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The left's agenda for the UK and EU

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Beyond Brexit: poll findings

The left in the UK has weathered the stormy years since Brexit in a tactical pose. But time spent discussing the negotiations has meant too little time thinking about the bigger picture. The left must broaden the conversation so that it has a plan to tackle the social and economic drivers of Brexit, and a vision for a close working relationship with the EU.

The Fabian Society and FEPS book [Beyond Brexit](#) brings together leading politicians and experts from across Europe sketch the outline of a new left agenda for the the UK and EU after the negotiations are over. Their essays cover the need for a new political economy, Britain's role in the world and the devolution of power to communities. They are also honest about the challenges we face as we try and carve out a close relationship between the UK and EU.

Many now argue that a second referendum is necessary, and this may well be the right course of action to break the stalemate in the negotiations. But the UK's departure from the EU is still more likely than another vote. Whether we like it or not, the left needs to prepare for Brexit.

To help root this conversation in the reality of public opinion, the Fabian Society and FEPS commissioned a new survey of public attitudes on Britain's post Brexit future. The key insights from that poll are the subject of this post. Our findings suggest that despite the continued potency of the leave campaign's messages, **there is little appetite for a hostile 'no deal' Brexit and little evidence that people believe the benefits of Brexit will grow in the long term. We also find a strong sense that the UK has a lot in common with its European neighbours, and a very pragmatic approach to our future relationship with the EU.**

FEPS and the Fabian Society worked with YouGov to field the survey. The total sample size was 1660 adults, and fieldwork was undertaken between 13-14 August 2018. The question on positives and negatives in 2044 was run on the 16-17 August with a sample size of 1676. Both surveys were carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).



Insight 1: Lack of belief in long-term benefit

We asked one sample of the public to tell us whether they felt leaving the EU would have a positive or negative impact on a range of issues five years after Brexit (by 2024), and a different sample the same questions but considering the impact 25 years after Brexit (by 2044). We found there was very little difference between short term and long term expectations, which shows that public opinion does not support politicians who suggest that short term pain will lead to long term gain.

Figure 1: Percentage of GB adults who said they expected Brexit to have a positive impact in each area by 2024 or 2044

	2024 (sample: 836)	2044 (sample: 1676)	Long-term increase
Workers' rights	23	22	-1
Jobs	29	33	+4
Prices	14	16	+2
Business investment in Britain	28	29	+1
Immigration	42	41	-1
Security and terrorism	29	32	+3
Control over laws	59	59	0
UK influence in world	28	29	+1
Equality	18	21	+3
The environment	19	20	+1
Public services in Britain	28	28	0
Pride in Britain	45	44	-1

The margin of error for the results from the two samples is +/- 3 per cent, so there is only one statistically significant difference between the 2024 and 2044 groups. This relates to positivity about jobs. Four per cent more people felt that Brexit would have a positive impact by 2044. However, only a third (33 per cent) of the public said there will be positive impact on jobs at all, and this is still behind the proportion of the public who believe there will be a negative impact (35 per cent).

Insight 2: Lack of appetite for a hostile Brexit

We asked people to imagine that the negotiations were over and tell us what kind of relationship they think the UK should have with the EU. Strikingly, only 4 per cent of the population said that they want a 'distant and cold' relationship with the EU, which most would say is the inevitable consequence of crashing out of the Union without reaching agreement.

Figure 2: Imagine the negotiations are over and the UK has left the EU. Which statement best describes how you'd like to see the UK's relationship with the EU? (%)

	2017 Vote				EU Ref 2016		Age	
	Total	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Remain	Leave	18-49	50+
<i>Weighted Sample</i>	1660	569	544	101	652	709	886	774
A close and warm relationship	36	24	51	39	57	19	38	33
A practical and neutral relationship	51	69	39	57	33	73	44	60
A distant and cold relationship	4	3	4	2	4	4	4	3
Don't know	9	4	5	3	6	4	13	3



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Insight 3: Leave messages are still potent and persuasive

We asked people to think about Britain after Brexit, and asked them what politicians should be prioritising as we prepare to the leave. As figure three shows, the most popular issues were control over UK laws and controls on immigration.

Figure 3: And thinking about what will be important for Britain in the ten years after Brexit. Which two or three things do you think politicians should be prioritising as we prepare to leave the EU? (Please tick up to three) (%)

	Total	2017 Vote			EU Ref 2016		Age	
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Remain	Leave	18-49	50+
<i>Weighted Sample</i>	1660	569	544	101	652	709	886	774
Controls on immigration	36	54	23	26	16	57	27	46
Control over UK laws	36	58	19	24	14	60	25	48
Access to European markets	33	28	43	38	50	20	33	33
Security and terrorism	31	42	26	30	28	38	24	39
Jobs	22	15	28	26	25	18	25	18
Public services in Britain	21	17	26	33	26	19	21	22
Rights for EU citizens who have settled in the UK	19	12	26	27	29	9	22	16
UK influence in the world	17	26	13	20	16	21	14	21
Investment and support for left behind communities	12	10	15	17	16	9	12	12
Workers' rights	11	5	20	9	16	8	13	10
The environment	10	5	16	21	17	5	13	8
Something else	2	2	1	2	3	2	1	3
Don't know	11	5	9	5	10	7	16	4

These issues remain potent because they are the public's top priorities for Brexit, but also because they are the issues where most people believe Brexit will deliver benefits. On control of laws, 59 per cent think that Brexit will have had a positive impact by 2044. This figure is also high amongst Labour voters, with nearly half (47 per cent) saying the impact will be positive. On the broader patriotic issue of 'pride in Britain', 44 per cent say that Brexit will have had a positive impact by 2044. 41 per cent think the impact will be positive on immigration.

Figure 4: Putting aside how you voted in the referendum, we now want you to think about the impact that Brexit will have in the long term. Imagine it is 25 years since the UK has left the EU (i.e. 2044). Do you think leaving the EU will have had a positive or negative impact on each of the following by 2044, or will it have had no impact? (%)

	Total	2017 Vote			EU Ref 2016	
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Remain	Leave
<i>Weighted Sample</i>	1676	575	550	102	659	716
The control that Britain has over its own laws						
Positive impact	59	80	47	49	39	84
Negative impact	11	4	16	20	21	3
No impact either way	16	9	23	24	28	6
Don't know	14	7	14	7	12	7
Positive minus negative	48	76	31	29	18	81
Pride in Britain						
Positive impact	44	69	29	19	19	73
Negative impact	21	7	32	42	40	4
No impact either way	20	16	23	29	26	14
Don't know	16	8	16	10	15	9
Positive minus negative	23	62	-3	-23	-21	69



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Immigration						
Positive impact	41	62	26	16	18	68
Negative impact	25	13	36	43	44	9
No impact either way	17	15	21	28	24	12
Don't know	17	10	17	13	15	10
Positive minus negative	16	49	-10	-27	-26	59
Security and Terrorism						
Positive impact	32	46	21	14	10	57
Negative impact	27	15	40	49	52	8
No impact either way	23	28	22	27	24	24
Don't know	18	11	17	10	15	12
Positive minus negative	5	31	-19	-35	-42	49
Jobs						
Positive impact	33	52	21	17	10	60
Negative impact	35	18	51	67	65	10
No impact either way	15	18	12	6	12	17
Don't know	17	12	17	10	14	13
Positive minus negative	-2	34	-30	-50	-55	50
Public services in Britain						
Positive impact	28	42	20	14	8	51
Negative impact	30	14	44	58	56	9
No impact either way	23	31	19	16	19	27
Don't know	18	13	18	11	16	13
Positive minus negative	-2	28	-24	-44	-48	42
Equality						
Positive impact	21	31	14	7	6	37
Negative impact	27	11	41	47	49	6
No impact either way	34	45	27	32	30	42
Don't know	19	13	18	14	15	15
Positive minus negative	-6	20	-27	-40	-43	31
The environment						
Positive impact	20	32	13	9	6	36
Negative impact	27	11	41	57	50	7
No impact either way	35	45	29	22	28	44
Don't know	18	12	17	12	15	13
Positive minus negative	-7	21	-28	-48	-44	29
The UK's influence in the world						
Positive impact	29	49	16	9	8	54
Negative impact	37	20	53	77	69	11
No impact either way	18	21	17	5	12	21
Don't know	15	10	14	9	11	13
Positive minus negative	-8	29	-37	-68	-61	43
Workers' rights						
Positive impact	22	32	16	10	8	39
Negative impact	31	13	46	66	58	9
No impact either way	28	43	22	12	20	38
Don't know	18	13	16	12	14	14
Positive minus negative	-9	19	-30	-56	-50	30
Business investment in Britain						
Positive impact	29	51	16	7	7	56
Negative impact	39	23	54	71	71	11
No impact either way	13	14	12	8	8	17
Don't know	19	12	18	15	13	16
Positive minus negative	-10	28	-38	-64	-64	45
The prices in shops						
Positive impact	16	28	9	6	3	31
Negative impact	50	35	63	76	76	27
No impact either way	18	23	13	8	9	26
Don't know	17	14	15	10	11	15
Positive minus negative	-34	-7	-54	-70	-73	4
The control that Britain has over its own laws						
Positive impact	59	80	47	49	39	84



Insight 4: People don't feel European, but do recognise commonalities

We asked people about their connection to their European identity, and a majority said that they don't currently feel European. This figure was also high among Labour voters (40 per cent) and remain voters (30 per cent). This high figure should come as no surprise, considering the UK voted for Brexit. We also explored to what extent people feel that leaving the European Union will affect their European identity. 13 per cent say that they expect to feel less European after Brexit, whereas 22 per cent of people say they currently feel European and don't feel like Brexit will have an impact on this.

Figure 5: Which of the following comes closest to your view? (feeling European) (%)

	Total	2017 Vote			EU Ref 2016		Age	
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Remain	Leave	18-49	50+
<i>Weighted Sample</i>	1660	569	544	101	652	709	886	774
I currently feel European and will feel European after Britain has left the EU	22	14	30	33	36	10	26	19
I currently feel European but expect to feel less European after Britain has left the EU	13	9	18	17	22	6	14	12
I don't currently feel European	52	72	40	43	30	76	42	63
Don't know	12	4	12	6	12	8	18	5

But our poll suggests practical messages about maintaining links with other European countries will be more effective than emotional appeals based on shared European identity. 61 per cent of those surveyed said that they think we have a lot in common with our European neighbours. This is also the case for the majority of leave voters (52 per cent). 33 per cent of adults feel we have a lot in common with other European countries and don't feel this will change as a result of Brexit; while 28 per cent of people think we have a lot in common but expect this to decline over time.

Figure 6: Which of the following comes closest to your view? (commonalities with Europe) (%)

	Total	2017 Vote			EU Ref 2016		Age	
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Remain	Leave	18-49	50+
<i>Weighted Sample</i>	1660	569	544	101	652	709	886	774
The UK has a lot in common with other European countries and will continue to do so after Brexit	33	35	34	47	33	36	32	35
The UK has a lot in common with other European countries but will gradually have less in common with them after Brexit	28	22	36	38	43	16	28	29
The UK doesn't currently have a lot common with other European countries	21	35	12	10	9	35	16	27
Something else	3	3	2	1	2	3	4	2
Don't know	14	6	15	4	12	10	20	7




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Insight 5: The country is deeply divided

Across all questions, there is evidence of continued polarisation of views between leave and remain voters. On every issue we tested, more leave voters said the impacts of Brexit would be positive than negative, and more remain voters said the impacts would be negative rather than positive. The only exception to this for remain voters was control over laws, which slightly more remain voters believed would be a positive consequence of Brexit (see figure 4).

The divide between remain and leave voters is also evident on attitudes towards the prospect of Britain rejoining the European Union in the future. 74 per cent of remain voters think the UK should be open to rejoining, and 74 per cent of leave voters think that once the UK has left the EU it should never consider rejoining.

Figure 7: Which of the following statements best reflects your view? (%) (rejoining)

	Total	2017 Vote			EU Ref 2016		Age	
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Remain	Leave	18-49	50+
<i>Weighted Sample</i>	1660	569	544	101	652	709	886	774
Once the UK has left the EU it should never consider re-joining in the future	41	69	24	30	13	74	29	55
Once the UK has left the EU it should be open to re-joining in the future	45	20	65	64	74	16	54	34
Don't know	14	11	10	6	12	10	17	10

Across the questions, the poll also reveals the demographic divides that were so evident in the referendum result itself. One of the most pronounced is the age divide. 63 per cent of the over 50s said that they don't currently feel European, compared to 42 per cent of under 18-49 year olds and just 34 per cent of 18-24 year olds. Young people are also less enthusiastic about core leave messages, with 18-24 year olds 37 points less likely to select 'control over laws' as a priority for politicians than the over 65s.

There are also clear geographic splits. Key findings from our polling include that people in the North are 10 points more likely to think Brexit will be good for jobs than people in London, and 14 points more likely to think Brexit will be good for public services. People in London are also more likely to feel as though they have something in common with other European countries. 71 per cent of Londoners say Britain has a lot in common with other European countries, compared to 58 per cent of people in the North and 56 per cent of people in the Midlands and Wales.

We also know that social class was an important factor in the referendum result. People who were less well off were more likely to be leave voters, and this had important intersections with levels of education. Our survey suggests this divide continues to be pertinent with working class people less likely to feel European, less likely to say the UK has commonalities with Europe and more likely to select core leave issues as key priorities for politicians.