multivariate Analysis of Turnout, linear regression

	Coefficient	Std. Err.
% Age 65 and over	0.23***	0.05
% with no qualifications	-0.51***	0.03
% non-white	-0.16***	0.02
Ukip vote in 2014 EU elections	0.17***	0.02
Turnout in 2014 EU elections	0.41***	0.04
London	-0.45	0.64
Scotland	-0.49	0.72
Constant	62.91***	1.83
N	380	
Adjusted R-square	0.79	

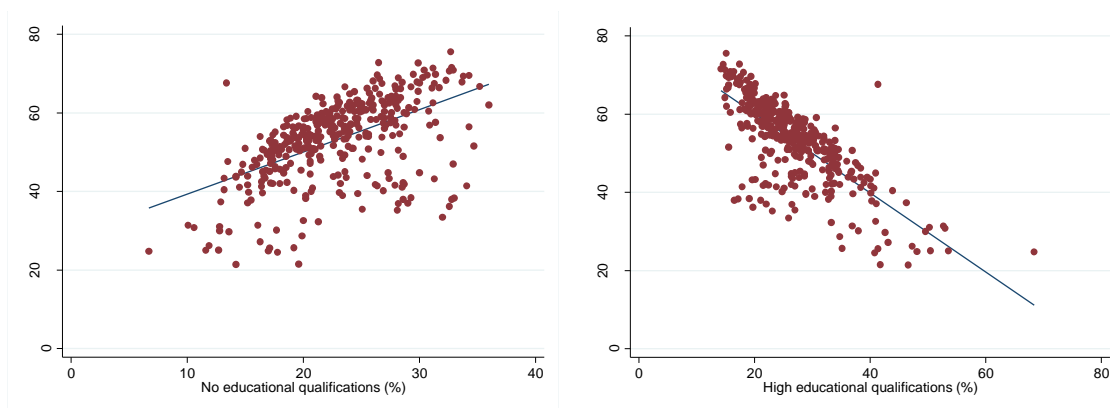
Notes: \*\*\* denotes  $p < 0.005$ ; \*\* denotes  $p < 0.05$ ; \* denotes  $p < 0.10$

### **Public Support for Brexit**

We now turn our attention to analyzing the result. We start by considering the relationship between education and Euroscepticism. While numerous studies have shown that the less well educated are consistently more skeptical about European integration it has also been argued that the gap in attitudes towards the EU between the lower and higher educated has widened over time.<sup>viii</sup> Figure 1 shows the association between the percentage of people within an authority who have no educational qualifications and the percentage who voted to leave the EU, and the association between the percentage of people with high educational qualifications (of degree level or above) and who voted to leave. To a certain extent the two graphs mirror each other. The Leave vote was much higher in authorities where there are substantial numbers

of people who do not hold any qualifications while the Leave vote was much lower in areas that have a larger number of highly educated people. In fact, 15 of the 20 ‘least educated’ areas voted to leave the EU while every single one of the 20 ‘most educated’ areas voted to remain. In authorities with below average levels of education the Leave campaign received 58 percent of the vote but in authorities with above average levels of education it received 49 percent of the vote.

Figure 1 Educational qualification and support for Leave

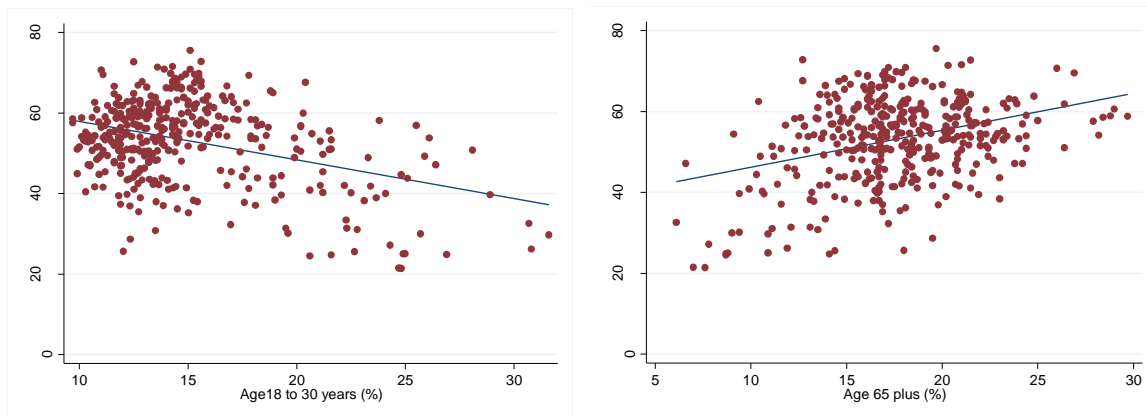


However, we should also note that there is substantial variation around the ‘line of best fit’. As shown in Figure 1, there are a number of places where the Leave vote was lower than expected based on the average levels of education at the local authority level. These places tended to be in Scotland and London. If we exclude London and Scotland from our analysis the association between education and the Leave vote becomes far stronger. The R-square for no educational qualifications increases from 0.29 for the United Kingdom to 0.52 for England and Wales but

excluding London. This indicates that outside of London and Scotland the country was highly polarized along educational lines on whether to support Brexit or not.

Next we turn to age, which past studies have shown is positively related to supporting Brexit, with the late middle-aged and pensioners notably more likely to vote for Ukip and, prior to the actual referendum, voice support for leaving the EU. As above we find a clearly identifiable association between the age profile of an authority and the Leave vote, albeit somewhat weaker. Figure 2 shows the association between the percentage of people within a local authority aged 18-30 years old and the percentage who voted to leave, and the association between the percentage aged 65 years old and above, and the Leave vote. The vote to leave the EU tends to be lower in areas that have a large population of young people, many of which are university towns. Oxford and Cambridge are the two authorities that have the largest proportion of people aged 18 to 30 years old and both recorded a Remain vote in excess of 70 per cent. Of the 20 'youngest' authority areas 16 voted to Remain. By contrast the Leave vote was much stronger in authorities with a larger number of pensioners. Of the 20 'oldest' local authorities, 19 voted to Leave.

Figure 2      Age and support for Leave



There is thus evidence that both the educational and age composition of different areas had an influence on the propensity of residents to vote leave, though the pattern in London and Scotland may have been somewhat different. We can get a clearer idea of the joint impact of these different factors by carrying out a multivariate regression analysis. Places where there are lots of young people might also be places where inhabitants have qualifications and are thus more highly educated. To what extent do both the age and educational composition of an area matter when we consider their impact on the Leave vote together?

Table 2 presents results from a series of linear regression models. The dependent variable is the level of support for leaving the EU. From Model 1 we see that both education and age have a significant effect on the Leave vote. If anything, the effect of education on the Leave vote might have been slightly stronger than the effect of age (at least at the aggregate level). But even in places where there were similar levels of education, support for leaving the EU was noticeably higher in older communities than younger ones. Lastly, taking into account

the education and age profiles of different areas the Leave vote was noticeably lower in London and Scotland than elsewhere. The results for Scotland are especially striking - the Leave vote was some 22 percentage points lower than might have been expected given the educational and age profile of the country.

Table 2 Multivariate Analysis of Support for Leave - Linear Regression

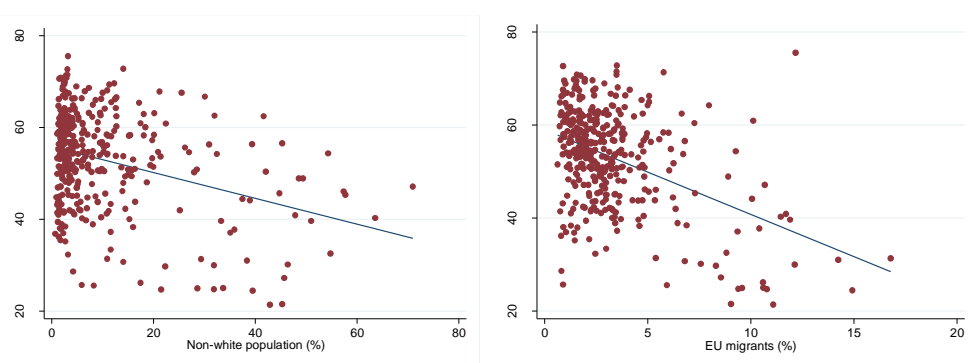
	<b>Model 1: Demographics</b>		<b>Model 2a: EU Immigration</b>		<b>Model 2b: E&amp;W EU Immigration change</b>		<b>Model 3: Ethnic diversity</b>		<b>Model 4: Ukip</b>	
	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.
% Age 65 and over	0.30***	0.09	0.23**	0.10	0.30**	0.11	0.19*	0.11	-0.33***	0.68
% no qualifications	1.16***	0.06	1.12***	0.07	1.07***	0.08	1.16***	0.06	0.76***	0.05
% EU migrants			-0.36*	0.19	-0.61**	0.23			-0.34***	0.12
Change in EU migrants					0.51**	0.19				
% non-white							-0.07	0.04		
London	-8.82***	1.26	-7.34***	1.48	-6.28***	1.58	-7.37***	1.55	0.12	1.01
Scotland	-21.38***	1.22	-21.47***	1.12			-21.77***	1.15	-2.15*	1.11
<b>Ukip 2014 EP vote</b>									0.84***	0.04
Constant	23.94***	2.09	27.11***	2.68	26.33	2.99	26.41***	2.61	18.34***	1.78
N	380		380		295		380		380	
Adjusted R-square	0.68		0.68		0.62		0.68		0.87	

Notes: \*\*\* denotes p<0.005; \*\* denotes p<0.05; \* denotes p<0.10



The next factors that we consider relate to ethnic diversity and immigration, issues that dominated the referendum and are central to explaining support for Ukip.<sup>ix</sup> One of the central messages of the Leave campaign was to ‘take back control of our borders’, with the implicit assumption that this would help reduce migration into Britain. This message played on public concerns about immigration within the country, which surveys frequently reveal is the topic that the public think is the most important issue facing the country. But did the message have particular resonance in local communities where there were large numbers of migrants from other EU member states?

Figure 3 Immigration and Public Support for Leave



On the face of it, the answer to this question appears to be no. From Figure 3 we can see that there is in fact a negative relationship between the level of EU migration in an area and the level of support for leaving the EU ( $r = -0.44$ ).<sup>x</sup> Broadly speaking, it was in fact communities

that had the *fewest* recent immigrants from the EU that were the most likely to want to leave the EU. For example, South Staffordshire in the West midlands has one of the lowest levels of EU migration in the country, with less than 1 percent of the population born in mainland Europe. Yet in this authority area the Leave vote reached 78 percent. Of the 20 places with the fewest EU migrants 15 voted to leave the EU. By contrast, of the 20 places with the most EU migrants 18 voted to remain. In many of the areas that were among the most receptive to the Leave campaign there were hardly any EU migrants at all.

There is also a negative, albeit slightly weaker, relationship between the size of the nonwhite population in an area and support for leave ( $r = -0.33$ ). Places with large non-white populations tended to be somewhat less likely to vote Leave. Many of these places were in London. Of the 20 places with the largest non-white population 17 were in London and 15 voted to remain. It is tempting to draw the inference from this that ethnic minorities were more likely to vote remain. But this is not necessarily the case and we will not be able to answer this question until individual-level analyses are undertaken. It is also possible that white people living in ethnically mixed areas were more likely to vote remain than people living in predominantly white areas, perhaps because they had a more cosmopolitan outlook.

Returning to Table 2, in Models 2 and 3 we examine the impact of EU immigration and ethnic diversity on support for leave in conjunction with the other factors that we have already discussed. Because the level of EU migration and size of the nonwhite population in an area are highly correlated ( $r=0.71$ ) we model the two variables separately. Controlling for the age and education profiles of different areas, and whether or not they are in London or Scotland, from Model 2a we can see that support for Leave was somewhat lower in places where there were many EU migrants than where there were relatively few.

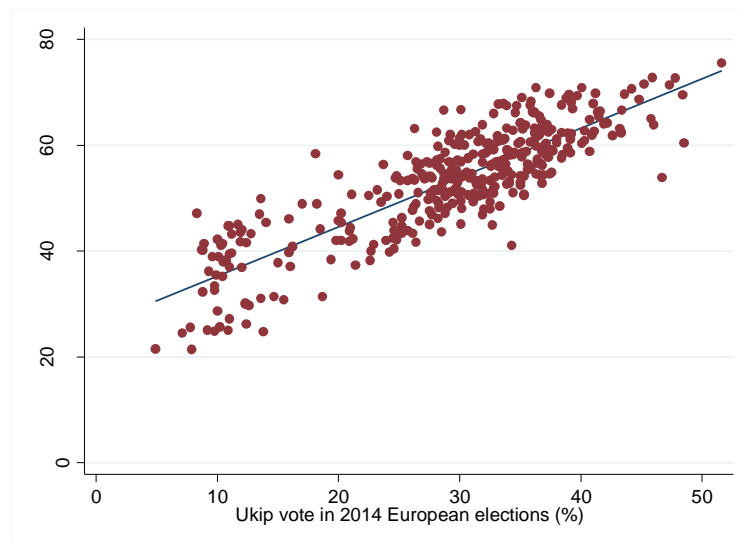
From this it might be tempting to assume that immigration played no part in delivering Brexit. However, a slightly different picture emerges if we also consider *changes* in the level of EU migration.<sup>xi</sup> Data on recent change is only available for England and Wales so we don't include it in our main analysis, but the results from this subset of cases reveal some interesting patterns. Controlling for the effect of overall migration and the other variables in Model 2a (excluding Scotland), those places which experienced an increase in EU migration over the last 10 years tended to be somewhat more likely to vote Leave ( $b=0.51$ ;  $p=0.007$ ). Thus, even though areas with relatively high levels of EU migration tended to be more pro-remain; those places which had experienced a sudden influx of EU migrants over the last 10 years tended to

be more pro-Leave. This finding is consistent with the view that it is sudden changes in population that are most likely to fuel concern about immigration.

From Model 3 we can see that there is not much evidence that the size of the non-white population matters. Once we have factored into the equation whether or not the area is in London, it does not appear to make much difference how ethnically diverse it is.

The results presented so far are consistent with past research on Ukip, which emphasizes the party's appeal among older, working-class, white voters who lack qualifications and skills. Thus, to a certain extent the factors that helped to explain rise of Nigel Farage and Ukip also help to explain why, at the 2016 referendum, the British voted for Brexit. This point comes out incredibly clearly in Figure 3, which considers the association between support for Ukip at the 2014 European Parliament elections and support for Brexit at the 2016 referendum. The R-square is 0.73, indicating a very strong relationship. By and large, then, authorities that were the most likely to vote for Brexit were the same ones that had given Ukip its strongest support two years earlier.

Figure 3 Support for Ukip in 2014 and Support for Leave in 2016



However, this clearly is not the whole story. Whereas the average level of support for Ukip across all authorities in 2014 was 29 per cent, the average level of support for Leave at the 2016 referendum was 53 per cent. Thus, even if the relative difference between authorities was much the same they were all substantially more likely to vote Leave than they had been to vote Ukip in the past, to the tune of around 25 percentage points. This raises an intriguing question – how might we explain where the additional votes for Leave came from?

Among closer observers of British politics it would not be a surprise to find that more economically left behind areas of the country, such as Boston, Castle Point and Thurrock, have the strongest support for Brexit. But what is surprising is that the level of this support was so much higher in these areas (and others) than it had been for Ukip in 2014. Many insurgent parties start off life by appealing to a relatively narrow section of society. However, as they

grow they often tend to try and broaden their social appeal and attract the votes of new sections of society. Is this what Ukip's populist Eurosceptic message achieved?

We can begin to get some idea of where the extra votes for Brexit came from by inspecting the impact of age and education on the Leave vote, while controlling for past support for Ukip. The results are presented under Model 4 in Table 2. The first thing to notice is that when we control for Ukip support the model's fit to the data dramatically improves. The adjusted R-square increases to 0.87. This clearly brings home how close the structure of variation in support for Leave between different authorities maps on to past support for Ukip. Interestingly, we find that once we take into account past support for Ukip, the effect of some of the other variables on the vote change as well. We now have to be a little careful about how we interpret these variables as they now show us the partial effect on Leave, controlling for past support for Ukip. So, for example, we know that places with older populations are both more likely to have voted for Ukip in 2014 and more likely to have voted Leave in 2016. However, when we take into account past support for Ukip we see that the effect of age on support for Leave is negative. This implies that support for Leave in 2016 is slightly less polarized along age lines than support for Ukip was in 2014.<sup>xii</sup>

By contrast the coefficient for education is positive. This implies public support for Brexit is more polarized along education lines than support for Ukip was.<sup>xiii</sup> Places where people have few educational qualifications tend to be more likely to support Ukip. But places where Ukip is strong *and* people have few qualifications tend to be more likely to vote Leave than places where Ukip is equally strong but there are a smaller number of people with fewer qualifications. Thus, to a certain extent, the 2016 referendum result magnified class divisions within Britain that were already evident in earlier years, and which parties like Ukip had been actively cultivating. Controlling for Ukip also wipes out the effect of Scotland and London. One way then in which these places are distinctive from the rest of the UK is the low support that they had given to Eurosceptic parties in the past.

### **Discussion: Implications of the Result**

In the conclusions of their book on Britain's referendum in 1975 Butler and Kitzinger warned against an interpretation of the vote to stay in the European Community as a public outburst of enthusiasm for the broader European project. 'It was', they noted, 'unequivocal but it was also unenthusiastic. Support for membership was wide but it did not run deep... It did not result in a girding of the loins for a great new European adventure'.<sup>xiv</sup> The clear lack of British public

enthusiasm for European integration would remain clearly visible for much of the next forty years and would eventually, in June 2016, culminate in a vote for Brexit.

Our analysis of this vote has revealed how the 2016 referendum gave full expression to much deeper divides in Britain that cut across generational, educational and class lines. The public vote for Brexit was anchored predominantly, albeit not exclusively, in areas of the country that are filled with pensioners, low skilled and less well educated blue-collar workers and citizens who have been pushed to the margins not only by the economic transformation of the country over recent decades but also by the values that have come to dominate a more socially liberal media and political class. In this respect the vote for Brexit was delivered by the ‘left behind’- social groups that are united by a general sense of insecurity, pessimism and marginalization, who do not feel as though elites, whether in Brussels or Westminster, share their values, represent their interests and genuinely empathize with their intense angst about rapid social, economic and cultural change. Interestingly, our results also reveal how turnout in the heartlands of Brexit was often higher than average, indicating perhaps that it is citizens who have long felt excluded from the mainstream consensus who used the referendum to voice their distinctive views not only about Britain’s EU membership but a wider array of perceived threats to their national identity, values and ways of life.



Yet clearly the left behind thesis cannot explain the entire Brexit vote. Even if support for EU membership is more polarized along education than support for Ukip ever was, the centre of gravity has shifted. This represents something of a puzzle. Public support for Euroscepticism has both widened and narrowed – it is now more widespread across the country, but it is also more socially distinctive. One potential explanation for this is that the Leave campaign recruited support from across the Conservative spectrum, helping to widen its appeal; but disproportionately from the low skilled and less well educated blue-collar Labour supporters, making it more socially distinctive. We will know more when individual level data is released, which will allow closer examination of the flow of the vote since 2015. But in the shadow of the 2016 referendum stands one basic assertion that few would contest: Britain is now more divided than ever.

## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger (1976) *The 1975 Referendum*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan

<sup>ii</sup> A YouGov poll for The Times newspaper suggested that 45 per cent of Labour voters thought that the Labour Party either backed Brexit or was split on the referendum <https://www.politicshome.com/news/europe/eu-policy-agenda/brexit/news/75574/labour-voters-remain-unsure-partys-eu-referendumrendum-question>.

<sup>iii</sup> Vernon Bogdanor, 'The EU referendum shows how the sovereignty of Britain's people can now trump its parliament', *The Daily Telegraph* June 26 2016

---

<sup>iv</sup> Chris Hanretty, 'The EU referendum: How did Westminster constituencies vote? Available online: <https://medium.com/@chrishanretty/the-eu-referendum-how-did-westminster-constituencies-vote-283c85cd20e1#.i23b9uxbm> (accessed July 5 2016).

<sup>v</sup> Chris Hanretty, 'Most Labour MPs represent a constituency that voted Leave'. Available online: <https://medium.com/@chrishanretty/most-labour-mps-represent-a-constituency-that-voted-leave-36f13210f5c6#.fu9zvch6u> (accessed July 5 2016).

<sup>vi</sup> Robert Ford and Matthew J. Goodwin (2014) *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Public Support for the Radical Right in Britain*, Abingdon: Routledge; also (2014) 'Understanding UKIP: Identity, Social Change and the Left Behind', *The Political Quarterly*, vol.85, no.2, July-September. For further discussion of the 'left behind' and political geography see Matthew Goodwin and Caitlin Milazzo (2015) *UKIP: Inside the Campaign to Redraw the Map of British Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>vii</sup> Geoffrey Evans and Jon Mellon (2015) "Working Class Votes and Conservative Losses: Solving the UKIP Puzzle." *Parliamentary Affairs* (2015)

<sup>viii</sup> Hakhverdian, A., Van Elsas, E., Van der Brug, W., & Kuhn, T. (2013). Euroscepticism and education: A longitudinal study of 12 EU member states, 1973–2010. *European Union Politics*, 14(4), 522-541

<sup>ix</sup> On the importance of immigration concerns to Ukip support and Euroscepticism in Britain see Goodwin and Milazzo, *Ukip: Inside the Campaign to Redraw the Map of British Politics*.

<sup>x</sup> EU migration is measured using data from the 2011 Census on the number of people born in mainland EU countries.

<sup>xi</sup> To measure change in the level of EU migration we use data from the Labour Force Survey in 2004 and 2014 (available for England and Wales).

<sup>xii</sup> Another way to look at this is just to compare the correlation coefficient between age and support for Ukip ( $r=0.45$ ) and age and support for Leave ( $r=0.34$ ). We can see that the former is stronger than the latter.

<sup>xiii</sup> Again, this is also illustrated by comparing the correlation coefficient between education and support for Ukip ( $r=0.21$ ) and education and support for Leave ( $r=0.53$ ).

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid. Butler and Kitzinger, p.280