

Still neck-and-neck – but both Leave and Remain have reasons to be cheerful

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In his latest update on the campaigns, **Matthew Goodwin** finds that despite high-profile pro-Remain interventions from Barack Obama, the Treasury and other luminaries, the polls remain neck-and-neck. Both sides have reason to think that will change in their favour when polling day arrives.

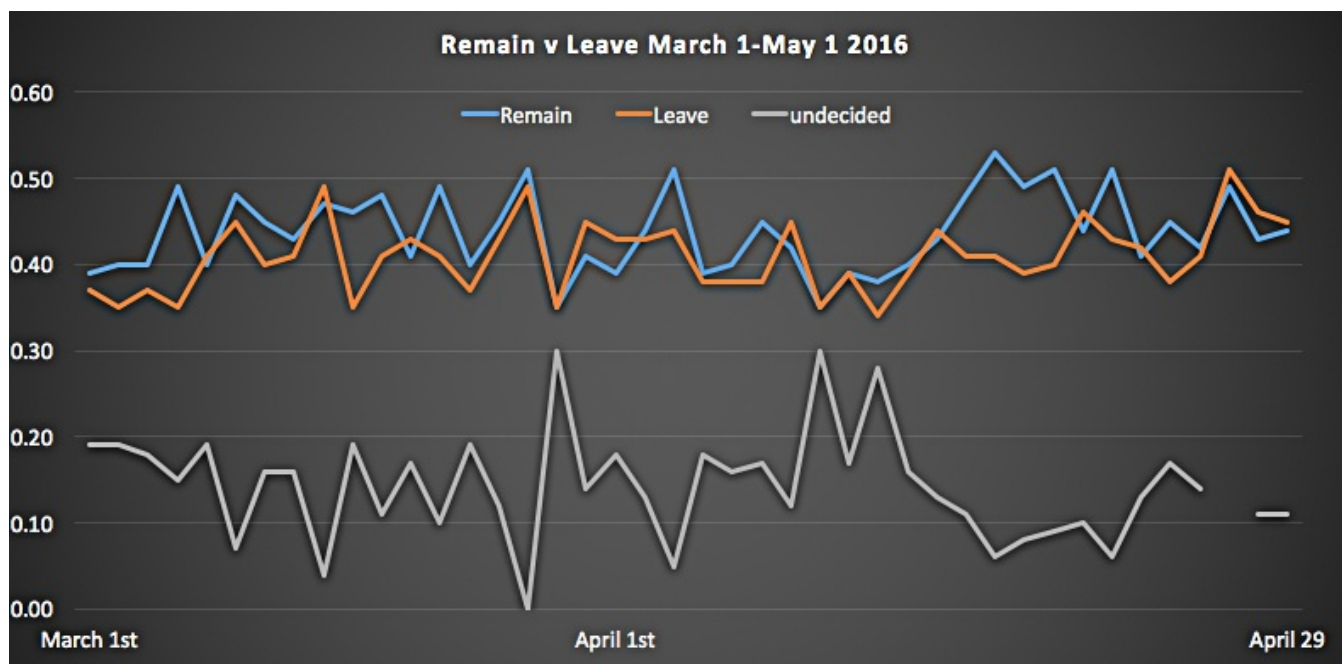


There are only just over six weeks until Britain votes on its EU membership. When I last wrote, about a month ago, the race to win the referendum was a dead heat. Once voters who said they were undecided had been excluded, Remain was on 50% and Leave was on 50%. But since then a lot has happened.

There has been a [very big nudge](#) from President Obama to vote Remain. There have been [warnings from the Treasury](#), the governor of the Bank of England and many others about the claimed economic risks that accompany Brexit. And there have been passionate calls to vote Remain from [Sir John Major](#) and Nick Clegg and not so passionate calls from Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn.

Yet despite all of this it appears that the race has not fundamentally changed course. When we look at the data, the picture that greets us is familiar. While the bookers remain convinced that Britain will vote to remain in the EU, giving this outcome an [implied chance of 71%](#), in the authoritative [Poll of Polls](#), which calculates the average figures based on the six most recent polls, Remain is on 50% and Leave is on 50%.

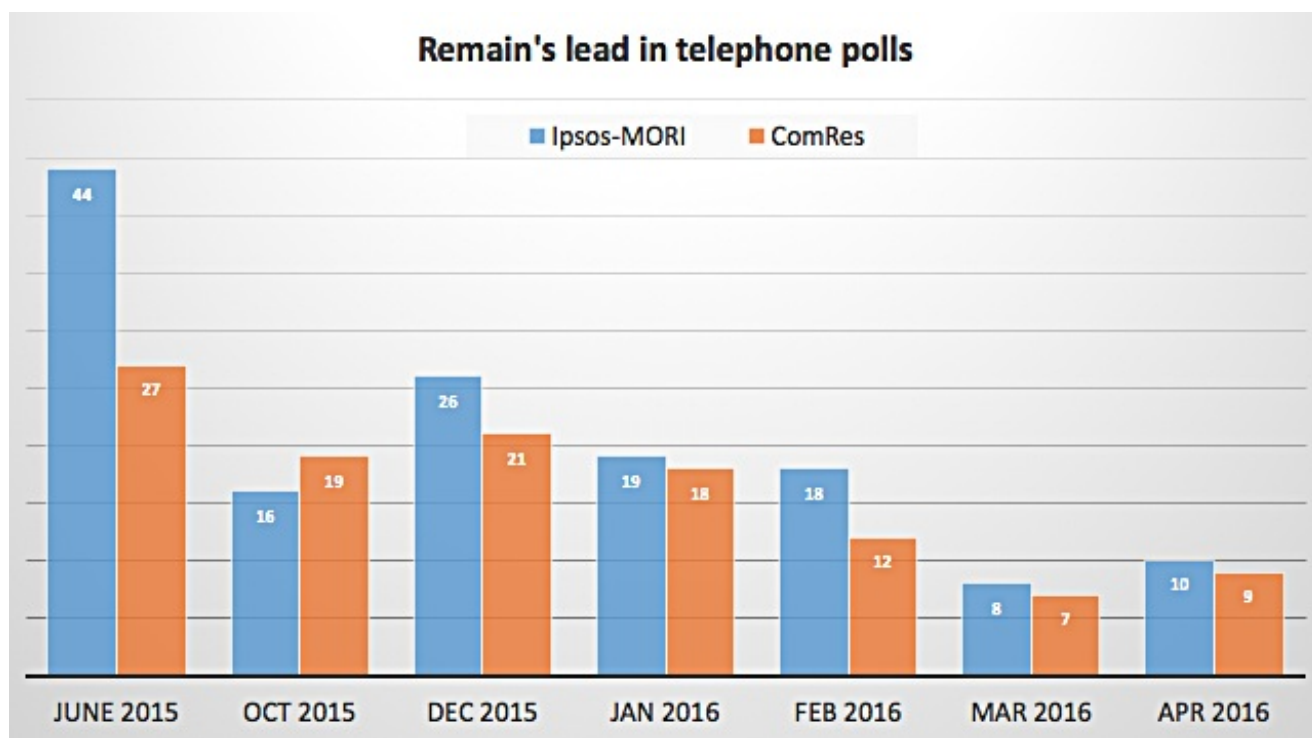
Or let's look at this from another angle. According to my calculations, throughout April Remain averaged a 3 point lead over Leave, 44% to 41%. While this is well within the margin of error these are the exact same figures that I also have for the preceding month of March. At least as far as the polls are concerned, therefore, there is little if any evidence that the events of the past month have produced a significant or lasting advantage for Remain (more on that [here](#)).



But let's dig around a little more to see if we can see any underlying advantages for Remain or Leave. Ultimately, who you believe is ahead will depend on how you interpret the data and what you believe will ultimately sway voters on the day. Remainers could point to three things.

First, while the overall race appears to remain close the Remainers could perhaps argue that they have had a better time of late. While it is currently a dead heat in the Poll of Polls, for much of April Remain was ahead. At its peak the pro-EU side was ahead by 8 points. Across 24 separate polls conducted since April 1, Leave was only ahead in 8 and never by more than 3 points. Remain was ahead in 14 and held more commanding leads of up to 11 points.

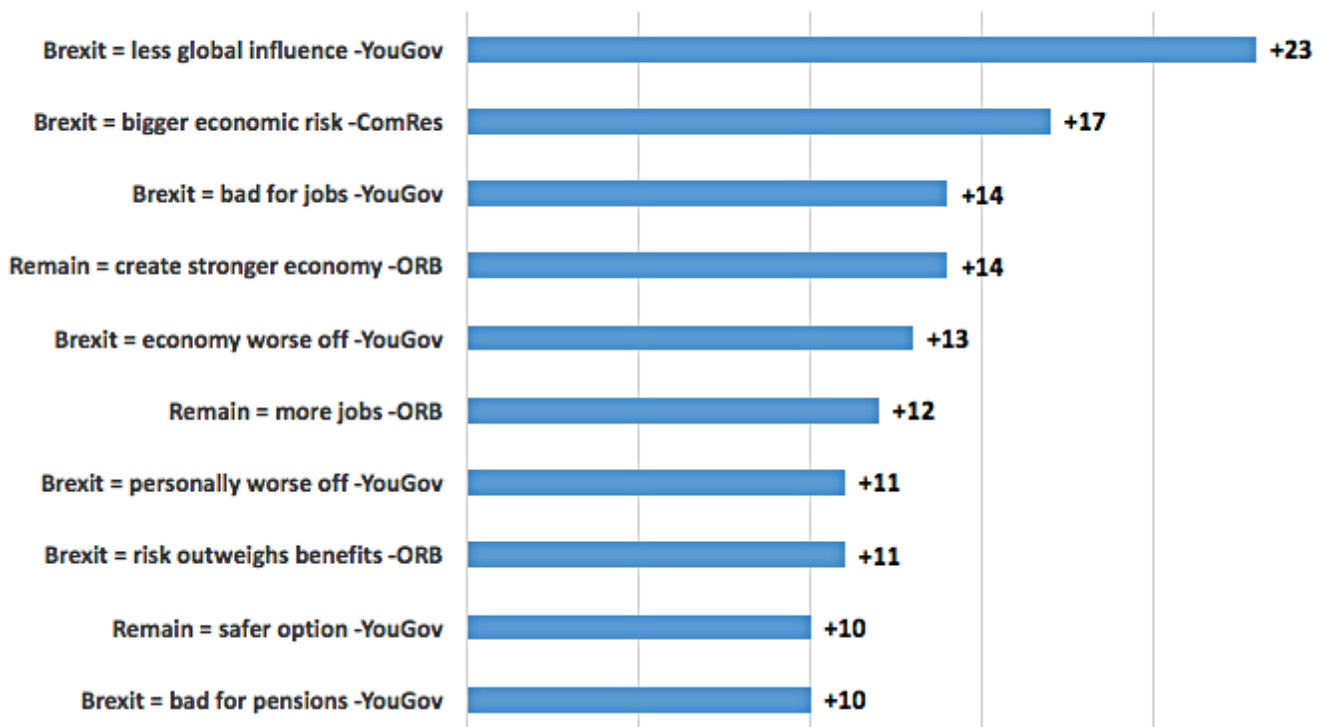
Remainers might also expect to re-establish a lead once the next batch of telephone polls arrive. Polls conducted over the telephone have traditionally put Remain ahead, and often by decent margins, though in recent months this lead has narrowed. Yet since I last wrote the erosion of support for Remain in the phone polls has stalled and its position has stabilised, as shown below. Indeed, in other telephone polls in recent days by firms like Survation and ORB Remain has walked away with a 7 or 8 point lead. With this in mind the Remainers might also point out that the British people clearly do not believe that Britain will vote to Leave – in the latest [ORB poll](#) just 17% think the likely result will be a Brexit.



Second, Remainers might point to new evidence which suggests they are having the better campaign. According to [new data](#) most voters feel that it is the Remain camp that has a clear vision for Britain after the referendum, are running the best campaign with a clear message, is the more credible and trustworthy campaign and is providing more information. More voters also say they have heard from Remain. It may be that voters are picking up on pro-Remain messages from David Cameron, business and some media but it is difficult for Eurosceptics to escape the conclusion that it is their rivals who are seen by most people as running the better and more credible campaign.

Third, if you believe that voters will ultimately be swayed by perceptions of risk then there is now ample evidence that Remain has a key advantage. Those campaigning to keep Britain in the EU can point to a string of surveys in recent days that – in different ways – ask voters about how the two possible outcomes will affect the country. The chart below presents net scores for a range of questions that probe how people think Brexit or remaining in the EU will impact on jobs, the economy, pensions or Britain's global influence. Consistently, more people view Brexit as the greater risk and as having negative effects on the economy and global influence. Eurosceptics have so far failed to de-risk Brexit, at least on the economic dimension.

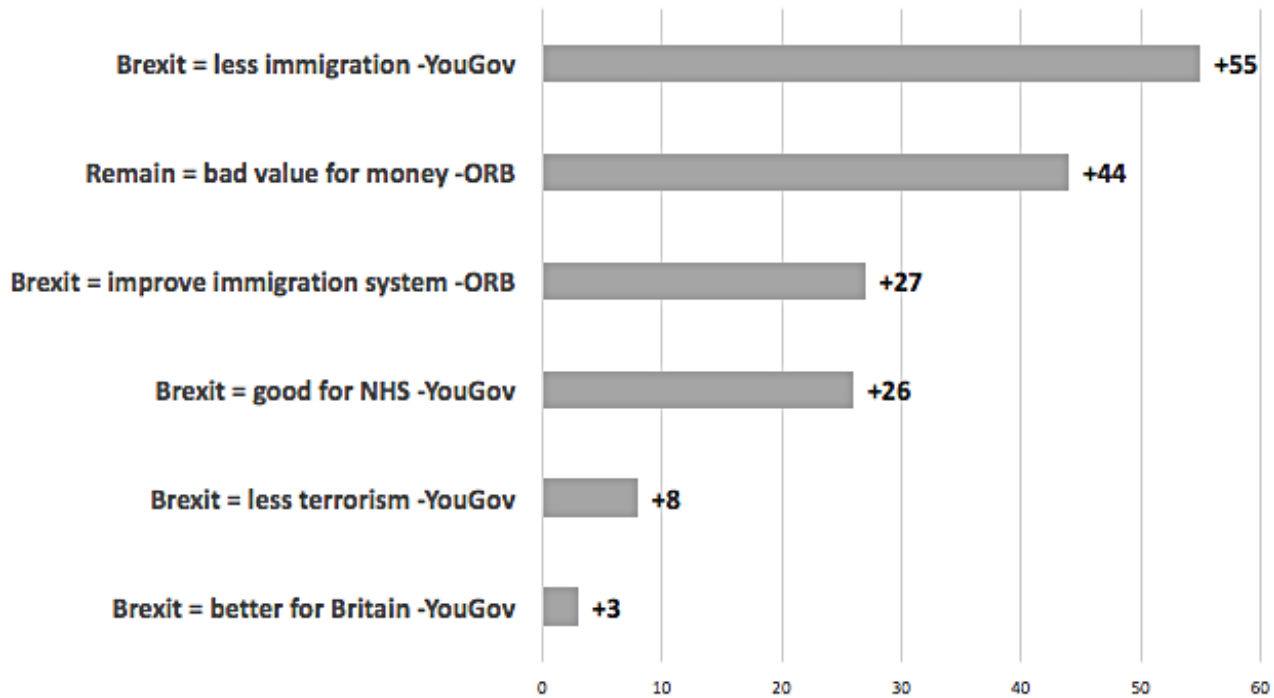
Net score - Brexit vs Remain



The above data points to important, fundamental advantages for the Remain camp. But what about the Leavers, what can they point to? First, they are keeping pace with Remain in the polls and despite a concerted effort from political and business elites to set out the pro-EU case. The resilience of the Leave vote should not be underestimated and is reflected in the fact that since President Obama returned home no less than four polls have put Leave ahead. One thing now seems reasonably certain: whatever the outcome on June 23 Britain is likely to see a strong Leave vote, which will [cast a shadow](#) long after the referendum.

Second, there also remain clearly identifiable opportunities for Leavers. These opportunities can be seen by returning to the surveys above but looking at areas away from the economy. Take a look at the chart below. This time you see how it is the Leave camp who hold important advantages over Remain, but on different territory. More voters feel that Brexit would help tackle terrorism, would help the National Health Service, improve the immigration system and lower immigration. The immigration motive should not be dismissed as a fringe concern. This issue is currently the top issue of concern for most voters and, [as I show here](#), is the primary motive for Leave voters. In short, for many voters this has already become a referendum about immigration rather than Britain's relationship with the EU. It is because of this issue that the Eurosceptics are managing to keep pace with Remain.

Net score - Brexit vs Remain



There are also other openings. A clear majority of the population also view the amount that Britain gives to the EU as representing 'bad value for money' and [would \(by far\) want to see](#) this money redirected into the health service. So there is some evidence that one of the core messages of Vote Leave has cut through. It is also worth noting that [a slightly higher number](#) feel that, overall, Brexit would be better for Britain, even if most voters remain wary about the economic risks that it might entail. This suggests, therefore, that while most voters appear to dislike how EU membership is changing Britain they simultaneously feel deeply anxious about what the alternative might do to the country's, and their own, finances. Had Eurosceptics made more progress on the economic front then you can begin to see how the pendulum might well have been firmly on the side of Brexit.

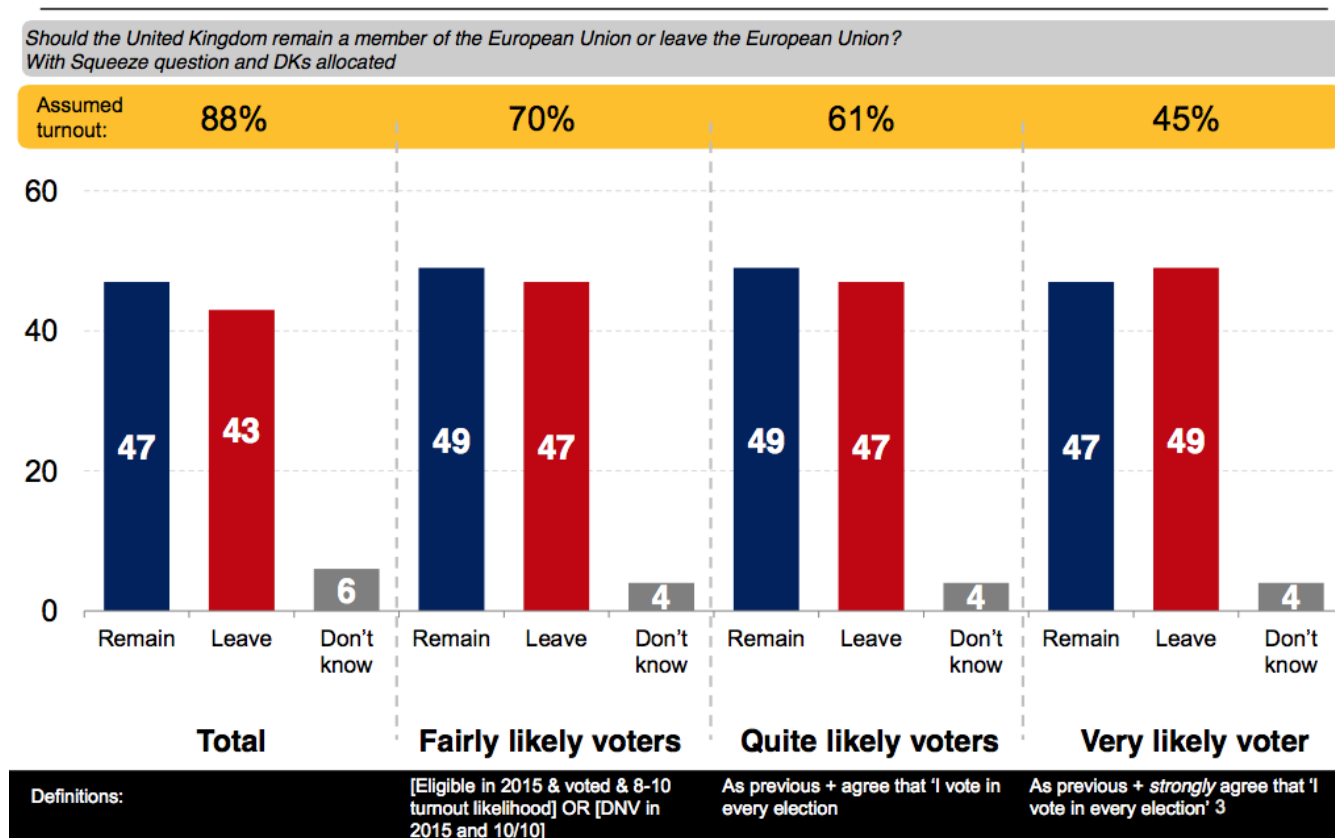


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Lastly, Leavers now also routinely point to the turnout factor, contending that in most polls you can see an 'enthusiasm gap' between Remain and Leave voters. It does appear that Brexit-minded voters are more likely to say

they are enthusiastic about the referendum and will also turnout on the day. Yet as any member of Ed Miliband's team will tell you, what people claim they will do at the polls does not always translate into reality. Nonetheless, there has emerged [evidence](#) of how lower turnout among Remain voters could potentially hand victory to Leave amid a tight race and low turnout. Research by the pollsters Greenberg, Quinlan and Rosner indicates how Remain's prospects could deteriorate as overall turnout falls. This is shown below. Remain's lead declines as overall turnout falls and then, among those who say they are the most likely to turnout, disappears altogether.

Of course, the reality is that we will really not know how turnout influences the vote until we are huddled around our television screens seven weeks from now...



Further reading

[The Treasury's Brexit analysis and immigration](#) – Jonathan Portes

[5 ways David Cameron wins the referendum](#) – Matthew Goodwin

[How much does Britain pay the EU?](#) – Iain Begg

[Firing a blank?](#) – John Curtice

[Britain's military standing would not suffer after Brexit](#) – Anand Menon

[The economic case for Brexit](#) – Philip Whyman

[Facts behind the claims series](#) – UK In a Changing Europe

his post represents the views of the author and not those of BrexitVote, nor the LSE.

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