One-dimensional or two-dimensional?

The changing dividing lines of Britain's electoral politics

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Support for political parties in Britain traditionally varied along a left-right dimension, with 'left-wing' voters, who were concerned about inequality, supporting Labour and 'right-wing' voters, who were more concerned about the promotion of growth, supporting the Conservatives. However, the Brexit debate divided voters along a different ideological dimension – between 'libertarians' on the one hand and 'authoritarians' on the other. This chapter analyses trends in the ideological basis of party support since voters opted to leave the EU. It considers whether the libertarian-authoritarian dimension remains as important as it was during the Brexit debate, or whether the politics of 'left' and 'right' are once again dominating the structure of party support.

Libertarian-authoritarian dimension has become more important

Despite the lack of debate about Brexit since the UK left the EU at the beginning of 2020, the libertarian-authoritarian dimension is more strongly related to patterns of party identification now than it was at the time of the EU referendum. But the 'left-right' divide is also still in evidence, meaning that the ideological basis of Britain's electoral politics is now two-dimensional.

- In 2015, the combined level of support for the Conservatives and UKIP was 19 points higher among authoritarians, while that for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens was 21 points higher among libertarians.
- Now the equivalent figures are 32 points and 42 points respectively.
- These figures are similar to those for the 'left-right' divide. Support for the Conservatives is now 34 points higher among those on the right, while the combined level of support for Labour and the Greens is 37 points higher among those on the left.

Party support has become more strongly related to specific issues associated with the libertarian-authoritarian dimension

Party support is now more strongly linked to issues, other than Brexit, which are associated with the libertarian-authoritarian divide, including immigration, sexuality and questions of identity and empire.

- In 2015, those who thought migrants undermined Britain's culture were 16 points more likely to support the Conservatives or UKIP. Now the equivalent figure is 33 points.
- In 2015, those who think that migrants enrich Britain's culture were 21 points more likely to support Labour, the Liberal Democrats or the Greens. Now they are 48 points more likely to do so.
- Those who think that equal opportunities for lesbian, gay and bisexual people have not gone far enough are 37 points more likely than those who believe they have gone too far to support one of Labour, the Greens or the Liberal Democrats, almost double the equivalent figure of 20 points in 2013.

Introduction

What values and attitudes divide the supporters of Britain's political parties? For much of the post-war period, the answer to that question was relatively straightforward. Most voters backed either the Conservatives or Labour. The former were more popular among middle-class voters, the latter among those in working-class occupations (providing representation for whom was the explicit purpose for which the party was originally created). Less well-off working-class voters tended to be more concerned about inequality, both in the workplace and beyond, while middle-class voters were more sympathetic to the argument that a smaller, low tax state helped create the conditions for the entrepreneurial activity that generates economic growth from which all can benefit. Ideologically, therefore, the country was primarily divided between more 'left-wing' voters, who were concerned about inequality and who backed Labour, and more 'right-wing' citizens, who were more concerned about the promotion of growth and who supported the Conservatives (Heath et al., 1991; Evans et al., 1996). Only a small minority opted out of this choice and voted for the Liberals, who explicitly projected themselves as a party of the centre and who rejected the politics of class.

However, the picture has become more complex at recent elections. In Scotland, the main ideological division has come to be between nationalists, who want the country to leave the UK, and unionists who take the opposite view (Curtice and Scholes, 2022). Since the 1970s, Britain's main third party, now called the Liberal Democrats, has been unable to appeal to more than a small minority of voters. Meanwhile, in 2015 the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which wanted a referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union (EU) with a view to campaigning for withdrawal, overtook the Liberal Democrats in terms of votes. A year later, that referendum was held and registered a narrow majority in favour of withdrawal – leading to a period of political instability that included two general elections in which Brexit was the central issue on which voters were being asked to vote.

The debate about Brexit was not primarily about inequality, taxation, or the role of the state. Rather than dividing 'left' from 'right', it divided voters along a different ideological dimension – between 'libertarians' or 'social liberals' on the one hand and 'authoritarians' or 'social conservatives' on the other (Curtice, 2017). 'Libertarians' believe in the freedom of the individual to make their own choices, including, for example, about morality, social mores, language, religion and identity. They are relatively relaxed about living in a diverse, multi-cultural society or, indeed, a cosmopolitan world. 'Authoritarians', in contrast, believe that too much social heterogeneity threatens social cohesion, and thus they incline to the view that society should enforce a moral code, require people to be able to speak English and acknowledge a British identity, and are doubtful about a globalised world that, for example, creates migrant flows that influence a country's culture as well as its freedom to make its own choices. Much of the Brexit debate was about sovereignty and immigration, and therefore touched upon these two very different world views rather than the debate between 'left' and 'right'.

However, as the Prime Minister promised, Britain did 'get Brexit done' following the Conservatives' success in the 2019 general election. Although they had hitherto wanted to revisit the decision to leave, neither Labour nor the Liberal Democrats are now challenging that decision, at least so far as the immediate future is concerned, and are therefore no longer inviting voters to consider the issue in deciding how they vote. Meanwhile, differences in levels of mortality and morbidity by age, social class and ethnicity, together with the circumstances in which people had to negotiate 'lockdown', ensured that the COVID-19 pandemic served to highlight questions of inequality. It might therefore be thought that the division between 'left' and 'right' has become the predominant ideological division in British politics once more.

On the other hand, the Conservatives are still keen to promote what they regard as the advantages to Britain of the Brexit deal that they negotiated, while the success of that deal is now being questioned by a newer Eurosceptic party, Reform UK. At the same time, some Conservative politicians have been inclined to try and

draw a dividing line between themselves and their political opponents over so-called 'woke' issues that touch upon aspects of morality, mores, and identity where the views of Remain and Leave voters – and more broadly of libertarians and authoritarians – are often markedly different from each other (Curtice and Ratti, 2022). These include the recognition of transgender people, the provision of gendered toilets, the acknowledgement of racial inequality, and debates about the merits of Britain's imperial past. Meanwhile, continuing high levels of immigration and large numbers of people attempting to secure asylum in the UK by crossing the English Channel in small boats has ensured that immigration continues to be an issue on the nation's political agenda – a fact we discuss further in our chapter on Immigration.

In view of these seemingly contradictory developments, this chapter analyses afresh recent trends in the ideological basis of party support. In particular, it examines whether the politics of 'left' and 'right' are now dominating the structure of party support in Britain once more, or whether the legacy of Brexit is still with us, resulting in a pattern in which issues that touch upon the 'libertarian-authoritarian' dimension, including but not exclusively Brexit itself, play as important a role as those that are primarily part of the 'left-right' debate about inequality. We begin by examining the relationship between attitudes towards the EU and where people stand on our two ideological dimensions. Thereafter we examine the evolution of the relationship between party support and attitudes towards Brexit since the EU referendum in 2016. That will enable us to address directly whether, four years on from the last election, attitudes towards this subject do or do not still structure the pattern of party support. We then undertake an analysis of the relationship between party support and where people stand on our two ideological dimensions. This is followed by an assessment of how far the relationships that we uncover are reflected in attitudes towards specific issues that are related to either the libertarian-authoritarian dimension or the left-right divide. We conclude by considering the implications for the battle between the political parties, both during the 2024 general election and beyond.

The ideological foundation of attitudes towards Brexit

Every year, British Social Attitudes (BSA) asks a suite of questions on inequality and what the government should do about it that are intended to measure where people stand on the division between 'left' and 'right'. It also asks another set of questions about law and order and upholding traditional values that are designed to identify where people are on the 'libertarian-authoritarian' spectrum. Full details of these questions are given in the Technical Details to this report. As is explained there, we can aggregate respondents' answers to each suite of questions to give them a score on each dimension. In this chapter we use these scores to divide people in each year into three roughly equally sized groups. In the case of the 'left-right' dimension, those on the left are the one third or so of respondents with the most left-wing scores, those on the right are those with the most right-wing scores, with the remaining one third of people with more centrist views in the middle. The equivalent approach is then used to divide respondents between libertarians, authoritarians, and those who fit into neither category.

In Table 1, we use these data to chart the evolution of the relationship between where people stand on these two dimensions and the level of support for Brexit. The first row of the table affirms the point we have made previously that the level of support for Remain and Leave in 2016 differed little between those on the left and those on the right. Indeed, in so far as there was a difference – and contrary to how supporters of Brexit are often portrayed – those on the left were seven percentage points more likely than those on the right to report having voted Leave in the 2016 referendum. In contrast, there is a very sharp difference between libertarians, only around one in five of whom (21%) voted for Brexit, and authoritarians, among whom support for Brexit stood at over seven in ten (72%).

Table 1 Support for Brexit by position on left/right and libertarian/authoritarian dimensions 2016-2023

	Left vs. Right			Libertarian vs. Authoritarian		
% support Brexit	Left	Centre	Right	Libertarian	Neither	Authoritarian
2016	52	48	45	21	53	72
2017	41	42	41	17	41	66
2018	36	40	40	15	42	59
2019	38	36	41	18	46	58
2020	29	40	51	10	41	67
2021	23	39	49	12	37	58
2023	19	29	41	12	25	51

2016 is based on reported vote in the referendum. Between 2017 and 2021 respondents were asked whether they would vote 'Remain' or 'Leave' in a second referendum. In 2023 respondents were asked whether they would vote for or against Britain becoming a member of the EU. Those not stating a preference are excluded from the denominator on which these figures are based. Unweighted bases can be found in Table A.1 in the Appendix to this chapter.

The picture was much the same when, in the years immediately after the EU referendum, respondents were asked how they would vote if there were to be a second referendum on being inside or outside the EU. Until

2020 there continued to be little difference between those on the left and those on the right in their level of support for Brexit, whereas the idea continued to be far more popular among authoritarians than libertarians.

That latter gap is still very much in place. Although Brexit is not as popular as it was across all parts of the ideological spectrum, support for the idea among authoritarians (51%) is still more than four times the level among libertarians (12%). However, since Brexit was eventually delivered at the beginning of 2020, a difference, albeit still a smaller one, has opened up between those on the left, just 19% of whom now support Brexit, and those on the right (41%).[1] People's attitudes towards the EU have, it seems, become rather more two-dimensional in character. This of course means that even if the issue were still to be related to party support, it might now be having less impact on the relative importance of the two dimensions in shaping the divide between the parties.

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[1] It might be queried whether this change has arisen because the shift in 2020 from face-to-face interviewing to a push-to-web design has changed the character of the sample (Clery et al., 2021). However, when respondents to the 2020 survey were asked how they had voted in 2016, there was still only a relatively modest gap – and one much smaller than that in Table 1 – between those on the left (41%), in the centre (45%), and on the right (53%) in their reported level of support for Leave. As many as 19% of those on the left who had voted Leave in 2016 now said they would vote Remain, compared with just 5% of those on the right. At the same time, 56% of those on the left who did not vote in 2016 now said they would vote Remain, compared with 27% of those on the right.

The evolution of the relationship between attitudes towards Brexit and party support

Each year, the BSA survey includes a measure of party support known as party identification. Somebody who identifies with a party is said to have an affective attachment to the party, a bond that may be somewhat stronger and more durable than simply being minded to vote for a party at a general election (Dalton, 2021). As detailed in the Technical Details, in order to identify who does have such an attachment respondents are asked whether they "think of themselves" as a supporter of one of the parties, then if not, whether they "think of themselves" as closer to one of the parties, and only if they still do not name a party at that point are they asked which party they are most likely to support in a general election. Not surprisingly, even at the end of these three questions, often around 20% either select "None" or "Don't know".

Table 2 shows separately for those who each year said they would vote Remain and those who indicated they would back Leave, the proportion who identified with one of the principal parties that contest elections across the UK. It shows that immediately after the 2016 referendum, those who had voted Leave (43%) were more than twice as likely as those who backed Remain (16%) to support the Conservatives, while in Labour's case the level of support for the party was more than twice as high (47%) among those who voted Remain than it was among those who had backed Leave (22%). Meanwhile, more broadly we should note that as many as 53% of Leavers were backing either the Conservatives or UKIP in 2016, while 67% of Remainers were supporting one of the three parties, that is, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, or the Greens, that did not back leaving the UK.

Table 2 Party Identification by Remain/Leave preference, 2016-2023

	Remain %	Leave %
2016		
Conservative	16	43
Labour	47	22
Liberal Democrat	12	4
Green	8	4
UKIP	1	10

Table 2 Party Identification by Remain/Leave preference, 2016-2023 (continued)

	Remain %	Leave %
2017		
Conservative	22	45
Labour	49	28
Liberal Democrat	10	2
Green	3	1
UKIP	*	4
2018		
Conservative	17	44
Labour	48	29
Liberal Democrat	9	3
Green	3	2
UKIP	0	4
2019		
Conservative	19	48
Labour	39	13
Liberal Democrat	15	2
Green	5	2
UKIP/Brexit	*	11

Table 2 Party Identification by Remain/Leave preference, 2016-2023 (continued)

	Remain %	Leave %
2020		
Conservative	17	61
Labour	45	16
Liberal Democrat	11	1
Green	10	3
Reform/UKIP	*	6
2021		
Conservative	15	59
Labour	45	15
Liberal Democrat	10	1
Green	10	3
Reform/UKIP	*	7
2023		
Conservative	15	51
Labour	47	12
Liberal Democrat	11	4
Green	8	2
Reform/UKIP	1	14

Note: Other categories of party identification, including 'SNP', 'Plaid Cymru', 'None' and 'Don't Know', are included in the denominator on which the figures in the table are based but are not shown. See also note to Table 1. Unweighted bases can be found in Table A.2 in the appendix to this chapter.

This picture largely remained unchanged through to and including our 2019 survey, which was conducted before the general election that year (on the role of Brexit in which see Curtice, 2020; Curtice, 2021). Overall, support for Labour was by now lower, but the fall was only slightly higher among Leavers than Remainers. That said, by this stage the proportion of Leave supporters who were backing the Conservatives, UKIP, or the newly formed

Brexit Party had risen to 59%, matching the 59% of Remainers who now identified with one of the parties that were at this point favouring a second referendum on EU membership.

By the time of our 2020 survey, as many as two-thirds of Leavers (67%) identified with one of the pro-Brexit parties, with as many as three in five of them (61%) supporting the Conservatives. And although the proportion backing the Conservatives in our most recent survey has fallen back to 51%, the combined level of support for the Conservatives and Reform still stands at 65%. Meanwhile, the proportion of Remainers who identify with one of the parties that in 2019 backed a referendum has, at between 64% and 66%, consistently been the mirror image of the position among Leavers. In short, despite the reluctance of some of the opposition parties to talk about Brexit, there is no sign in these data of any waning of the link between attitudes towards Brexit and party identification – indeed, if anything, it appears to be somewhat stronger than it was back in 2016.[2]

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[2] This conclusion is largely corroborated if we undertake a similar analysis of the trend since 2015 (that is, before the EU referendum) in the relationship between attitudes towards Brexit and people's response to a more detailed question that presents five different options for Britain's relationship with the EU, ranging from at one end being outside of the EU to, at the other, working for a single European government (see Appendix Table A.3 for details). The Conservative party has always been most popular among those who want to be outside the EU, and, thereafter, among those who would opt to be a member in an institution that had fewer powers. Unsurprisingly, nearly all of the support for UKIP, Reform or the Brexit Party has come from those who want to be outside the EU. Meanwhile, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens have always been more popular among those who wanted the relationship to be at least as strong as it was before the UK left, and indeed since 2021 their combined support among this group has been as high as it has ever been since the EU referendum.

Party identification and values

So, despite being a subject that is largely not being addressed by the two main opposition parties, Brexit, attitudes to which are more strongly related to where people stand on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension than to the left-right one, is now more strongly related to the pattern of party identification than it was at the time of the EU referendum. This leads to the expectation that whereas the structure of party support might perhaps at one point have been one dimensional, focused heavily on the division between left and right, now it is two dimensional, with where people stand on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension also being related to the party that they support.

Table 3 begins our examination of whether or not that is indeed what has happened by showing the relationship between party identification and where people stand on the left-right dimension in each BSA survey since 2015. It shows that support for the Conservative Party has consistently been higher among those on the right than among those on the left, while the opposite is true for Labour – and indeed the Greens. In contrast, as we might anticipate, the level of identification with the Liberal Democrats has rarely differed between those on the left and those on the right, and is often at its highest among those in the centre. Meanwhile, the same is true nowadays of those who identify with a Eurosceptic party though at the time of the EU referendum itself, UKIP supporters, who came disproportionately from those in working-class occupations (Ford and Goodwin, 2014), were rather more likely to be found among those on the left than those on the right. While clearly playing an important role in the structure of support for the Conservatives and Labour, the division between left and right has been less evident in the pattern of support for the country's smaller parties.

Table 3 Party Identification by position on left/right dimension, 2015-2023

	Left %	Centre %	Right %	% Right – % Left
2015				
Conservative	14	29	56	42
Labour	45	30	15	-30
Liberal Democrat	4	6	4	0
Green	5	3	2	-3
UKIP	7	6	3	-4

Table 3 Party Identification by position on left/right dimension, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Left %	Centre %	Right %	% Right – % Left
2016				
Conservative	18	32	56	38
Labour	41	32	14	-27
Liberal Democrat	5	7	5	0
Green	5	2	1	-4
UKIP	6	4	3	-3
2017				
Conservative	16	27	53	37
Labour	50	38	23	-27
Liberal Democrat	6	7	6	0
Green	4	2	2	-2
UKIP	2	2	1	-1
2018				
Conservative	14	26	44	30
Labour	48	38	23	-25
Liberal Democrat	6	7	7	1
Green	4	3	1	-3
UKIP	2	1	1	-1

Table 3 Party Identification by position on left/right dimension, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Left %	Centre %	Right %	% Right – % Left
2019				
Conservative	16	27	45	29
Labour	36	25	16	-20
Liberal Democrat	12	12	9	-3
Green	5	3	2	-3
UKIP/Brexit	5	4	3	-2
2020				
Conservative	14	30	54	40
Labour	49	35	17	-32
Liberal Democrat	5	10	6	1
Green	9	5	3	-6
Reform/UKIP	2	3	3	1
2021				
Conservative	12	28	50	38
Labour	47	33	16	-31
Liberal Democrat	6	9	6	0
Green	12	7	4	-8
Reform/UKIP	3	2	3	0

Table 3 Party Identification by position on left/right dimension, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Left %	Centre %	Right %	% Right – % Left
2022				
Conservative	9	24	47	38
Labour	54	37	19	-35
Liberal Democrat	6	10	9	3
Green	10	4	3	-7
Reform/UKIP	1	2	2	1
2023				
Conservative	7	19	41	34
Labour	49	35	20	-29
Liberal Democrat	7	11	7	0
Green	11	6	3	-8
Reform/UKIP	4	4	4	0

Unweighted bases can be found in Table A.4 in the Appendix to this chapter. See also note to Table 2.

There has, however, been some variation over time in the strength of the relationship between left/right support and identification with the Conservatives or Labour. The difference between Conservative support among those on the left and those on the right fell from 42 percentage points to 29 points between 2015 and 2019, by which point, as we have already seen, the relationship between attitudes towards Brexit and party support had strengthened. Equally, the equivalent gap for Labour fell from 30 percentage points to 20 points over the same period. That said, as the final column of Table 3 shows, both differences were more marked again in 2020. And although they have since slipped somewhat yet again, at 29 points the figure for Labour is much as it was in 2015, though in the case of the Conservatives, the 34-point difference is somewhat less than was evident in 2015. The left-right divide is still apparent in the pattern of Conservative and Labour support to a similar extent as before.

But what of the libertarian-authoritarian divide? Has it become a more important source of division? Indeed, might it now appear to be as important as the left-right division? Table 4 addresses these questions by undertaking the same analysis of the pattern of party support that we have just undertaken for the left-right dimension.

There are some clear and important differences from what we have just seen. First, before the EU referendum, in 2015, there was only a relatively weak link between where people stood on the dimension and the party they supported. Although the Conservatives were somewhat more popular among authoritarians (38%) than among

libertarians (26%), the gap, at 12 percentage points, was much less than the 42-point difference we have seen was in evidence in respect of the left-right divide. And while in Labour's case support for the party was somewhat higher among libertarians (34%) than among authoritarians (25%), the nine-point difference was well below the difference of 30 points between those on the left and those on the right.

Table 4 Party identification by position on libertarian/authoritarian dimension, 2015-2023

	Libertarian %	Neither %	Authoritarian %	% Authoritarian – % Libertarian
2015				
Conservative	26	33	38	12
Labour	34	32	25	-9
Liberal Democrat	8	5	2	-6
Green	7	2	1	-6
UKIP	2	4	9	7
2016				
Conservative	26	38	41	15
Labour	39	24	25	-14
Liberal Democrat	9	6	2	-7
Green	6	1	1	-5
UKIP	1	5	7	6

Table 4 Party identification by position on libertarian/authoritarian dimension, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Libertarian %	Neither %	Authoritarian %	% Authoritarian – % Libertarian
2017				
Conservative	18	37	40	22
Labour	49	31	30	-19
Liberal Democrat	11	5	3	-8
Green	4	2	1	-3
UKIP	1	1	3	2
2018				
Conservative	16	33	37	21
Labour	48	33	27	-21
Liberal Democrat	12	5	3	-9
Green	4	2	2	-2
UKIP	1	1	3	2
2019				
Conservative	16	31	39	23
Labour	33	34	21	-12
Liberal Democrat	19	8	6	-13
Green	9	5	3	-6
UKIP/Brexit	1	4	8	7

Table 4 Party identification by position on libertarian/authoritarian dimension, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Libertarian %	Neither %	Authoritarian %	% Authoritarian – % Libertarian
2020				
Conservative	13	34	49	36
Labour	47	33	21	-26
Liberal Democrat	13	8	3	-10
Green	12	3	3	-9
Reform/UKIP	1	2	6	5
2021				
Conservative	10	32	46	36
Labour	46	29	22	-24
Liberal Democrat	12	7	3	-9
Green	14	6	4	-10
Reform/UKIP	1	2	4	3
2022				
Conservative	10	27	39	29
Labour	52	32	27	-25
Liberal Democrat	11	9	6	-5
Green	11	4	2	-9
Reform/UKIP	1	2	3	2

One-dimensional or two-dimensional?

Table 4 Party identification by position on libertarian/authoritarian dimension, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Libertarian %	Neither %	Authoritarian %	% Authoritarian – % Libertarian
2023				
Conservative	7	23	34	27
Labour	50	32	24	-26
Liberal Democrat	12	8	6	-6
Green	13	5	3	-10
Reform/UKIP	2	3	7	5

Unweighted bases can be found at Table A.5 in the Appendix to this chapter. See also note to Table 2

Second, and in contrast to the bigger parties, support for smaller parties was strongly structured by where people stood on the libertarian-authoritarian divide even before the EU referendum took place. This has largely remained the case since. The Greens, in particular, have consistently been much more popular among libertarians, while, as we would anticipate, most supporters of a Eurosceptic party have always been on the authoritarian end of the spectrum. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats have always been more popular among libertarians than authoritarians, though since 2019 the party's support has held up rather better among authoritarians than among libertarians, thereby narrowing the gap between them somewhat.

Third, however, and as we have anticipated, the pattern of support for the Conservatives and Labour is now related more strongly than previously to where people stand on the libertarian-authoritarian divide. Between 2017 and 2019, support for the Conservatives was consistently just over 20 points higher among authoritarians than among libertarians, while in these years the gap in the case of Labour was somewhat higher than in 2015 too. More importantly, at 31 points, the difference between libertarians and authoritarians in the combined level of support for all of the parties who by 2019 were backing a second EU referendum more than matched the 23-point difference between left and right in their level of support. Meanwhile, the 30-point difference between libertarians and authoritarians in the combined level of support for the Conservatives and Eurosceptic parties matched the 29-point difference in their level of support between those on the left and those on the right.

This is the picture that has pertained ever since. Although the difference between those on the left and those on the right in their level of support for the Conservatives and Labour was wider again in 2020 (as was also true of the Greens), so also was the gap between libertarians and authoritarians in the support they gave to parties on opposite sides of the Brexit divide. As a result, the relationship between people's value position and the pattern of party support was still more or less equally strong on the two dimensions – and this has continued to be the case since. In our most recent survey, libertarians are 42 points more likely than authoritarians to support one of Labour, the Liberal Democrats or the Greens, while authoritarians are 32 points more likely than libertarians to

identify with the Conservatives or Reform/UKIP. The equivalent figures for the left/right divide are 37 points and 34 points respectively.[3]

Despite the decline in the discussion of Brexit, it appears that one of its electoral legacies– a stronger relationship between party identification and where people stand on the libertarian/authoritarian divide – is still with us. As a result, it seems that, contrary to the expectations of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, they and their political opponents are still having to negotiate a two-dimensional electoral landscape in which their support is not only structured by the traditional divide between left and right, but also by the more recent one of libertarian vs. authoritarian.

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[3] The patterns in Tables 3 and 4 are largely independent of each other. For example, among those on the left, support for the Conservatives in our latest survey is 18 points higher among those who are authoritarian than it is among those who are libertarian. The equivalent figures for those in the centre and the right are 26 points and 28 points respectively. Meanwhile in Labour's case the three figures are -22, -24 and -19. This independence reflects the fact that there is only a mild relationship between where people stand on the left-right dimension and where they are positioned on the libertarian-authoritarian one. Although in our latest survey, 46% of those on the left are libertarian, and vice-versa, only 38% of those on the right are authoritarian while only 33% of authoritarians are on the right.

Libertarian-authoritarian issues and party support

Still, we might wonder whether and how this picture plays out if we move from the generalisations of our two ideological dimensions and examine the link between where people stand on particular issues and party support. Is it the case that the pattern of party support is more strongly related now than in the past to those issues, other than Brexit, that touch upon the libertarian-authoritarian divide? And how does the strength of the relationship compare with those on issues that are closer to the left-right division?

One of the key issues in the Brexit debate, immigration, touches upon questions of identity and diversity that are central to the libertarian-authoritarian divide. That said, there is also an economic aspect to the debate about the desirable level of immigration. So, in Table 5, we look first at the relationship between people's evaluations of the economic consequences of immigration and party support before turning, in Table 6, to a similar analysis of perceptions of the cultural consequences of people coming to the UK as migrants, an issue where questions of identity are clearly to the fore.

As Ford, Humphrey and Wilson (2024) outline in detail in their chapter on immigration, BSA has regularly invited respondents to use a scale from 0 to 10 to indicate whether migrants who come to Britain are generally bad or good for the economy. In Table 5 we use this scale to divide respondents into those who think this is generally bad (a score of 0-3), those who believe it is good (a score of 7-10) and those who give a more neutral response (4-6). For each group, Table 5 shows the proportion who have identified with each party since 2015, together with the difference in each party's support between those who think immigration is bad for the economy and those who believe it is good.

Table 5 Party identification by perceptions of the economic consequences of immigration, 2015-2023

	Bad %	Neutral %	Good %	% Bad – % Good
2015				
Conservative	29	37	28	1
Labour	24	28	36	-12
Liberal Democrat	1	5	6	-5
Green	1	2	8	-7
UKIP	12	4	1	11

Table 5 Party identification by perceptions of the economic consequences of immigration, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Bad %	Neutral %	Good %	% Bad – % Good
2017				
Conservative	27	36	23	4
Labour	31	37	52	-21
Liberal Democrat	2	4	10	-8
Green	1	2	2	-1
UKIP	4	1	*	4
2018				
Conservative	29	31	19	10
Labour	28	30	47	-19
Liberal Democrat	0	4	9	-9
Green	*	3	4	-4
UKIP	7	1	0	7
2019				
Conservative	26	33	24	2
Labour	23	22	32	-9
Liberal Democrat	4	6	15	-11
Green	1	3	5	-4
Brexit/UKIP	10	5	2	8

Table 5 Party identification by perceptions of the economic consequences of immigration, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Bad %	Neutral %	Good %	% Bad – % Good
2021				
Conservative	39	39	21	18
Labour	20	26	43	-23
Liberal Democrat	1	3	10	-9
Green	2	6	10	-8
Reform/UKIP	11	2	*	11
2023				
Conservative	28	23	12	16
Labour	23	31	48	-25
Liberal Democrat	4	10	12	-8
Green	3	6	9	-6
Reform/UKIP	12	5	1	11

Unweighted bases can be found at Table A.6 in the Appendix to this chapter. See also note to Table 2

Attitudes to the economic consequences of immigration were only moderately related to pattern of party support in 2015. Indeed, in the case of the Conservative Party there was barely any difference at all in the level of support between those who think migrants are good for the economy and those who think they are bad – rather, the party was most popular among those who took a neutral stance. However, as we might anticipate, those who were supporting UKIP in 2015 were mostly people who thought that immigration was bad for the economy, while Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens were all somewhat more popular among those who reckoned that immigration was good for the economy.

This picture remained largely unchanged through to 2019. Conservative supporters continued to be most numerous among those who took a neutral stance on the issue. At ten percentage points, the difference in the combined level of support for the Conservatives and the Brexit Party/UKIP between those who reckoned migrants were good for the economy and those who believe they were bad, was similar to the 12-point difference in 2015. Meanwhile, the equivalent figure for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens was, at 24 points, exactly the same as in 2015.

However, since 2019 the link between attitudes towards the economic consequences of migrants and party support has strengthened markedly. In our latest survey, the Conservative Party is most popular among those who think that immigration is bad for the economy. Yet at the same time, this is still the group that is most likely

to support a Eurosceptic party. As a result, there is now as much as a 27-point difference in the combined level of support for the Conservatives and Eurosceptic parties between those who think migrants are good for the economy and those who believe they are bad. Meanwhile, the difference in the combined level of support for the other opposition parties now stands at 39 points, primarily because of what is now a much stronger relationship between perceptions of the economic consequences of immigration and Labour support.

A similar story of a strengthened relationship with party support is also in evidence in respect of people's perceptions of the cultural consequences of migration. Here too, respondents were asked to use a scale of 0 to 10, but in this instance to indicate whether they thought migrants who come to Britain undermine or enrich the country's culture. In Table 6 those included in the 'undermined' category are those giving a score of 0-3, those in the 'enriched' group are those offering a score of 7-10, while those classified as 'neither' are those who gave a score of between 4 and 6.

The table shows that the link between perceptions of the cultural consequences of immigration and party support was also relatively modest in 2015. Again, the Conservatives were most popular among those taking a neutral stance on the issue, though support for UKIP was firmly embedded among those who believed the country's culture was being undermined. Meanwhile, there was just a 21-point difference in the level of support for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens between those who thought migrants undermine Britain's culture and those who believe they help enrich it.

Table 6 Party identification by perceptions of the cultural consequences of immigration, 2015-2023

	Undermined %	Neither %	Enriched %	% Undermined – % Enriched
2015				
Conservative	32	37	26	6
Labour	24	29	35	-11
Liberal Democrat	2	4	7	-5
Green	2	2	7	-5
UKIP	12	3	2	10

Table 6 Party identification by perceptions of the cultural consequences of immigration, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Undermined %	Neither %	Enriched %	% Undermined – % Enriched
2017				
Conservative	27	36	23	4
Labour	31	37	52	-21
Liberal Democrat	2	4	10	-8
Green	1	2	2	-1
UKIP	4	1	*	4
2018				
Conservative	36	28	18	18
Labour	24	36	46	-22
Liberal Democrat	3	4	8	-5
Green	*	3	4	-4
UKIP	7	*	*	7
2019				
Conservative	36	31	22	14
Labour	19	21	34	-15
Liberal Democrat	4	7	15	-11
Green	1	2	5	-4
Brexit/UKIP	11	4	1	10

Table 6 Party identification by perceptions of the cultural consequences of immigration, 2015-2023 (continued)

	Undermined %	Neither %	Enriched %	% Undermined – % Enriched
2021				
Conservative	45	37	19	18
Labour	18	27	43	-25
Liberal Democrat	2	4	10	-8
Green	3	5	11	-8
Reform/UKIP	11	1	1	10
2023				
Conservative	32	20	13	19
Labour	19	31	50	-31
Liberal Democrat	3	9	13	-10
Green	3	6	10	-7
Reform/UKIP	15	4	1	14

Unweighted bases can be found at Table A.7 in the Appendix to this chapter. See also note to Table 2.

But in 2021 and in our most recent survey these gaps have widened. There is now as much as a 33-point difference between the level of support for the Conservatives and Eurosceptic parties among those who think that migrants undermine Britain's culture and those who believe they enrich the country. At the same time the gap between the two groups in their level of support for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens is now as high as 48 points, again primarily because the issue now more strongly demarcates those who do and do not identify as Labour. These figures are, indeed, even higher than the equivalent figures for perceptions of the economic consequences of migration. Although it might have been thought that the implementation of Brexit would have served to reduce the salience of immigration in Britain's electoral politics, the very opposite appears to have happened. As a result, it is now one of the sharpest dividing lines between the parties' supporters.

Recent years have also seen a debate emerge about how we should view Britain's past, including not least its empire and its association with slavery and, in the eyes of some at least, economic exploitation and cultural insensitivity. The debate has been exemplified symbolically by calls for the statues of those associated with empire and slavery to be pulled down and for streets or buildings which bear the names of such persons to be renamed. However, others, including some Conservative politicians, feel that this approach unduly denigrates the contribution that Britain has made to the economic and cultural advancement of the world. In any event, here

is an emergent issue that touches upon people's sense of identity and has become part of the 'culture wars' debate between 'woke' and 'anti-woke'.

Table 7 examines the role of this issue in Britain's electoral politics by showing the level of support for the parties broken down by how much pride people say they have in Britain's history. Back in 2013, when the question was previously asked, there was already some relationship with party support. Those who were "very proud" of Britain's history were more likely than those who were "not very" or "not at all" proud to support the Conservatives or UKIP, while the opposite was true of Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Table 7 Party identification by level of pride in Britain's history, 2013 and 2023

	Very proud %	Somewhat proud %	Not very/ not at all proud %	% Very – % Not very/not at all
2013				
Conservative	30	22	14	16
Labour	34	34	46	-12
Liberal Democrat	5	8	14	-9
Green	1	1	0	1
UKIP	7	4	2	5
Unweighted bases	*488*	*299*	*73*	
2023				
Conservative	39	28	6	33
Labour	23	34	49	-26
Liberal Democrat	6	9	9	-3
Green	2	2	14	-12
Reform/UKIP	9	3	2	7
Unweighted bases	*454*	*592*	*453*	

See note to Table 2.

Ten years on, however, the relationship is much stronger. Support for the Conservatives is as much as 33 points higher among those who are very proud of Britain's history than it is among those with little or no pride, while support for Reform or UKIP is also seven points higher. Meanwhile, Labour and the Greens (and to a lesser

extent the Liberal Democrats) are more popular among those with little or no pride. Indeed at 41 points the difference in their combined level of popularity is only a little less than the equivalent figure for the perceived cultural consequences of immigration.

One of the biggest changes in social attitudes during the 40 years that British Social Attitudes has been charting public opinion has been the emergence of a more liberal attitude towards same sex relationships (Clery, 2023). Meanwhile, both Labour (with the introduction of civil partnerships for same-sex couples in 2005) and Conservative (with the implementation of equal marriage for the same group in 2014) governments have introduced key changes that have advanced the legal recognition of such relationships. We might anticipate therefore that, even though it bears on issues of identity and morality, on this issue at least, there would be little or no relationship between people's attitudes and party support.

For a number of years, the BSA survey has occasionally asked people whether they think attempts to give equal opportunities to lesbian, gay and bisexual people have "gone too far or not gone far enough". The level of support for each party broken down by how people responded to this question are presented for 2013 to 2023 in Table 8. It reveals that a relationship between people's attitudes to identity and morality, and their party identification, is far from absent, and again may now be stronger than in the past. Already in 2013, those who believed that attempts to give equal opportunities had "gone too far" were more likely than those who felt they had "not gone far enough" to identify as Conservative or UKIP. Meanwhile, Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters were more likely to be found among those who felt such opportunities had "not gone far enough".

Table 8 Party identification by perceptions of equal opportunities for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, 2013-2023

	Gone too far %	About right %	Not gone far enough %	% Too far – % not far enough
2013				
Conservative	29	24	13	16
Labour	30	31	42	-12
Liberal Democrat	4	7	11	-7
Green	1	1	2	-1
UKIP	7	5	3	4
Unweighted bases	*380*	*467*	*196*	

Table 8 Party identification by perceptions of equal opportunities for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, 2013-2023 (continued)

	Gone too far %	About right %	Not gone far enough %	% Too far – % not far enough
2021				
Conservative	45	34	13	32
Labour	20	30	47	-27
Liberal Democrat	4	7	8	-4
Green	4	5	13	-9
Reform/UKIP	7	3	1	6
Unweighted bases	*715*	*1345*	*988*	
2023				
Conservative	29	18	10	19
Labour	26	36	49	-23
Liberal Democrat	5	11	10	-5
Green	3	7	12	-9
Reform/UKIP	8	6	2	6
Unweighted bases	*221*	*505*	*474*	

See also note to Table 2.

These differences have not disappeared. Indeed, it looks as though on this issue too they have grown somewhat. For example, on our most recent survey those who think that equal opportunities for lesbian, gay and bisexual people have not gone far enough are 37 percentage points more likely than those who believe they have gone too far to support one of Labour, the Greens or the Liberal Democrats, almost double the equivalent figure of 20 points in 2013. Meanwhile, support for the Conservatives or a Eurosceptic party is 25 points higher among those who think that equal opportunities have gone too far, up a little on the 20 points in 2013.

More recently, the social recognition and legal status of transgender people has emerged as a subject of significant debate (see also the forthcoming chapter by Montagu and Maplethorpe (2024). As a result, in 2018 both the UK and the Scottish governments held consultations on whether it should be made easier for those who do not identify with the sex on their birth certificate to claim the gender with which they identify as their legal status. The proposal generated considerable controversy, not least because in the view of some this could undermine public policies that promote and protect the status of women. Eventually the UK government

abandoned the proposal, and while the Scottish Parliament did go ahead with a legal measure, this was then 'vetoed' by the UK government, some of whose members at least have been critical of attempts to ensure that people are treated by the state on the basis of their gender identity rather than their sex at birth.

Table 9 shows how the level of support for the parties varies according to whether people agree or disagree with the proposition that "a person who is transgender should be able to have the sex recorded on their birth certificate changed if they want". When this question was first asked in 2016 the level of party support varied little by how people answered this question. Conservative supporters were just a little more numerous among those who disagreed than they were among those who agreed, while in the case of Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, there were just the smallest of differences in the opposite direction.

Table 9 Party identification by attitudes towards a transgender person being able to have the sex on their birth certificate changed, 2016-2023

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	% Disagree – % Agree
2016				
Conservative	28	36	36	8
Labour	34	23	31	-3
Liberal Democrat	5	10	3	-2
Green	4	1	2	-2
UKIP	4	2	5	1
2019				
Conservative	23	32	34	11
Labour	30	22	23	-7
Liberal Democrat	11	10	10	-1
Green	4	2	3	-1
Brexit/UKIP	4	4	5	1

Table 9 Party identification by attitudes towards a transgender person being able to have the sex on their birth certificate changed, 2016-2023 (continued)

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	% Disagree – % Agree
2021				
Conservative	20	28	40	20
Labour	44	31	25	-19
Liberal Democrat	5	8	6	1
Green	11	6	5	-6
Reform/UKIP	1	2	6	5
2023				
Conservative	9	19	26	17
Labour	44	38	30	-14
Liberal Democrat	7	14	7	0
Green	10	5	6	-4
Reform/UKIP	1	3	9	8

Unweighted bases can be found at Table A.8 in the Appendix to this chapter. See also note to Table 2

That, however, is no longer the case. Conservative supporters and those who back a Eurosceptic party are more numerous among those who disagree with the proposition. Indeed, there is as much as a 25-point difference between those who disagree and those who agree in their levels of support for these two parties. Meanwhile, those who identify with Labour or the Greens – though not in this instance the Liberal Democrats – are more numerous (by 18 points) among those who agree with the statement. Although the issue is not as strongly related to party support as immigration, this relatively new debate about an issue of identity has also become something of a dividing line in Britain's electoral politics.

A consistent picture of the relationship between party support and attitudes towards specific issues that touch upon aspects of identity has emerged. Although the strength of the relationship varies from issue to issue, in each case the relationship is stronger now than it was before Britain embarked on the debate about Brexit. While that debate may have played a key role in making the libertarian-authoritarian value dimension a more important dividing line in Britain's electoral politics, it appears that it has subsequently been reinforced and strengthened by the rise to prominence of other issues where attitudes reflect that dimension. As a result, it is now playing a role in structuring party choice even though Brexit itself has largely disappeared off the political agenda.

Issues on the left-right divide

But how does the strength of the relationship between issues of identity and party support compare now with the link between party identification and issues that have long been part of the left-right debate? Are identity issues now more or less of equal importance, as our earlier analysis of the link between party support and values implied?

One of the key traditional dividing lines between the Conservatives and Labour is their approach to the role of trade unions. The Labour party was founded by trade unionists, has trade unions as institutional members, and is commonly relatively sympathetic towards unions' role in collective bargaining over terms and conditions – a practice that might be thought to help reduce income inequality. In contrast the Conservative Party tends to be sympathetic to the needs of employers and has on more than one occasion passed legislation designed to make it more difficult to call strikes or to reduce their potential impact.

Table 10 reveals that this difference of outlook is very much in evidence among the supporters of these parties. Those who believe that trade unions have too much power are, in our latest survey, 34 points more likely than those who feel they have too little influence to support the Conservatives. In the case of Labour, the difference is 34 points in the opposite direction. Meanwhile, there are also smaller differences of seven points in the case of supporting Reform or UKIP (with these Eurosceptic parties being more popular among those who think that trade unions have too much power) and five points in the case of the Greens (in the opposite direction). Meanwhile, as we would anticipate, the Liberal Democrats are most popular among those in the centre on this issue, that is, those who think that trade unions have the right amount of power.

Table 10 Party identification by perceptions of trade union power

	Too much %	About right %	Too little %	% Too much – % Too little
Conservative	40	18	6	34
Labour	19	37	53	-34
Liberal Democrat	6	14	7	-1
Green	4	6	9	-5
Reform/UKIP	11	3	4	7
Unweighted bases	*330*	*383*	*340*	

See note to Table 2.

So far as the Conservatives and Labour are concerned, these differences are a little greater than we have seen on any of our identity issues (see, for example, Tables 6 and 7). However, once we look at how far an issue divides supporters of all of the parties, and not just those who identify as Conservative or Labour, we find the 41-point difference between those who think trade unions have too much and those who believe they have too little

in their combined level of support for the Conservatives and a Eurosceptic party is similar to the 40-point difference in respect of pride in Britain's history. Equally, the 40-point difference in Table 10 in respect of support for Labour, the Greens and the Liberal Democrats matches the 41-point difference in their combined level of support on the issue of pride.

Meanwhile, no issue touches more directly on questions of inequality than whether those on high incomes are taxed too little or too much (Montagu and Maplethorpe, 2024). Table 11 shows that where people stand on that debate is also associated with party support. Supporters of the Conservative or Eurosceptic parties are more common among those who do not think that those on high incomes are taxed too little, while the Labour and Green parties are most popular among those who think their taxes are much too low. Once again, Liberal Democrats tend to be most popular among those with more centrist views.

Table 11 Party identification by perceptions of the taxation of high incomes

	Too high/ About right %	Too low %	Much too low %	% Too high – % Much too low
Conservative	29	15	7	22
Labour	28	43	50	-22
Liberal Democrat	9	12	5	4
Green	3	9	10	-7
Reform/UKIP	7	4	4	3
Unweighted bases	*527*	*368*	*240*	

See note to Table 2.

That said, the differences in Table 11 are rather less than on the issue of trade union power. Instead, they are not dissimilar to those we have seen on the issue of equal opportunities for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. Although their strength might vary from issue to issue, overall, a similar picture is beginning to emerge of the relationships between party support and attitudes towards individual issues that align primarily with the libertarian-authoritarian and left-right dimensions.

Finally, there is no issue on which the instincts of Conservative and Labour politicians are more divided than the level of taxation and spending. Conservative politicians tend to be inclined to the view that lower taxes, and therefore less government spending, are more likely to create a climate in which the economy will grow (and thus in the long run be able to generate the revenues to fund public services). Labour politicians, in contrast, usually feel that a system of progressive taxation accompanied by public spending that addresses the needs of the less well-off can help reduce economic inequality.

Table 12 shows the level of support for the parties broken down by whether people think that, if it has to choose, the government should "reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits", increase them, or keep them as now (for further details see the chapter by Montagu and Maplethorpe (2024). It reveals that how people respond to this choice is not in fact reflected especially strongly in the pattern of party support. In particular, support for the Conservatives is only six points lower among those who think taxes and spending

should be increased than it is among those who think it should be reduced. In fact, it is highest among those who say taxation and spending should be kept at their current levels.[4] However, support for Labour is as much as 24-points higher among those who think that taxation and spending should be increased, while support for the Greens is also heavily tilted in that direction. In contrast, support for a Eurosceptic party is much higher among those who wish to reduce taxation and spending.

Table 12 Party identification, by attitudes towards taxation and spending

	Reduce %	Keep as now %	Increase %	% Reduce – % Increase
Conservative	22	26	16	6
Labour	23	29	47	-24
Liberal Democrat	7	9	10	-3
Green	2	5	9	-7
Reform/UKIP	14	7	3	11
Unweighted bases	*102*	*399*	*568*	

See note to Table 2.

Here again, however, the alignment between people's attitudes and the party they support is not out of kilter with what we have already witnessed in connection with issues of identity and sexuality that are part of the cultural debate between libertarians and authoritarians. Earlier we saw that people who think that equal opportunities for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals have gone too far are 37 points more likely than those who believe they have not gone far enough to identify as Labour, Green or Liberal Democrat. The equivalent figure here is 34 points. Not only are British electoral politics now two-dimensional in terms of how values divide the parties' supporters, but this pattern is also apparent in voters' reactions to specific aspects of public policy.

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[4] It might be thought that these findings are a product of the fact that, since 2019, a Conservative government has presided over a record increase in taxation and spending, and that this development has changed the character of the party's support on this issue. In practice, this is not the case. For example, in 2016, support for the Conservatives stood at 39% among those who wanted to keep taxation and spending at current levels, while at 28% support for the party among those who wanted to increase taxation and spending was the same as it was among those who wanted a reduction.

Conclusion

Brexit helped to disrupt the traditional dividing lines of British electoral politics. Hitherto those on the 'right' tended to support the Conservatives, while those on the 'left' backed Labour. The difference between 'libertarians' and 'authoritarians' was only weakly reflected in the pattern of party support, albeit it was relatively more important in identifying those who supported one of the smaller parties. However, Brexit was an issue that divided 'libertarians' from 'authoritarians' rather than 'left' from 'right'. So as the issue came to dominate British politics at the 2017 and 2019 general elections, so the libertarian-authoritarian dimension came to structure party support as much as the left-right divide.

Yet the absence of Brexit since 2019 from the focus of party debate and the media headlines has not witnessed any diminution of the strength of the relationship between party support and where people stand on the libertarian-authoritarian divide. Indeed, it looks even stronger now than it did at the height of the Brexit debate, seemingly reinforced by partisan divisions over other identity and 'woke' issues such as immigration, sexuality, and empire. Rather than being an isolated, temporarily disruptive issue, Brexit seems to have been the harbinger of a broader change in the subject matter of British political debate (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020). What remains to be seen is how well our politicians can cope with the less familiar, more complex world of two-dimensional politics in which we now appear to live.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Table A.1 Unweighted bases for Table 1

	Left vs. Right			Libertarian vs. Authoritarian		
% support Brexit	Left	Centre	Right	Libertarian	Neither	Authoritarian
2016	565	736	574	586	711	581
2017	633	805	651	702	604	786
2018	209	202	250	191	247	223
2019	290	242	225	270	258	232
2020	446	338	438	413	429	381
2021	873	1086	885	1006	844	1001
2023	415	505	422	471	404	468

Table A.2 Unweighted bases for Table 2

	Remain	Leave
2016	1115	1139
2017	1445	1148
2018	472	340
2019	524	402
2020	756	467
2021	1882	973
2023	950	393

Table A.3 Party identification by attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 2015-23

The following table shows the relationship between party identification and how people responded to the following question:
Do you think Britain's long-term policy should be...

to leave the European Union,
to stay in the EU and try to reduce the EU's powers,
to leave things as they are,
to stay in the EU and try to increase the EU's powers,
or, to work for the formation of a single European government?

From 2016 onwards the question began:
Leaving aside the result of the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union….

From 2020 onwards the options were:

Be outside the European Union
Be part of the EU but try to reduce the EU's powers
Be part of the EU and try to keep the EU's powers as they are
Be part of the EU and try to increase the EU's powers
Work for the formation of a single European government

Those who gave one or other of the last two responses have been combined in the far right hand column of the table.

	Outside %	Inside but reduce %	Inside as is %	Inside but increase %
2015				
Conservative	38	41	21	19
Labour	18	28	39	34
Liberal Democrat	2	5	3	5
Green	2	4	5	12
UKIP	18	4	1	3
Unweighted bases	*252*	*470*	*205*	*110*

Table A.3 Party identification by attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 2015-23 (continued)

	Outside %	Inside but reduce %	Inside as is %	Inside but increase %
2016				
Conservative	40	34	21	15
Labour	24	32	42	39
Liberal Democrat	3	7	7	12
Green	1	3	4	5
UKIP	9	1	*	1
Unweighted bases	*852*	*666*	*264*	*103*
2017				
Conservative	43	27	11	18
Labour	27	44	56	50
Liberal Democrat	2	7	12	6
Green	1	2	4	3
UKIP	4	*	*	0
Unweighted bases	*773*	*677*	*348*	*119*
2018				
Conservative	45	26	9	12
Labour	22	39	53	44
Liberal Democrat	4	8	7	8
Green	1	2	5	7
UKIP	3	*	0	1
Unweighted bases	*1095*	*946*	*538*	*193*

Table A.3 Party identification by attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 2015-23 (continued)

	Outside %	Inside but reduce %	Inside as is %	Inside but increase %
2019				
Conservative	45	27	9	11
Labour	15	33	43	32
Liberal Democrat	3	15	13	7
Green	1	2	6	10
UKIP/Brexit	10	*	0	1
Unweighted bases	*423*	*348*	*209*	*52*
2020				
Conservative	58	32	6	10
Labour	16	33	52	46
Liberal Democrat	1	9	11	10
Green	2	8	11	11
Reform/UKIP	7	1	0	*
Unweighted bases	*407*	*484*	*297*	*105*
2021				
Conservative	55	24	6	5
Labour	13	39	52	51
Liberal Democrat	2	8	9	9
Green	5	8	12	15
Reform/UKIP	8	1	0	4
Unweighted bases	*294*	*354*	*219*	*101*

Table A.3 Party identification by attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 2015-23 (continued)

	Outside %	Inside but reduce %	Inside as is %	Inside but increase %
2023				
Conservative	39	22	10	4
Labour	17	37	48	40
Liberal Democrat	3	11	12	8
Green	3	5	9	14
Reform/UKIP	17	1	2	2
Unweighted bases	*289*	*397*	*346*	*144*

Note: Other categories of party identification, including 'None' and 'Don't Know' are included in the denominator on which the figures in the table are based but are not shown.

Table A.4 Unweighted bases for Table 3

	Left	Centre	Right
2015	1063	1402	1130
2016	720	939	690
2017	967	1272	967
2018	948	919	152
2019	793	606	627
2020	*1405*	*1307*	*1505*
2021	1858	2281	2068
2022	2709	1769	2169
2023	1665	2052	1816

One-dimensional or two-dimensional?

Table A.5 Unweighted bases for Table 4

	Libertarian	Neither	Authoritarian
2015	1317	1091	1200
2016	727	895	733
2017	1049	939	1225
2018	837	1080	1106
2019	676	704	652
2020	1327	1407	1218'
2021	2136	1912	2172
2022	2407	2025	2231
2023	1790	1775	1983

Table A.6 Unweighted bases for Table 5

	Bad	Neutral	Good
2015	649	835	662
2017	187	377	452
2018	167	366	415
2019	508	1239	1448
2021	502	897	1687
2023	295	400	508

Table A.7 Unweighted bases for Table 6

	Undermined	Neither	Enriched
2015	759	747	636
2017	260	347	411
2018	190	350	402
2019	644	1181	1358
2021	578	898	1609
2023	282	404	515

Table A.8 Unweighted bases for Table 9

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
2016	571	178	208
2019	1714	669	771
2021	974	882	1208
2023	301	305	596

One-dimensional or two-dimensional?

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