

# Argument or organisation? The battle over membership of the European Union

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## About the project

This report presents the key findings of a poll conducted by the Fabian Society and GQRR, with the support of the partners mentioned above. It should be read alongside the data tables and additional analysis that can be found at [www.gqrr.com](http://www.gqrr.com).

The poll was designed following: discussions with experts, analysis of campaign messages, and 4 small focus groups with swing voters to proof the content for comprehension. 2,282 people responded to the online survey, which was in the field between 4 March and 11 March 2016.

The aim of the research was to improve our understanding of the referendum debate, and specifically to understand the power of the arguments being used on each side, and their impact on working class voters (sample of 1,015 respondents in social classes C2DE) and Labour Party supporters (sample of 547 who think of themselves as being Labour).

The Fabian Society's rules forbid the Society from taking collective positions on questions of policy and it is therefore neutral in the EU referendum. This report analyses strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for both the Leave and Remain campaigns, without promoting any particular outcome.

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## Executive Summary

The EU referendum is a battle of arguments and organisation. Leave can win if they get their emotive arguments heard, and Remain can win if they turn out their underwhelmed voters.

This report presents the main findings and conclusions from a Fabian Society and GQRR poll which explored attitudes and arguments about the referendum campaign. It reveals that the race is on a knife-edge. Remain have a narrow lead among the total adult population, but there are three factors in Leave's favour:

- **Leave voters are more likely to vote:** While Remain leads overall, they lose their lead amongst the most likely voters, with 47 per cent saying they'll vote to leave against 45 per cent for Remain.
- **Leave's arguments seem to have more power to persuade:** After voters are exposed to detailed arguments on both sides of the debate, the race shifts in Leave's favour. We were able to test this by asking people to tell us their voting intention before and after they had been shown arguments from both campaigns. While remain led by 45 points to 40 at first amongst the total population, after respondents had been exposed to a balanced debate, Leave and Remain tied on 42 per cent.
- **Remain has a softer vote:** Using GQRR's in house measure of how loyal voters are to their cause, we show that there are nearly double the number of Leave loyalists as there are Remain loyalists.

There are three core insights from our poll that both campaigns should reflect on in the coming weeks.

### Remain do well on first impressions, but Leave arguments have more power to persuade

We tested arguments being used by campaigners for Leave and Remain to see how convincing people found them. On the majority of core issues in the referendum contest (with the notable exception of risk and uncertainty), Leave arguments were found to be more persuasive than the arguments being deployed by Remain, with more people initially telling us they would vote Remain than found Remain's arguments 'very' or 'somewhat' convincing.

- Immigration is the unavoidable issue of the referendum campaign, with more than half of voters selecting it as one of their top three concerns when thinking about the referendum. While people are fairly

split on whether free movement is good or bad, Leave's messages about immigration outperform Remain's messages by a significant margin.

- The economy is thought to be an area of strength for Remain, and respondents instinctively felt that the EU is good for economic issues like jobs, investment and prices. However, once they were exposed to the fuller arguments being used by both campaigns, Leave once again performs better.
- Security and global influence is one of the most finely balanced areas of debate in the referendum contest, and is also perceived to be one of the most important. On the key argument about terrorism, the leave message has an 11-point lead.
- 57 per cent said leaving the EU would be better for 'pride in Britain', but patriotic Remain arguments can help counter this advantage. When we tested a patriotic Remain argument against a patriotic Leave argument the Leave lead was reduced to just 4 points.

There are a number of factors that mitigate this bad news for the Remain camp.

- Remain has the advantage of the status quo, which we know often triumphs in referendums. When we asked for initial impressions on whether leaving or staying would be 'better' for a range of core issues, remain triumphed in a majority of them.
- Remain are winning the argument about risk. 52 per cent agree that leaving the EU would lead to years of uncertainty, compared to 27 per cent who think it would be straightforward.

## **Civil war in the Conservative party means both Labour campaigns must up their games**

Civil war has broken out within the Conservative party leadership and it is clear that its supporters are split on Europe as well. This means that the scale on which Labour supporters turn out to vote could be decisive in the referendum. For once, an opposition party could make the difference.

But for the Labour party, which wants to persuade its supporters to vote Remain, there are a number of warning signs. Labour's electoral machine is not yet at full throttle, and Labour voters aren't yet particularly motivated to vote, with just 56% of those who voted Labour in May 2015 indicating they are very likely to vote this June.

This offers an opportunity for the Labour Leave campaign, and a challenge for the party's official Remain campaign.

- Both Labour campaigns need to work harder to promote a distinctive progressive case. Remain should talk about workers' rights, but avoid empty phrases about 'social Europe'. Just 14 per cent of strong Labour supporters selected this phrase, when asked to choose the three most important issues in the referendum campaign. Meanwhile, Labour Leave should make more of TTIP and the threat of EU-inspired liberalisation of public services in Britain.
- Jeremy Corbyn can be decisive in this referendum. For Labour voters he is comfortably the most trusted figure in this debate, significantly ahead of Alan Johnson. If he were to offer more full-throated support for Labour's position, that could be powerful. The Labour Leave campaign will hope he continues to keep a relatively low profile.
- The Labour Leave campaign is currently using a lot of rhetoric from the umbrella Leave campaigns. This is a mistake. They could do better if they make their messages more anti-Conservative. This is not the case for Labour Remain who are doing the right thing by re-using non-partisan campaign lines, although our poll shows that they also have an opportunity to talk more about the positive case for Europe than about the risks of Brexit. This is because Labour Remain voters are more likely to react well to positive arguments than the Remain voters in the rest of the population.
- Both campaigns should be patriotic. When we asked respondents whether remaining or leaving would be better simply for 'pride in Britain', Leave had an 8-point lead amongst Labour supporters. But when Remain sound patriotic they are able to convince people. We tested a pro Remain statement about being proudly British and supporting remaining in the EU, against a Leave statement about standing up for Britain, and the Remain statement led amongst Labour supporters by more than 20 points.
- Labour Leave is at a disadvantage when it comes to turning out their vote because they don't have the support of the Labour Party's field operation. They should instead focus on getting their arguments heard, targeting potential switchers. But, for Labour Remain, turnout is absolutely key. On current voting intentions, two thirds of Labour's 2015 voters support Remain. But many of those six million people will not turn out unless Labour's electoral machine is in overdrive.

## **Working class voters are a forgotten force in this referendum**

Working class voters have often been at the sharp end of decisions taken at European level. Some analysis has shown that free movement of labour has contributed to holding down the wages of the lowest paid in Britain, and rapid migration to specific communities has highlighted concerns about the pressure on schools and public services in Britain's poorest areas, especially in the context of funding cuts.

If the EU referendum were held only amongst the working classes, our research indicates that Leave could win, with the poll giving Leave a lead of 6 points amongst those in socioeconomic groups C2DE. But there are votes up for grabs for both campaigns.

- Remain should talk more about rights at work, in particular by highlighting the risk the Conservative party could pose to them.
- Immigration is a strong suit for Leave, but both campaigns should realise that worries about immigration are tied to worries about personal and economic insecurity. For example, 49 per cent of C2DE respondents said that the best argument for why the EU is bad for jobs is that 'there are hundreds of thousands of workers competing with British workers for jobs in this country'.
- The working class vote is less likely to turn out, posing a challenge for Leave campaigners. Just 51 per cent of C2DE voters say that they will definitely go to the polls, compared to 58 per cent of the total population.
- Both campaigns should realise the importance of trying to find the right message carrier because most of their key players are highly distrusted. Amongst the message carriers we tested, trade unions have the most favourable rating with working class voters.

## Introduction:

### The state of the race

Our survey reveals that the referendum race is on a knife-edge. While our poll gives Remain a narrow lead amongst the adult population, when we focus on most likely voters, Leave moves ahead. Moreover, we found that Leave's arguments are seen to be more persuasive and their supporters are more committed to their cause.

### Leave look stronger after a balanced debate

In our poll we simulated a balanced debate by asking people to react to arguments that each campaign is currently deploying. We found that after people are exposed to the campaigns' messages the race shifts in Leave's favour. We were able to test this by asking people to tell us their voting intention before and after they had been shown the arguments. While Remain led by 45 points to 40 at first amongst the total population, after respondents had been exposed to both sides of the debate, Leave and Remain tied on 42 per cent. The strength of Leave's arguments are explored in detail in the following chapter.

#### How we tested the arguments

To measure the effectiveness of different arguments for Leave and Remain we used a number of different techniques in the survey, which we refer to throughout this report.

**'First impression' questions:** Respondents were asked to tell us whether leaving or staying in the EU would be 'better' for a number of core issues, like jobs, immigration, and security and terrorism.

**Head-to-heads:** We asked respondents to tell us which of two contrasting statements came somewhat or much closer to their views, covering core areas of debate in the referendum.

**Campaign message testing:** We took the core messages being used by Leave and Remain campaigns and tested them in the poll. We showed a selection of these messages to respondents, and asked them to tell us if they found the arguments 'very' 'somewhat' 'a little' or 'not at all' convincing. Throughout the report, we have paired up statements on important issues and contrasted how convincing respondents found them.

**The persuasiveness test:** To assess the impact that exposure to the arguments might have on the debate, we asked respondents to tell us their voting intention at four points: at the beginning of the survey, after respondents had seen a selection

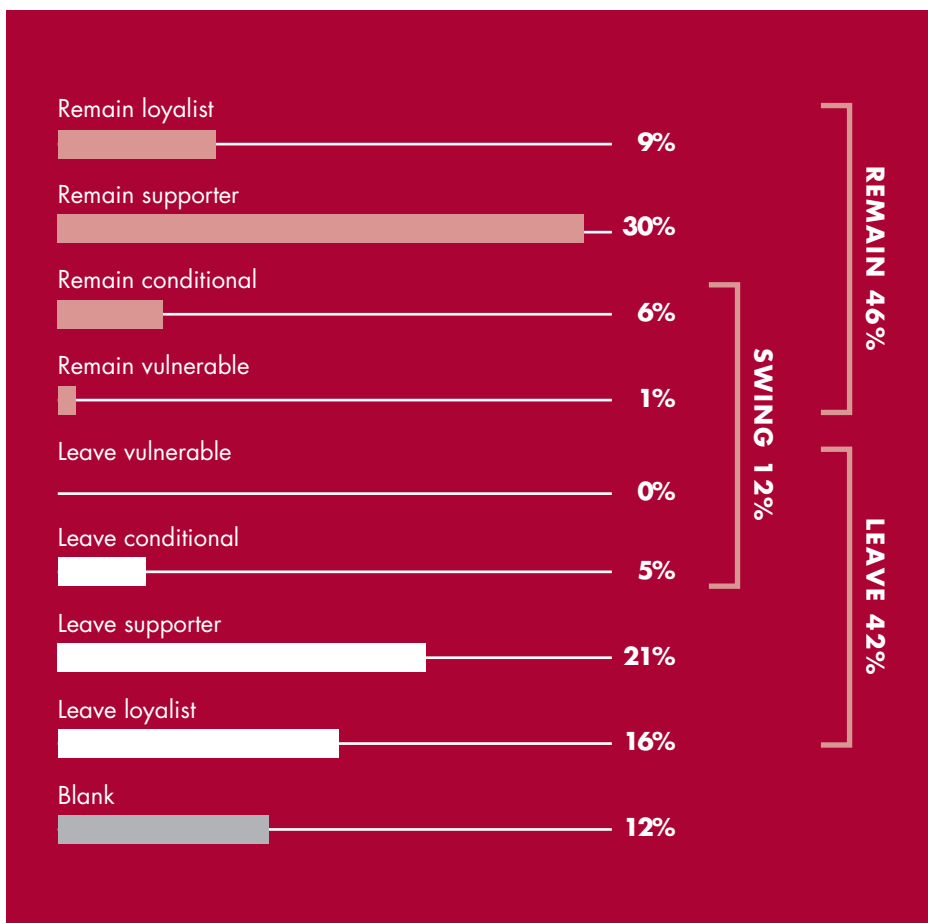


of Remain arguments, after respondents had seen a selection of Leave arguments (we randomised which order they saw the Leave or Remain sets), and after they had seen a balanced debate.

### Remain's vote is softer

After we'd established voting intentions, we asked respondents to tell us how likely they are to vote for the opposing side. Both camps have about the same amount of voters vulnerable, with between 8 and 10 per cent saying there is a fair or good chance they might change their vote. Using a specially constructed measure of 'swing' (a combination of how people said they'd vote, how likely they are to vote for the other side and their favourability towards the EU) GQRR calculate that about 12 per cent of population are swing voters in this referendum, with about 6 per cent on each side.

However, using this in-house measure, we were also able to establish that Leave's voters are more loyal to their cause. More Leave voters say they will vote to Leave, definitely won't change their vote and having a very negative view of the EU ('Leave loyalists') than Remain voters who have the equivalent strong feelings for retaining EU membership.



## Turnout will make the difference

Voter turnout could be decisive in this referendum. Our poll shows that while Remain leads overall, their lead disappears amongst the most likely voters, with 47 per cent saying they'll vote to leave against 45 per cent for Remain.<sup>1</sup> This confirms the view that Leave voters will be more motivated to go to the polls. Likely voters were also more ready to select immigration as one of their top three issues for the referendum. If turnout is low, the chances of Leave winning improve.

We found that 79 per cent of people feel that the referendum is one of the most important decisions Britain has taken in decades, a result which could suggest a high turnout.<sup>2</sup> But there are a range of factors that point in the other direction.

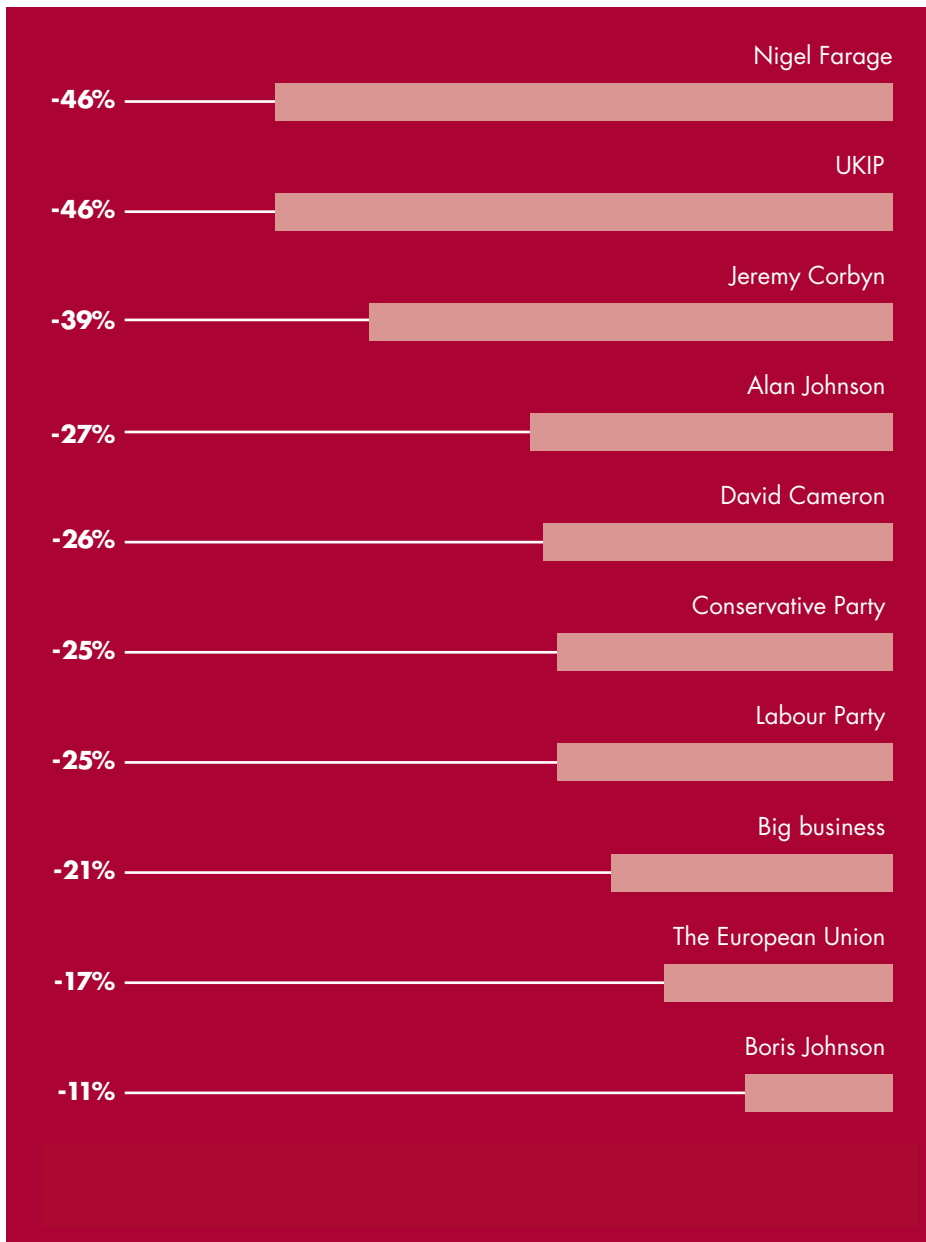
First, neither side yet has a real ground operation. The campaigns do not have significant local presence and the Conservative party machine will be unavailable to either camp (unlike the Labour party it will not campaign for one side). Labour could in theory mount a strong 'Get out the vote' operation, but it is unused to fighting national referendum campaigns, as opposed to intense operations in a few battleground seats, as well as being short on money and staff. Neither Remain nor Leave are in a position to build an operation from scratch in areas that have rarely been the focus of other electoral contests.

The second is a general sense of political alienation, and a lack of trust in the main message carriers. Our poll shows a net negative favourability rating for all of the main players in the debate, including big business, the prime minister, Jeremy Corbyn, Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and the European Union itself.

1 Most likely voters are defined as a combination of those who voted in May 2015 and who said the chances of them voting in the referendum was 8, 9 or 10 out of 10, as well as those who did not vote in 2015 but who said chances of voting in the referendum was 10 out of 10 and strongly agreed with the statement 'I vote in every election'.

2 Respondents who said the statement 'There's a lot at stake in this referendum. It's one of the most important decisions we've taken in decades' came much or somewhat closer to their views than the statement 'The choice to remain or leave the EU isn't that important. Things won't change that much, whether we're in or out of the EU.'

Net favourability of key players in referendum (total population).<sup>3</sup>



Our poll also reveals a sense of powerlessness about interaction with the EU, suggesting both low turnout and potential support for Leave. 47 per cent of respondents disagreed that they could influence EU policy, compared to just 23 per cent who felt they could.<sup>4</sup> These figures are perhaps not surprising. For years, Europe has seemed to be in an almost permanent state of crisis, being buffeted by factors outside of its control like the migrant crisis,

3 Total saying they had a favourable feeling (rating between 51 & 100) – total saying they had an unfavourable feeling (rating between 0 & 49).

4 Respondents were asked whether they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement ‘As a voter, I can influence policy at the European level.’

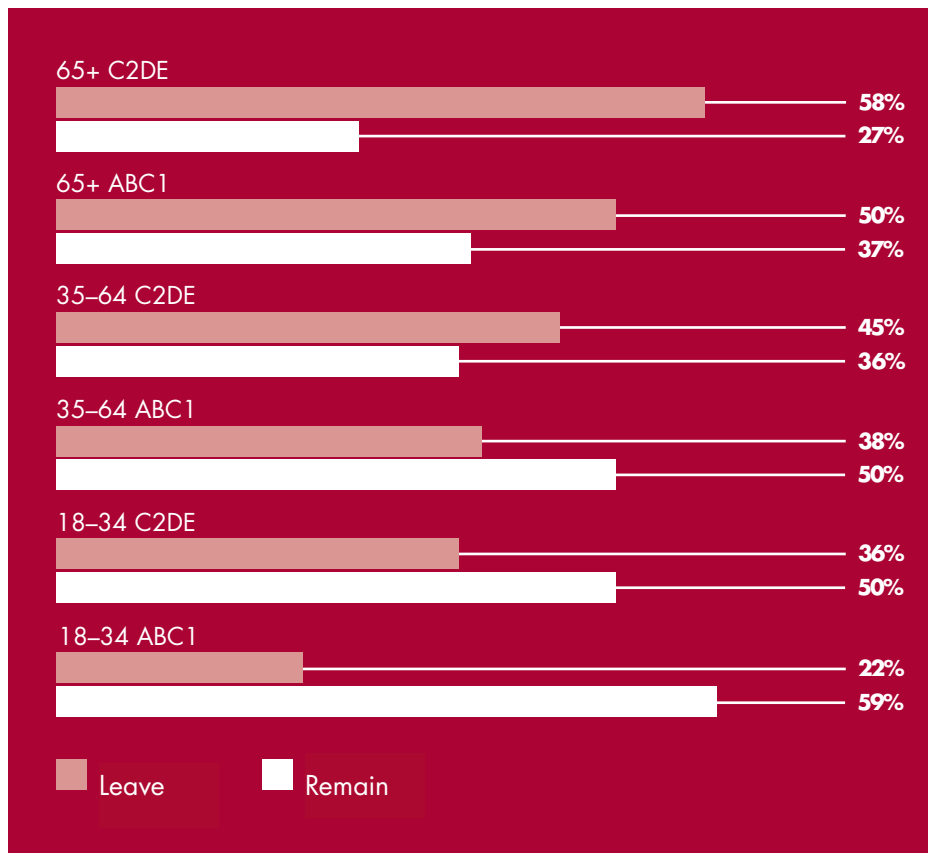
terrorism and the global financial crisis. Trust in the European Union has been in decline across the continent in response, and the EU's own figures in 2013 showed trust reaching its lowest levels since records began.<sup>5</sup>

### Who is voting for whom?

Our poll confirms what we already know about the partisan allegiances of both campaigns. Conservative voters are split down the middle, with Leave edging it, and 61 per cent of Labour supporters are in favour of Remain. This presents an opportunity for both sides. Both must seek to win the battle amongst Tory supporters, but the margin by which progressive voters support Remain will also be crucial.

Perhaps the most startling differences in the makeup of supporters for each campaign are the differences in social class and age. The young middle class are the stalwarts of the Remain campaign, and the older working class swell the ranks of Leave.

Leave/Remain by socioeconomic group and age (total population)



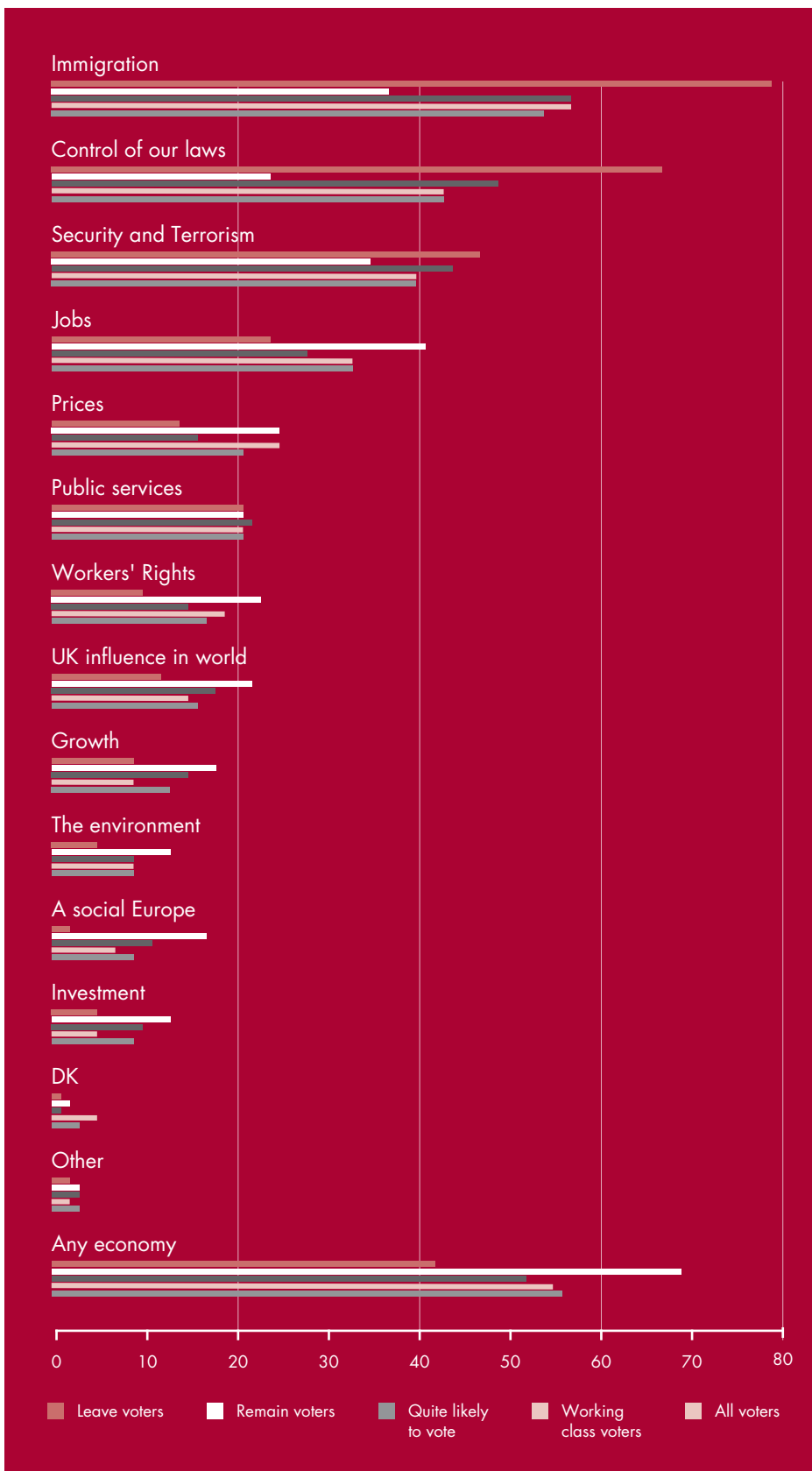
5 [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/10586961/Trust-in-EU-at-an-all-time-low-latest-figures-show.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/10586961/Trust-in-EU-at-an-all-time-low-latest-figures-show.html)

## **1. Remain do well on first impressions, but Leave arguments have more power to persuade**

The debate about membership of the European Union has wide reaching impact on the lives of people in Britain, affecting issues as diverse as jobs, the cost of living and rights at work. In such a tight race, the kitchen table argument about these core issues could swing the result. Our polling underlines this, showing that when people are asked for their first impressions (on voting intention and the issues) they seem more favourable to the status quo, but, if they are exposed to the arguments being used by both sides, the race is likely to shift in Leave's favour.

To explore the core issues at play in this referendum, we asked people to select the three most important issues to them when thinking about what they will do with their ballot. Four issues emerge as most important: immigration; the economy; control of laws; and security and terrorism. Important differences also emerged amongst subsets of voters, with Leave voters selecting immigration as their top concern, and Remain voters opting for an economic issue.

Most important issues in EU referendum

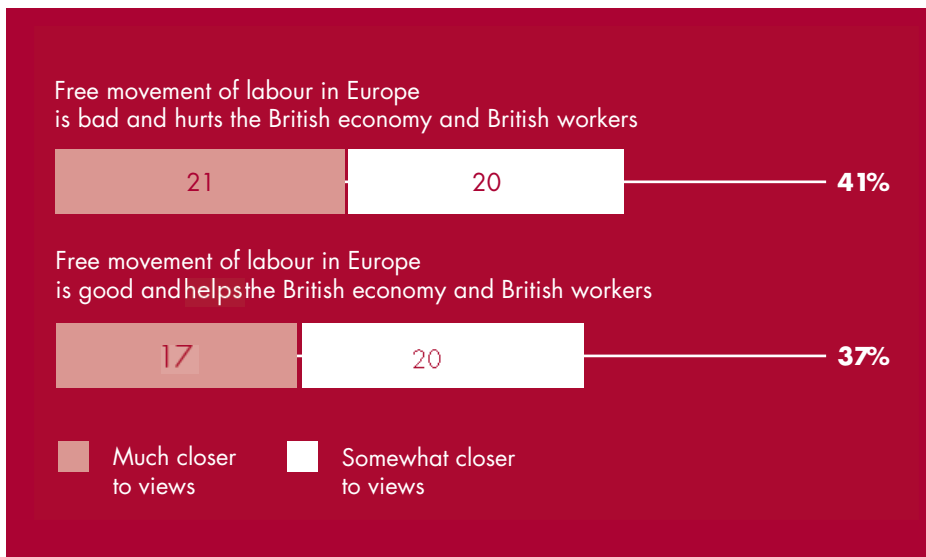


## Immigration and borders

Our polling reveals that immigration is the unavoidable issue of the referendum campaign, with 55 per cent of voters selecting it as one of their top three issues when making up their mind how to vote. While Leave has a consistent message, covering jobs, security and control, Remain move between trying not to talk about it, being in favour of free movement, and arguing that leaving the EU won't make any difference.

Public opinion on immigration is not straightforward. While the topic provokes strong reactions that speak to people's personal economic and social insecurities, previous research shows that there are layers of complexity to their views.<sup>6</sup> This is supported by our poll, which shows that people are actually fairly evenly split on the question of whether or not free movement is good or bad for the economy and workers.

Only slightly more people think that EU free movement is 'bad' than 'good' (% who indicated the first or second statement was much or somewhat closer to their views)



When we tested the messages being deployed by both Leave and Remain, a wider divide opened up.<sup>7</sup> People find Leave's economic argument against EU migration much more convincing than Remain's attempts to argue for the economic benefit of migration.

<sup>6</sup> [www.ippr.org/blog/on-eu-immigration-both-camps-need-to-pay-careful-attention-to-public-opinion](http://www.ippr.org/blog/on-eu-immigration-both-camps-need-to-pay-careful-attention-to-public-opinion)

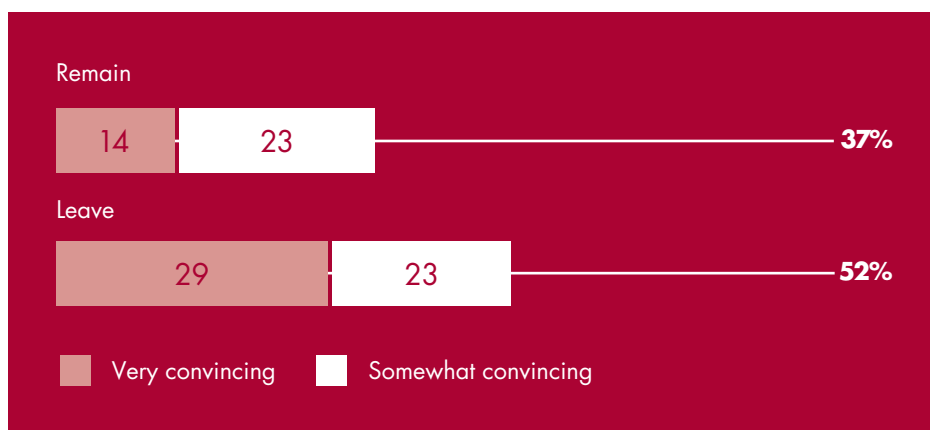
<sup>7</sup> On each core issue for the referendum, we analysed the arguments being used by each campaign and selected those that we deemed to be their core arguments.

**Remain argument:**

Migrants from other EU countries help us tackle skills shortages across British industries, fill job vacancies in the NHS and contribute to our economy – fuelling economic growth.<sup>8</sup>

**Leave argument:**

We must curb the flow of migrants from the EU. EU migrants can often deprive British citizens of jobs in the low-skilled end of the labour market. Furthermore, migration accounts for one third of the deficit in social housing and undoubtedly puts pressure on public services as a whole.<sup>9</sup>



Given Remain’s failure to find a coherent narrative on immigration, and the emotive language used by Leave, it is not surprising that Leave’s arguments perform so much better. However, there are other messages that have been found to be effective at tackling people’s concerns about migration, such as the TUC’s advocacy of stronger measures to prevent exploitation and undercutting. With a majority of the total population not opposed in principle to free movement, Remain must find better ways to neutralise the resonance of Leave’s immigration arguments, which find their way into Brexit messages on most policy issues.

## The economy

The argument about the economy is crucial to both Leave and Remain, as it was during the last referendum in 1975. Back then, business bankrolled the EU campaign, and 95 per cent of respondents in a poll of 653 business leaders for *The Economist* backed the single market.<sup>10</sup> Today both the chancellor and the prime minister have warned that Brexit would be a “shock” to the British economy, risking jobs and investment, and the majority of the

8 [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/corbyn-says-immigration-isnt-a-problem-a6673231.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/corbyn-says-immigration-isnt-a-problem-a6673231.html)

9 [www.leave.eu/fr/the-facts/on-migration](http://www.leave.eu/fr/the-facts/on-migration)

10 [www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/01/back-future-britain-s-1975-referendum-europe](http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/01/back-future-britain-s-1975-referendum-europe)



business community is lining up behind Remain.<sup>11</sup> The TUC has also warned about the risks of Brexit to jobs and rights at work. On the other hand, Leave argue that leaving Europe will allow for better trade deals to be reached, and that British business will prosper without 'red tape' from Brussels.

Our poll reveals that people's first impression is that remaining in the EU is better for economic issues like jobs, investment and prices, with jobs clearly the most important. On the question of whether leaving the EU would be better for jobs, Remain has a 3 point lead; on investment in Britain a 15 point lead; and on prices a 10 point lead. When we showed respondents two short statements about the economy being improved or damaged in the event of leaving, the Remain argument led by 4 points.

However, once respondents were exposed to the fuller arguments currently being used by the campaigns, they reacted very differently. Across the three core issues of jobs, investment and prices, the Leave arguments convinced more people than the Remain arguments, with Leave leads of 7 points, 5 points and 16 points respectively.<sup>12</sup>

This gap between instinct and argument on the economy should be of serious concern to the Remain campaign, but there are two potential explanations. The first is that the tone of the Remain arguments is too positive about the economic status quo. Their messages about jobs, investment and disposable income rely on what the EU provides today and might be placed at risk by Brexit. However, for people feeling economically or socially insecure this may sound rather complacent. Remain are trying to argue that things are good but might get worse, whereas Leave are arguing things are bad but might get better.

Another potential explanation for these surprising results is that people are simply less familiar with the Leave arguments, and therefore find them more persuasive – the Remain case is accepted, but Leave are saying something new. If this is the case, we might expect Leave's arguments to lose their potency as they get heard in the debate and as people weigh up their views in a more balanced way. There is potentially some support for this theory in our poll findings, which show that after respondents had been exposed to a balanced debate the swing to Leave was not as dramatic as the difference in how convincing people found the arguments – although many different factors will have combined to create this result.

## Security and global influence

<sup>11</sup> <http://news.cbi.org.uk/news/cbi-to-make-economic-case-to-remain-in-eu-after-reaffirming-strong-member-mandate>

<sup>12</sup> Percentage points lead reflects the % who found the leave argument very or somewhat convincing – % who found the remain argument very or somewhat convincing.

Security and global influence is one of the most finely balanced areas of debate in the referendum contest, and it is also one of the most important for voters. Security and terrorism is a key issue amongst all subsets of voters, while global influence is a solid second tier issue.

Since the referendum was announced, clear dividing lines have emerged between the two camps. Remain supporters argue that the EU is crucial to defence and security, pointing to benefits such as exchange of criminal records and counter terrorism, as well as defence cooperation.<sup>13</sup> Whereas Leave supporters are focusing on control of borders, repeating the claim from the former Interpol chief who said open borders within the EU is “like hanging a sign welcoming terrorists to Europe”.<sup>14</sup>

When asked to express whether leaving or remaining would be better for security and terrorism, 42 per cent of poll respondents preferred Remain over 41 per cent who preferred Leave. On global influence, 51 per cent said that the UK’s influence in the world would be somewhat or much better as a result of staying in the EU, compared to 32 per cent saying influence would be better as a result of leaving. Other polls have indicated a similar lead for Remain in this area, once again demonstrating the power of the status quo in forming instinctive reactions about issues.<sup>15</sup>

However, once again, as respondents were exposed to the full arguments being used by each campaign, Leave moved into the lead on both issues. On the threat of terrorism, we tested two arguments being used by the campaigns, revealing an 11-point lead for Leave. We also found this lead is maintained amongst swing voters.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Remain argument:**

Whether it is implementing sanctions against Russia, sharing intelligence about terrorists or arresting criminals using the European Arrest Warrant, there is strength in numbers. Leaving Europe would threaten our safety. We are stronger and more secure as part of Europe than on our own.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Leave argument:**

Our membership of the European Union makes it harder for us to deal with criminals and track terrorists. The European Court of Justice ties up our police and courts in red tape and human rights law. Border-free Europe makes it so much easier for terrorists to reach the English Channel without passing through a single border control.<sup>18</sup>

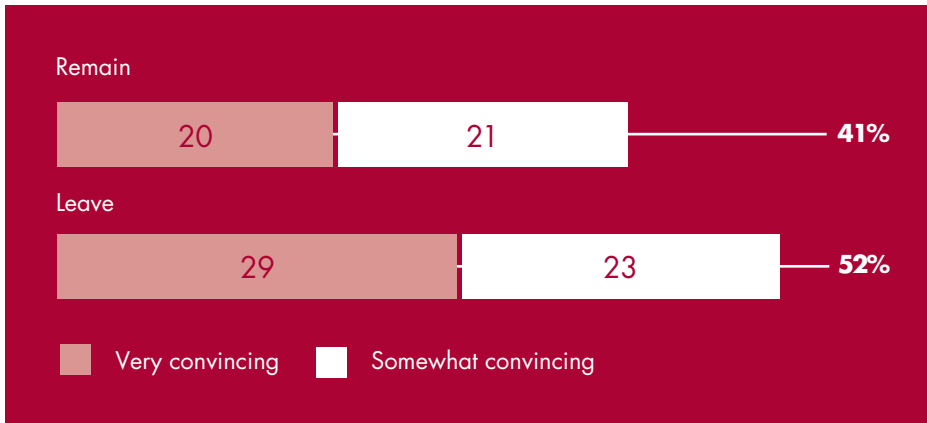
<sup>13</sup> For example, see Michael Fallon comments on day referendum announced.

<sup>14</sup> [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/eureferendum/12166345/European-referendum-Michael-Gove-explains-why-Britain-should-leave-the-EU.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/eureferendum/12166345/European-referendum-Michael-Gove-explains-why-Britain-should-leave-the-EU.html)

<sup>15</sup> <http://whatukthinks.org/eu/questions/do-you-think-britain-would-have-more-or-less-influence-in-the-world-if-it-left-the-eu>

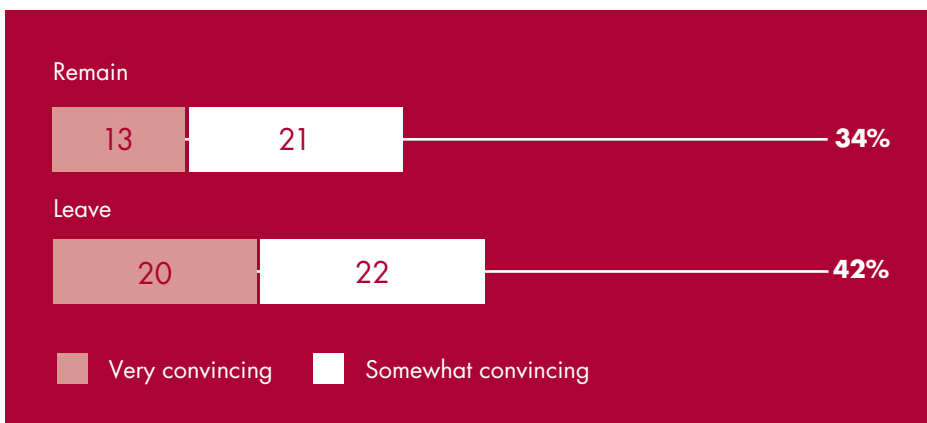
<sup>16</sup> Our poll was conducted before the recent terror attacks in Brussels.

<sup>17</sup> [www.strongerin.co.uk/security](http://www.strongerin.co.uk/security) & <sup>18</sup> [voteleavetakecontrol.org/briefing\\_safety](http://voteleavetakecontrol.org/briefing_safety) but edited to add reference to ECJ



We also tested the campaigns' arguments about global influence, resulting in another lead for Leave:

Argument	Text
<b>Remain argument:</b>	In today's complex world, the UK has more control over its destiny by staying inside organisations like the EU. Being part of Europe means we have stronger leadership on the world stage, enabling us to shape the future. <sup>19</sup>
<b>Leave argument:</b>	Leaving the EU would give us greater influence on a global level. The government would also be free to push for new global trade deals, and reinforce its links with the Commonwealth. As an English speaking nation, a major economy with vast resources in research and innovation, and with a proud past it would be better to exercise our voice on a global level than be an increasingly smaller voice within the EU. <sup>20</sup>



19 [www.strongerin.co.uk/leadership](http://www.strongerin.co.uk/leadership)

20 [www.leave.eu/fr/the-facts/on-global-influence](http://www.leave.eu/fr/the-facts/on-global-influence)

Once again, the Leave arguments convince more people than those of Remain, putting Leave in a commanding position on this crucial issue. But why is there such a difference between initial instincts and reactions to argument? Perhaps the Leave argument has not yet had sufficient cut through to be heard. But perhaps it is also because Leave are successfully tapping in to three powerful sources of fear: fear of the 'other', fear of terrorism, and fear of powerlessness in a rapidly changing world. With increasing insecurity and horrendous scenes on the news, it is an understandable emotional reaction to want to withdraw rather than engage. The 'Vote Leave, take control' message speaks to this.

### **Sovereignty and identity**

The battle over sovereignty and identity is the most amorphous in the referendum contest, but it is also one of the most important. It revolves around two central Leave arguments: that we need to take back control of law making from Brussels, and that we are weaker as a nation in Europe than we would be on our own. Michael Gove summarised the argument when he declared his support for the Leave campaign: *"The EU is built to keep power and control with the elites rather than the people. Even though we are outside the euro we are still subject to an unelected EU commission which is generating new laws every day and an unaccountable European Court in Luxembourg which is extending its reach every week, increasingly using the Charter of Fundamental Rights which in many ways gives the EU more power and reach than ever before."*<sup>20</sup>

71 per cent of those we polled said that leaving the EU would be better for the UK's control of its own laws.<sup>21</sup> The Leave argument being deployed to this end also performs well, with 58 per cent finding the following argument very or somewhat convincing: *"Leaving the EU would give Britain back control of its own laws, which would ensure that our national parliament remains a genuine, legitimate and democratic force. We should be free to have the final say over any laws that are implemented in our country."* A Remain argument to counter this, focused on remaining in the EU to help shape global trade rules rather than having to follow them without a say, was found very or somewhat persuasive by 40 per cent.

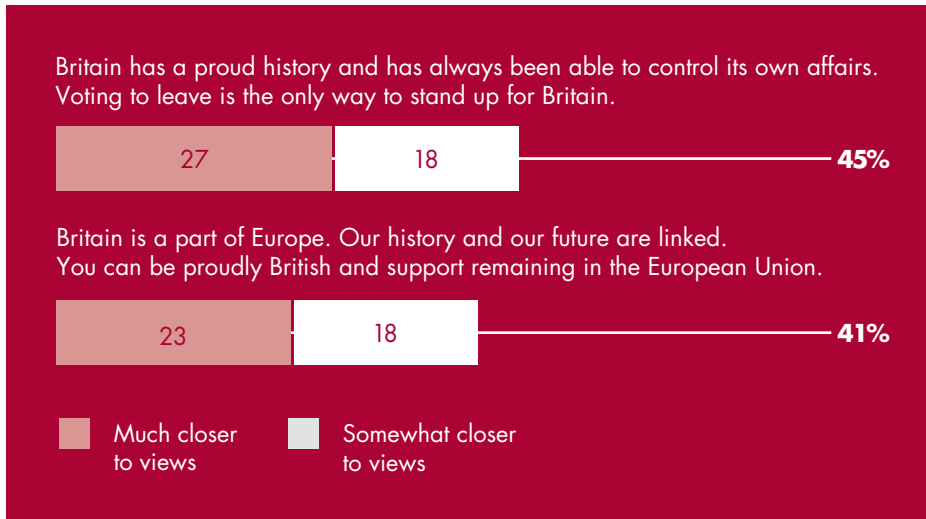
Respondents also indicated that they think leaving the EU would be better for 'pride in Britain', with 57 per cent believing there would be greater pride if we left and just 26 per cent thinking it would be better if we

20 [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/eureferendum/12166345/European-referendum-Michael-Gove-explains-why-Britain-should-leave-the-EU.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/eureferendum/12166345/European-referendum-Michael-Gove-explains-why-Britain-should-leave-the-EU.html)

21 Respondents were asked to put aside their voting intentions, and indicate whether leaving or staying in the EU would be much or somewhat better for 'controlling our laws'. 71% said it would be much or somewhat better if we leave.

remained.<sup>22</sup> While Leave is leading the patriotic argument at the moment, there is evidence that increased patriotism from Remain would help to blunt some of this impact. We tested a patriotic Remain argument in contrast to a patriotic Leave argument, and the Leave lead was significantly less than for the equivalent ‘first impressions’ question.

Patriotic Remain versus patriotic Leave (% who indicated the first or second statement was much or somewhat closer to their views)



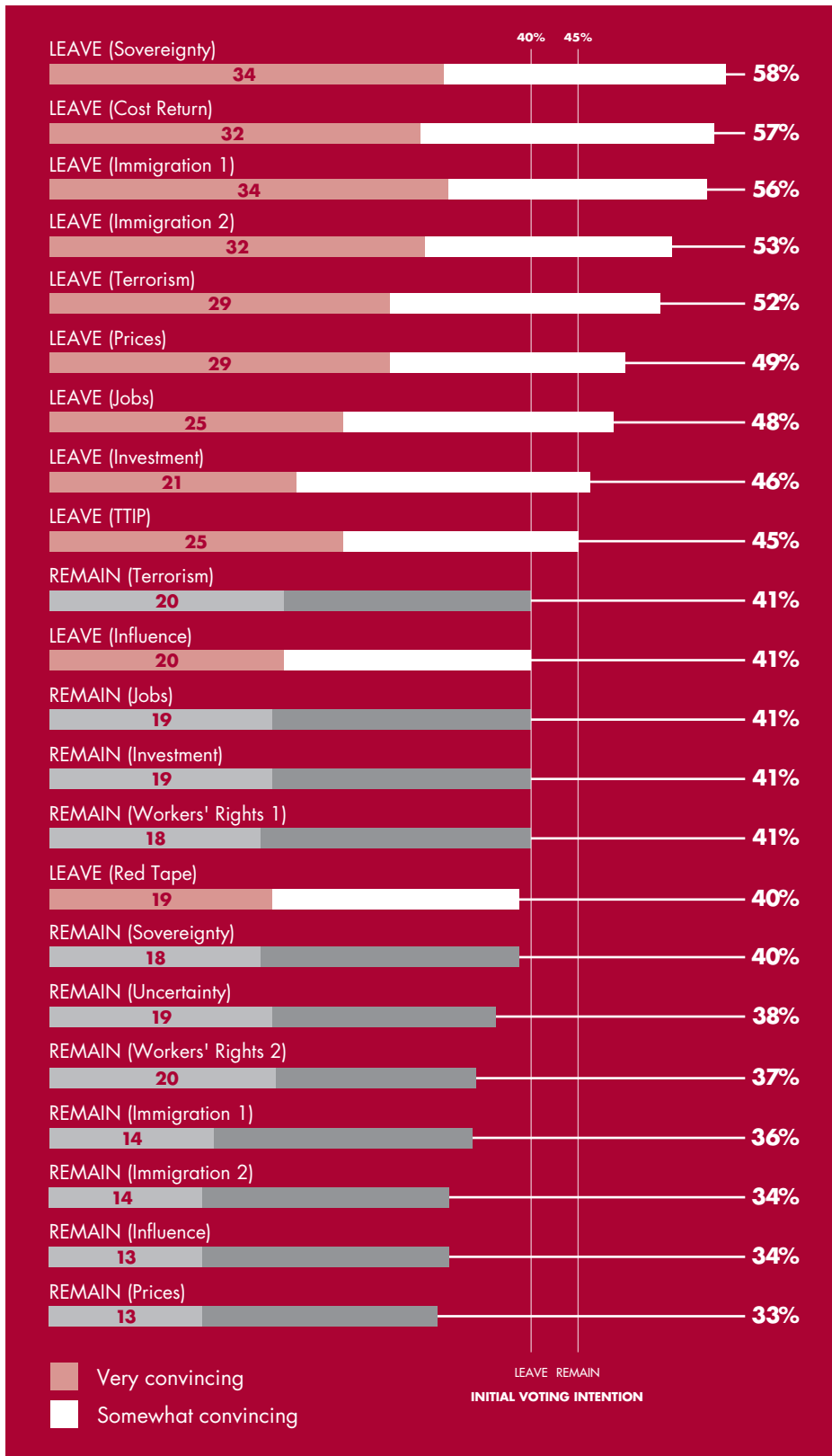
Much like immigration, control of laws is an area that shouldn't be in focus for the Remain campaign. It is an area of strength for Leave and it is hard to find persuasive arguments to counter the suggestion that the EU impacts on British laws. But Remain campaigners should not concede patriotism. By talking about the strength of Britain, they can mitigate people's first impression that leaving the EU would be better for British pride.

### Being the status quo is helping Remain lead the first impressions war, but Leave's detailed arguments seem to be more persuasive

Our poll shows that the detailed arguments currently being used by the Leave campaign are on the whole convincing to more people than the arguments being deployed by Remain. Leave's populist and emotive arguments speak to people's personal and economic insecurity. That means that if voters start to focus on the issues in more detail over the coming weeks, then Leave could move into the lead. The below graph shows the percentage that found each argument we tested very convincing or somewhat convincing. They were also able to indicate if they found the argument a little

<sup>22</sup> Respondents were asked to put aside their voting intentions, and indicate whether leaving or staying in the EU would be much or somewhat better for 'pride in Britain'. 57% said it would be much or somewhat better if we leave.

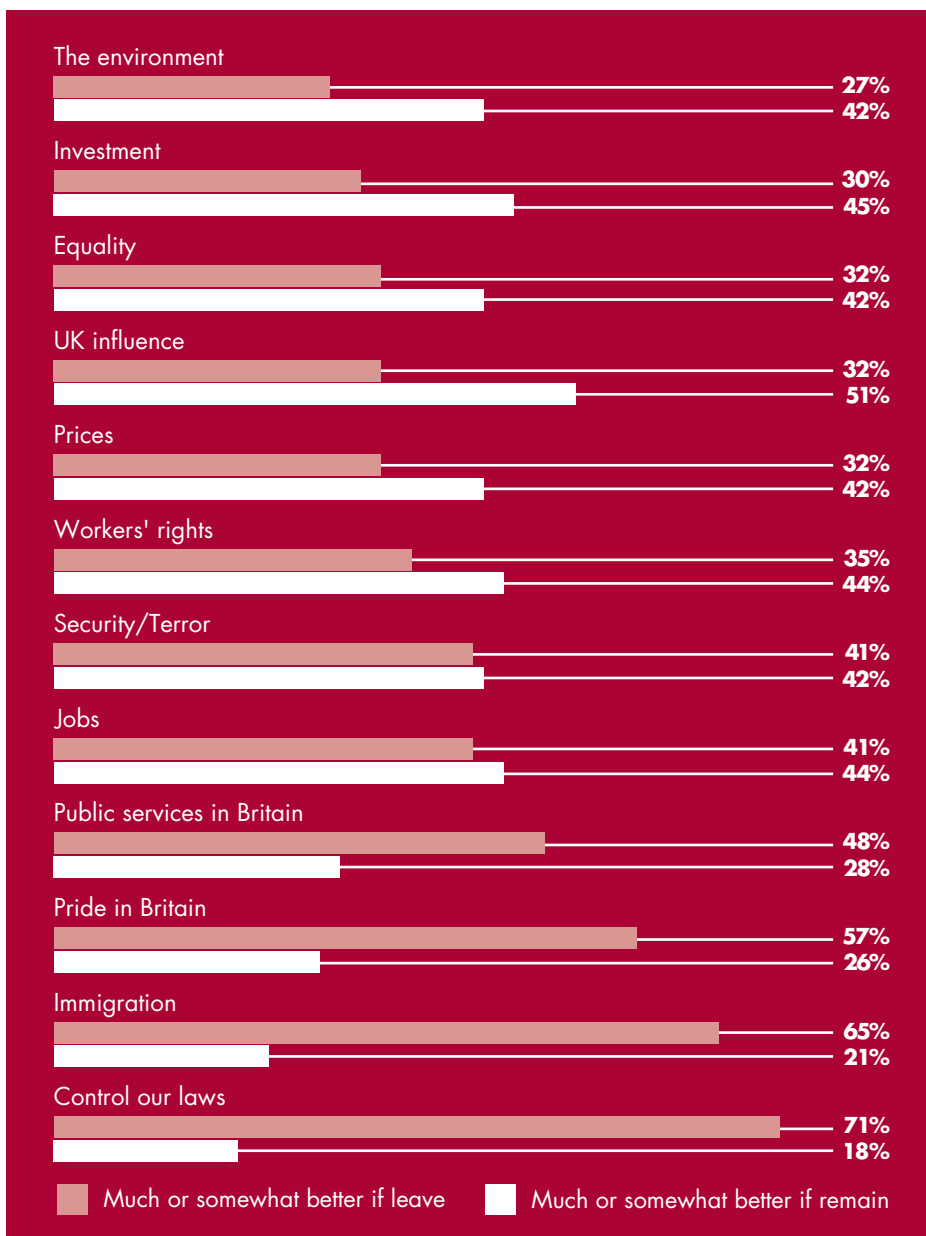
convincing, or not at all convincing, and were told to put aside current voting intentions. Leave arguments are in red, and Remain arguments are in blue. The vertical lines indicate the percentage who told us they would vote for Leave and for Remain (total population) at the start of the poll.



This exercise suggests that people find Leave arguments more convincing. They lead when it comes to ‘very convincing’ and ‘very/somewhat’ convincing. By contrast people were much less likely to select Leave arguments as ‘not at all convincing’ than they were the arguments from Remain.

There are two factors which might mitigate this bad news for the Remain camp. The first is that they are ahead in the battle of ‘first impressions’, presumably benefiting from being the proponents of the status quo. This is borne out by our polling across the majority of core issues in the referendum except for immigration, public services, control of laws and ‘pride in Britain’. Some of this instinctive Remain advantage could also be accounted for by the cue given by political parties and leading political figures.

Remain winning the first impressions race (% who selected ‘much’ or ‘somewhat’ better if we remain or ‘much’ or ‘somewhat’ better if we leave, total population)



The second is that they are winning the argument about risk. 52 per cent agree that leaving the EU would lead to years of uncertainty, compared to 27 per cent who think it would be straightforward (although this lead was slightly reduced when we tested a more developed argument which included arguments about trade deals).<sup>23</sup> By keeping the debate away from detail and focused on the uncertainty that could follow Brexit, they could increase their lead rather than lose it.

23 50% of respondents were asked to say which of these two statements came closer to their views: A vote to leave the EU would lead to years of uncertainty / A vote to leave the EU would be relatively straightforward. 52% said the first statement was much or somewhat closer to their views. The other 50% were asked the same question about two more developed statements: A vote to leave would lead to years of uncertainty as we try and negotiate trade deals with the EU and all the other countries around the world that have deals with the EU / A vote to leave would be relatively straightforward to carry out. Countries who sell goods to Britain, will want to continue doing so, so will want to agree trade deals with us on good terms. 45% opted for the first statement, against 40% who opted for the second.



## 2. The Tory civil war means both Labour campaigns must up their games

Conservative party politicians are in the midst of a civil war, and it is clear that their supporters are split down the middle on Europe as well. This creates an unusual level of influence for supporters of the Labour party – and therefore for Labour politicians and campaigns. For once, an opposition party could make the difference.

As it currently stands, just under two thirds of people who say they are Labour supporters<sup>24</sup> are in favour of remaining in the EU. Looking at the number of Labour voters from last May, this could be as many as 6 million potential voters. For many of these voters, a significant factor in their preference for Remain is likely to be the cue they are getting from Labour politicians. But the evidence shows that Labour Remain needs to do more here: one recent poll showed as many as 43 per cent of the population don't know the Labour party's position on Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Our poll also reveals a lack of motivation amongst Labour's Remain supporters, as well as in the Remain camp more generally. Just 56 per cent of those who said they voted for Labour last May indicated that they are very likely to vote in June. This is in contrast to 63 per cent of Conservative voters and 65 per cent of UKIP voters.

Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Remain campaign have more to do, and the Labour party's impressive electoral machine has not yet been switched to full throttle. Unless this changes, the turnout of Labour Remain supporters could be low, while their number could dwindle if the race tightens in the population at large. This is an opportunity for the Labour Leave campaign, and a serious challenge for Remain. So how should both sides react?

### Develop a stronger progressive case

The first thing to do is to work harder to promote a distinctive progressive case, separate to the core messaging of the umbrella campaigns. The Labour Remain campaign has not yet made the most of this opportunity, using many of the same arguments as the official Britain Stronger In Europe campaign. There have been a number of attempts by senior Labour spokespeople to use progressive arguments about internationalism and social solidarity, but these have little cut through. Our poll shows that just 14 per cent of Labour supporters selected 'a social Europe' as one of the three most important issues in the referendum campaign.

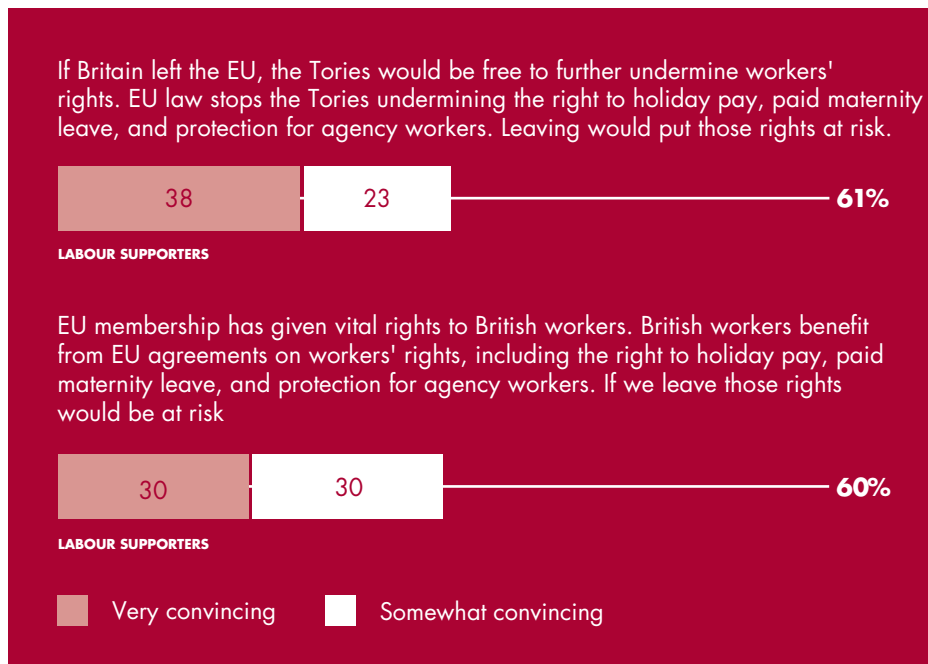
24 For the purposes of this chapter, 'Labour supporters' means those who told us they identify as Labour at the first time of asking. The sample size for this category was 547.

25 <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/03/07/tories-more-divided-labour>

Our research suggests that the issues most salient amongst Labour voters are broadly the same as the rest of the population, but with a greater importance given to jobs, and immigration ranking as the second most important issue rather than first. Workers’ rights is also an important issue. On jobs, 52 per cent of Labour supporters feel that remaining in the EU would be better for jobs and 61 per cent of Labour supporters found Remain’s argument on jobs very or somewhat convincing. On immigration, just 50 per cent of Labour supporters agree that the free movement of labour in Europe is good and benefits the economy and workers.

In addition to finding better ways to speak to Labour supporters about jobs and immigration, both campaigns should be confident of talking about a number of more progressive issues not being prioritised by the main campaigns. In particular, Remain should ramp up their discussion of Europe being a guarantor of rights at work. 29 per cent of Labour supporters think that workers’ rights is one of the three core issues at stake in the referendum, and that they also find arguments about rights at work very convincing. We tested two messages being used by the Labour Remain campaign about rights at work, and both perform well among Labour supporters.

26

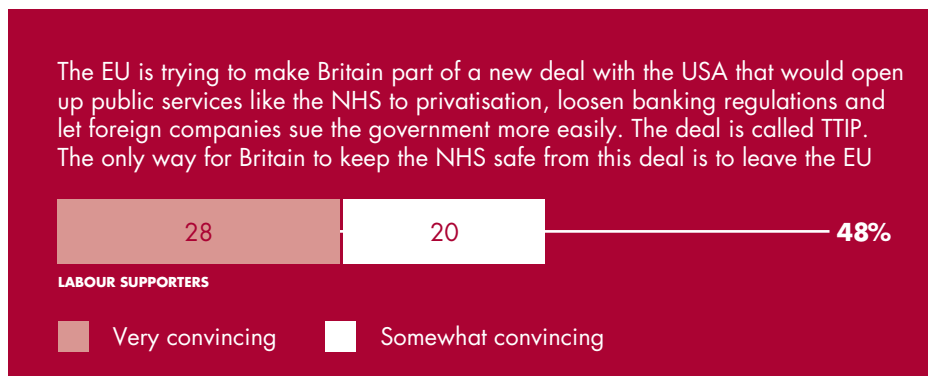


We also tested different evidence points about rights at work, listing the different rights delivered or guaranteed by the EU. Labour supporters selected prevention from discrimination as the most effective amongst these. 61 per cent of them also said that these rights at work either might

26 Arguments taken from Labour Party website ([www.labour.org.uk/index.php/inforbritain](http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php/inforbritain)) & LabourList (<http://labourlist.org/2016/02/eu-membership-is-bigger-than-camerons-reforms-says-alan-johnson>)

be or would be at risk under Brexit. Labour supporters are also strongly of the view that remaining in Europe would be better for 'equality', with 55 per cent agreeing, as opposed to just 23 per cent saying leaving would make equality worse. Talking up the risk of losing rights at work, as well as emphasising the EU's role as a leader for equality, seem two fruitful arguments for the Labour Remain campaign over the coming weeks.

Meanwhile the poll also shows that Labour Leave would do well to capitalise on untapped concerns about the potential role of the EU in undermining UK public services. 26 per cent of Labour supporters selected public services as one of their top three issues, in considering the referendum, and 48 per cent said they found Leave arguments about TTIP and privatisation very or somewhat convincing.



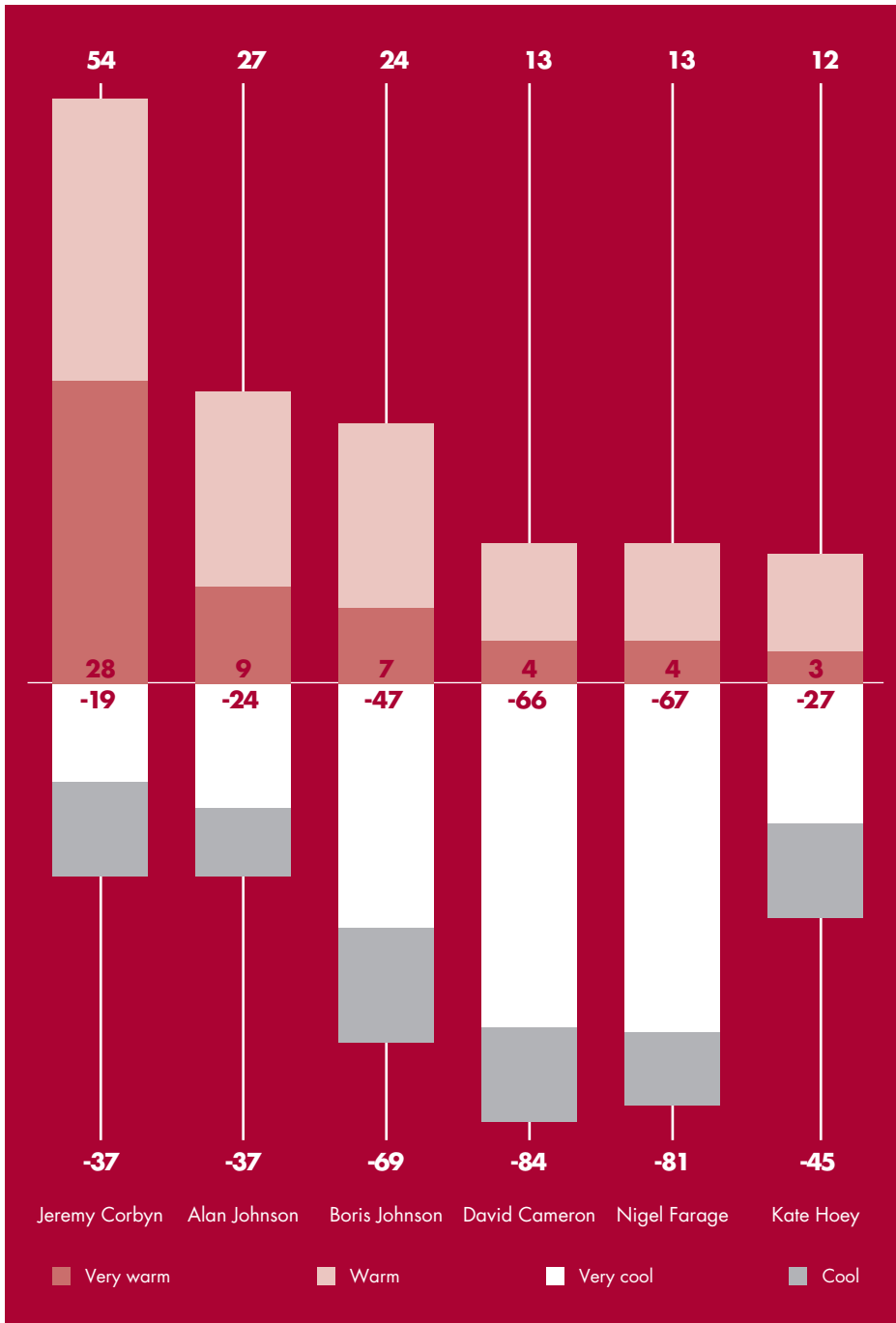
## Use the right message carriers

Both campaigns must also understand who their most trusted message carriers are. Here, Labour Leave is obviously at a disadvantage. Kate Hoey, the leader of the Labour Leave campaign, is not well known even amongst Labour voters, and leading Leave figures like Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage do not poll well amongst Labour supporters. Without a high profile Labour figure backing the out campaign, they are unlikely to be able to counter this.

The problem for Labour's remainers is the low profile of Jeremy Corbyn. It is clear from our poll that Jeremy Corbyn is more influential than Alan Johnson, and is the most important message carrier amongst Labour supporters. Matthew Goodwin and YouGov have carried out an experiment that suggests Corbyn could boost Labour support for Remain by a significant 7 points.<sup>27</sup> To succeed, Labour Remain need to do more to get the Labour leader seen and heard.

<sup>27</sup> <http://whatukthinks.org/eu/cameron-corbyn-and-farage-how-might-they-affect-the-eu-referendum-vote>

Favourability of key players amongst Labour supporters<sup>28</sup>



28 This graph shows the favourability ratings given by labour supporters. They were asked to give a ranking from 0 to 100, with 100 being 'feel very warm' to 0 'feel very cold'. The numbers for Kate Hoey feel implausible given her low profile amongst the general public.

## The importance of tone

The tone of the campaigns will have an important impact on Labour supporters. There are three crucial components to this: how partisan the campaigns are, how positive they are, and how patriotic they sound.

Given the tendency of both Labour campaigns to replicate messages used by cross party campaigns, we thought it would be interesting to test whether more partisan messages would have greater persuasion power. While 84 per cent of Labour supporters agreed that 'the Tories are on the side of big company bosses and would reduce workers' rights if they could get away with it', we discovered that inserting more Tory attack lines into Labour Remain messaging does not help their cause. Labour supporters were 7 to 10 points more likely to say that a positive message about the benefits of the EU made them more likely to vote to remain than two messages we tested which focused on the referendum as an opportunity to inflict damage on the Conservative party. Positivity trumps attacks on the Conservative party or the prime minister. Interestingly, the opposite is true for Labour Leave, with partisan messages performing better than a more generic Leave message. For example, a Leave message focused on attacking David Cameron performed 5 points better than a core Leave message without any Tory attack.

We already know that an important overarching frame for the referendum is the battle between a positive vision of the control regained in the event of Brexit, and a negative message about the risks associated with change. Amongst the total population, Leave supporters are 12 points more likely than Remain voters to say that they will vote to Leave because they feel positive about the benefits of their decision, rather than worried about the consequences of the opposite course of action. Amongst Labour voters, the numbers appear to be much closer: about half of Labour voters in each camp feel positively. While David Cameron's best course of action is Project Fear, Labour can play more of a role in making a positive case for Europe as well.

Thirdly, neither campaign should underestimate the importance of patriotism in this referendum. When we asked respondents if remaining or leaving would be better for 'pride in Britain', Leave had an 8 point lead amongst Labour supporters (compared to a 31 point lead in the total population). But, as we saw earlier, this instinct can be blunted by ensuring that campaign messaging sounds patriotic. When we tested a Remain statement which said you can be proudly British and support staying in the EU, against a Leave statement about standing up for Britain, the Remain statement led amongst Labour supporters by more than 20 points.

The Labour campaigns should also realise the English dimension to this contest. Amongst the total population, Remain has a lead amongst

those who define themselves as British, and Leave has a lead amongst those who define themselves as English. Given the increasing clamour for a greater voice for England, and the number of Labour voters switching to UKIP, the Labour party must ensure that the language and emphasis they use in the referendum doesn't worsen this problem further down the line. By campaigning for Remain, Labour must ensure it doesn't further alienate Labour Leave voters. On the other hand Labour Leave must ensure they don't do UKIP's work for them, and must keep strong partisan messages at the heart of their campaign.

### **Get out the vote**

Without the support of Labour's electoral machine, Labour Leave is at a disadvantage when it comes to turning out their vote. They should instead focus on getting their arguments heard, targeting potential switchers. But, for Labour Remain, turnout is absolutely key.

We know that Remain supporters in general – and Labour Remain supporters in particular – are less motivated than Leave supporters to vote, with just 56% of those who voted Labour in May indicating that they are very likely to vote this time. Persuading these voters to the polling stations is not straightforward for Labour HQ or remainers in the wider labour movement, but there are potentially as many as 6 million votes up for grab.

With the May elections approaching, a seeming lack of enthusiasm from the leader's office and increasing pressure on resources, it is hard to see how the Labour party can best maximise its impact. But as well as seizing the opportunity to ensure Labour voters make the difference in this referendum, there is also an additional benefit which they should not forget. A hard fought campaign gives Labour the opportunity to speak to voters in places they don't usually focus, starting to find a foothold in seats Labour must win in the future. Here the wider labour movement may also be useful: trade union organisation can sometimes reach areas of the country where the party machine is not strong.

## **Facing the future: Avoiding this situation happening again**

Labour voters are crucial to the outcome of this referendum, but the Labour movement is struggling to find the language to excite them. This is not simply the fault of the Labour Remain campaign, but instead the result of a problem that has been years in the making. As Mark Leonard argued in his influential Fabian pamphlet *Europe Was the Future Once...and How it Can be Once Again*, the traditional social democratic reasons to support Europe have been turned on their heads.<sup>29</sup> The pace of migration has caused conflict in communities, and the free market has caused economic insecurity and crisis across the continent.

As Europe has become politically difficult over recent years, too often Labour has tried to avoid the subject rather than substantively engage with it. This has left the wrong impression that they are simply defenders of the status quo, rather than proponents of radical change. If Remain do win in June, Labour shouldn't make the same mistake again. They should lead the charge for reform.

29 [www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Europe-was-the-Future-Once.pdf](http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Europe-was-the-Future-Once.pdf)

### **3. Working class voters are a forgotten force in this referendum**

Working class voters have often been at the sharp end of decisions taken by Europe.<sup>30</sup> Analysis has shown that the exploitation of migrant workers has contributed to holding down the wages of the very lowest paid in Britain. People also have reasonable concerns about the pressure on schools and public services in Britain's poorest areas, especially in the context of funding cuts. And, global economic insecurity has deepened poverty and inequality.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that if the EU referendum were held only amongst working class voters, Leave would be likely to win. Our poll gives Leave a lead of 6 points amongst those in socioeconomic groups C2DE. Part of the reason for this is the greater salience of Leave messages amongst working class voters, and part of it is because the Remain campaign have failed to find a way to speak convincingly to them. They have built a case for Europe on the backs of business people and statistics, and they have failed to tell a story about local jobs and rights at work.

In the Scottish referendum, working class dissatisfaction with the status quo and the political 'establishment' formed the backbone of the independence campaign. If the EU race ignites in the same way Scottish independence did, the decisions of working class voters could make the difference.

#### **Focus on the kitchen table not the boardroom**

Working class voters should be a focus for both campaigns, although they should not be treated as a monolithic group. While Leave leads, Remain isn't very far behind. And, our poll shows that working class voters broadly share the same policy concerns about the EU referendum as the total population. Immigration is the top issue, followed by control of laws and terrorism. However, our results reveal a few key insights that both campaigns should bear in mind.

The first is that they should focus their messages at the kitchen table rather than the board room, connecting messages about Europe to things voters personally value. Our poll finds some support for this, with kitchen table issues like prices and rights at work being given greater priority by working class voters. The most significant gap is for prices, which are important for 25 per cent of the working class population compared to 21 per cent of the total population.

<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, 'working class' should be taken to mean voters who are in socioeconomic group C2, D or E (sample size of 1,015).



Our poll also revealed that there is a need for a louder conversation about rights at work, particularly from the Remain camp. The issue is not yet particularly salient for working class voters (1 in 5 selected it among their top three for the referendum) but working class voters are very divided on whether rights would be stronger 'in' or 'out' (38 per cent of them said that the issue would be better if the UK remained in the EU, 39 per cent said they would be stronger out). When we attached rights at work to the concept of risk and the Conservative party, the numbers shifted. 59 per cent of working class voters said they agreed with the statement that 'The Tories are on the side of big company bosses and would reduce workers' rights if they could get away with it'. Given a third of working class voters believe that their rights at work are safe regardless of the outcome of the referendum, the Remain campaign should talk up the risk of losing workers' rights, as well as talking more about the benefits they bring.

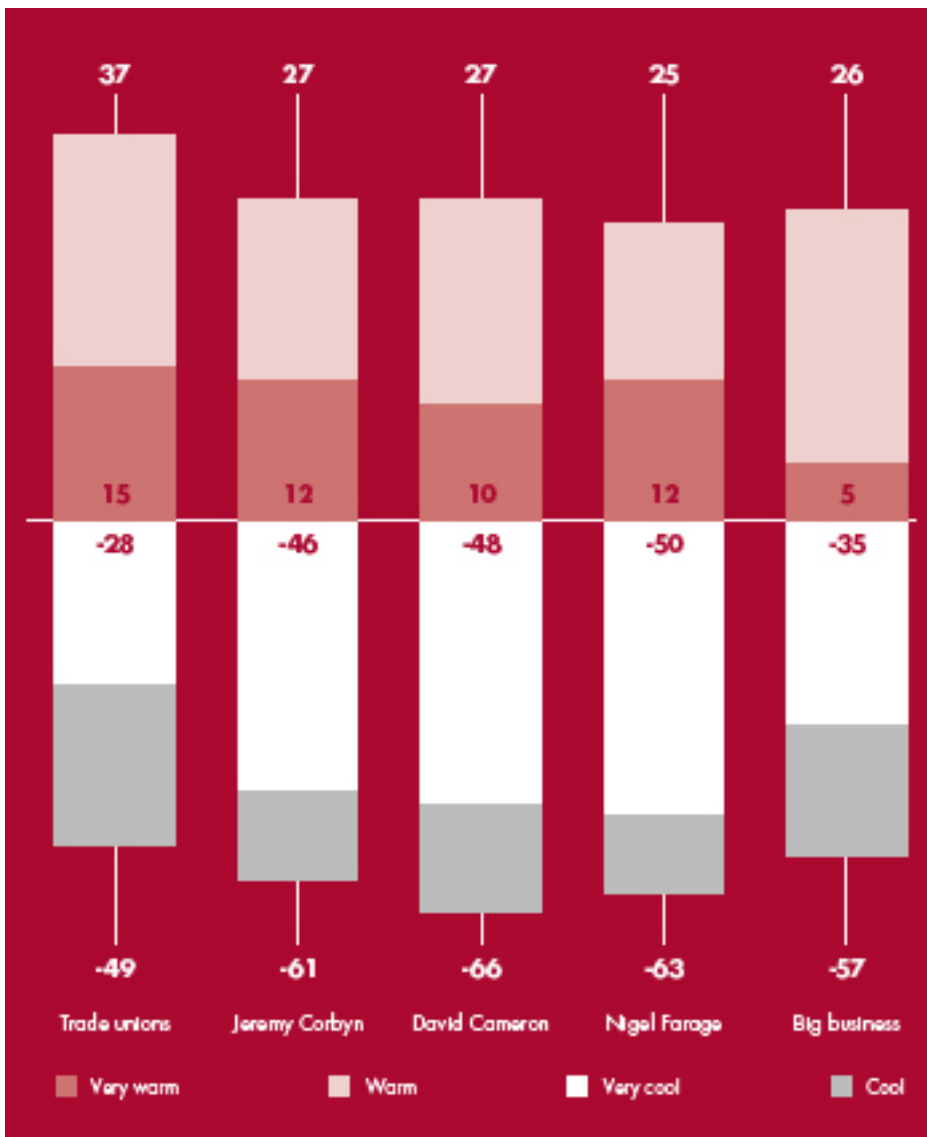
Thirdly, it is clear that there is a need for an honest conversation about immigration, which has a big impact on the lives of working class people. 57 per cent of working class respondents selected immigration as one of their top issues for the referendum, and more than half are very or somewhat convinced by the Leave arguments on the issue. Our polling also suggests that concern about immigration is linked to personal and economic insecurity. Leave arguments linked to jobs and immigration perform very well, with concerns about jobs rooted in worries about competition from European workers. 49 per cent said that the best argument for why the EU is bad for jobs is that 'there are hundreds of thousands of workers competing with British workers for jobs in this country'.

### **Attempt to rebuild trust**

We know that the whole electorate feels alienated and powerless when it comes to the EU and politics more generally. This is particularly pronounced amongst the working classes, one area where Leave's vote is less likely to turnout. Just 51 per cent of C2DE respondents said they would definitely go to the polls, compared to 58 per cent of the total population.

Our findings revealed another important lesson for both campaigns, the importance of finding the right message carrier. The most prominent figures in the referendum campaign so far have been business people and politicians, yet we know that both are highly distrusted by working class voters. The combination of Tory politicians and business leaders is especially toxic (59 per cent of our working class respondents said they saw the Conservative party as on the side of bosses). So who can cut through? The strongest message carrier according to our poll are the trade unions, who are viewed with less hostility than other protagonists in the debate.

Favourability of key players amongst C2DE voters<sup>31</sup>



31 Question asked was: Please rate your feelings toward some people and organisations, with 100 meaning a very warm favourable feeling; 0 meaning a very cold unfavourable feeling (under 50 plotted as negative, results among working class voters).



