

# Desire for change and rejection of a 'hard Brexit' motivated young people in the General Election



*A new survey of voters in the recent UK general election has revealed that young voters – those between the ages of 18 and 24 years old – were significantly more motivated by a desire for change, a rejection of the vision of Brexit that the Government was promoting, and frustration with the current political climate than the rest of the voting population, write **Michael Bruter** and **Sarah Harrison**.*

When it comes to party leadership, however, the young only marginally differed from the rest of the population in terms of expressing support for the leader of the party they voted for (which was Labour in 63 per cent of cases). The survey, designed by academics at the ECREP Electoral Psychology initiative at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and conducted by Opinium, sampled 2,004 British voters respondents between 13 and 16 June. The data were weighted for demographic and social variables but also to match the actual turnout and vote choice of the population\*.

Compared to the rest of the population, young voters were found to be 16 per cent more likely to be motivated by a desire for change than the average voter, 12 per cent more likely to be expressing their opposition to a certain vision of Brexit than average; 11% more likely to express frustration at the current political situation, and also 11% more likely to express support for the project of the party that they voted for. All four of those motivations were mentioned by over 80 per cent of young people aged 18-24. By contrast, there was no major difference between respondents aged 18-24 and the rest of the population when it came to wanting stability, better representation, or expressing enthusiasm for the leader of the party that they voted for, with responses largely in line with the answers from the rest of the population.

These results suggest that young people are expressing a strong urge for change but also a rejection of the 'Brexit route' which they see as a populist vision of change. The responses also indicate that many young people felt marginalised by last year's referendum and believe that it has created an unprecedented distance between two parts of the population that find it increasingly hard to see eye to eye on the country that Britain should become.



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In this context, a large majority of young people have chosen to vote to weigh more in the political debate, but also to warn politicians and fellow citizens alike that they intend to stick to their guns when it comes to the fundamental values that they believe in and to the deeply entrenched belief of many young people that they still belong to Europe.

The survey also reveals that, as with the turnout for the 2016 EU referendum, the turnout of young people was significantly higher for young people than has been usual in the past and, after controlling for registration, was not statistically different from the average of the population. This is very unusual, the researchers point out, and suggests a surge in participation for the 2017 general election when compared to previous elections.

The vote of 18-24 year olds largely favoured Labour (63 per cent) whilst the Conservative vote was well below average among that age group (24 per cent). When asked to characterise the atmosphere of the recent General Election, the main adjectives mentioned by young people were tense (38 per cent), democratic (31 per cent), aggressive (28 per cent), fractious (27 per cent). By contrast, only 9 per cent of young citizens described the atmosphere of the election as constructive and only 8 per cent as respectful.

When asked how they felt towards people who voted differently from them, young people felt more hostility than the rest of the population. 71 per cent expressed some anger at people who voted for the party they liked least (against 45 per cent for the population as a whole), 75 per cent expressed frustration (against 62 per cent for the population average), 66 per cent expressed distrust (against 57 per cent for the national average), and 57 per cent even described feeling some disgust towards those people who voted for the party that they liked least (against an overall average of 44 per cent).

\*Opinium Research carried out an online survey of 2,004 UK adults aged 18+ from 13th to 16 June 2017, including 1,941 who were registered to vote. Results have been weighted to representative criteria of the UK.

*A full report on the survey and its findings will be published later this year.*

*This blog represents the views of the author and not those of LSE Brexit blog, nor the LSE.*

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