

Should We Have Seen Brexit Coming? Lessons of 40 (and a bit) Years of Social Research

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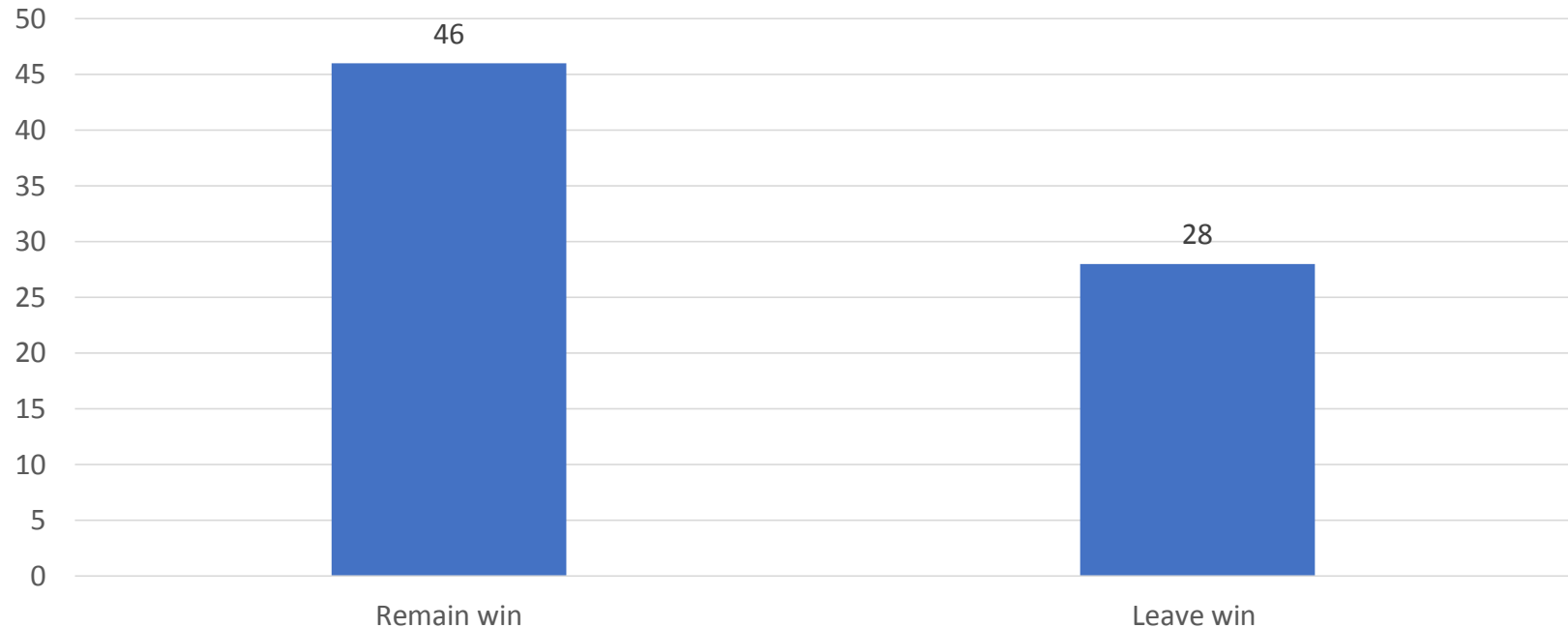
Senior Fellow 'The UK in a Changing Europe'

whatukthinks.org/eu @whatukthinks

A Parallel History

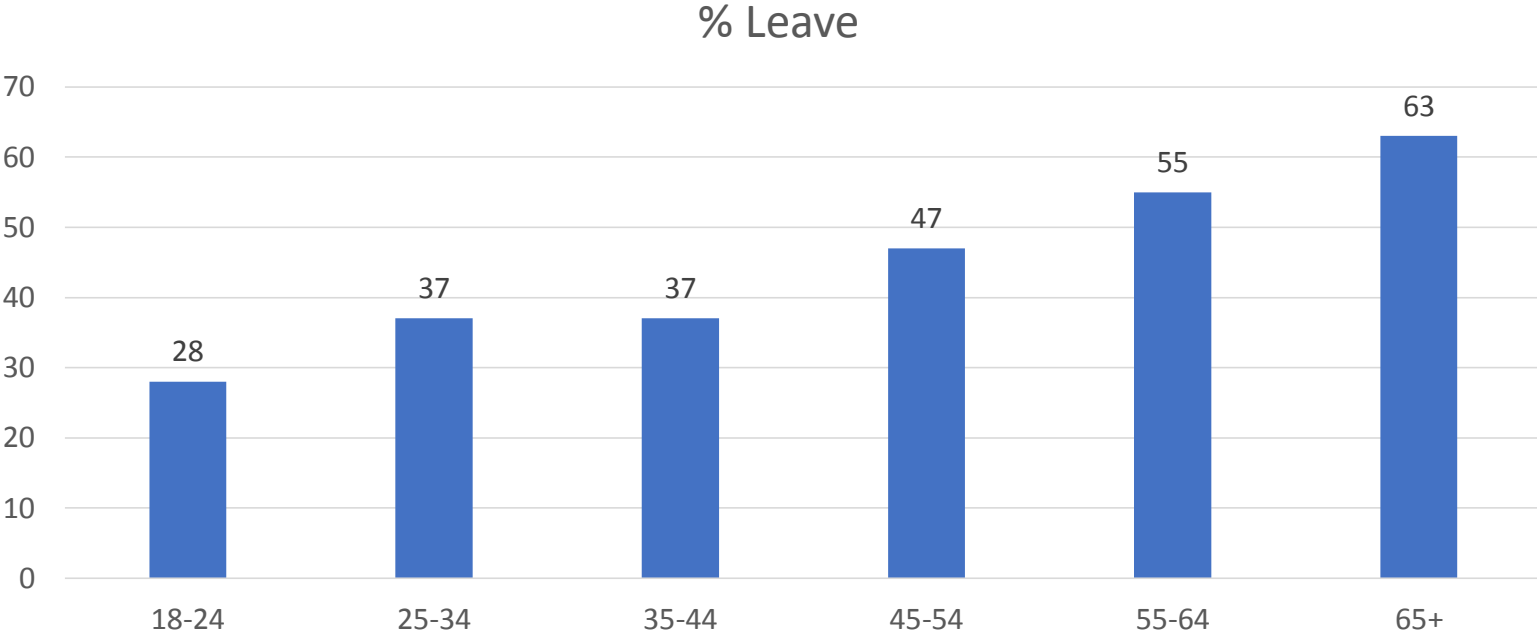
- 1973: UK joins Common Market
- 1975: UK votes in referendum to stay by 67% to 33% in the 'Common Market'
- 1978: Social Research Association formed
- 2016: UK votes in referendum by 52% to 48% to leave the EU
- 2018: SRA 40th anniversary
- 2019: UK due to leave the EU

What the Public Expected the Result of the EU Referendum would be



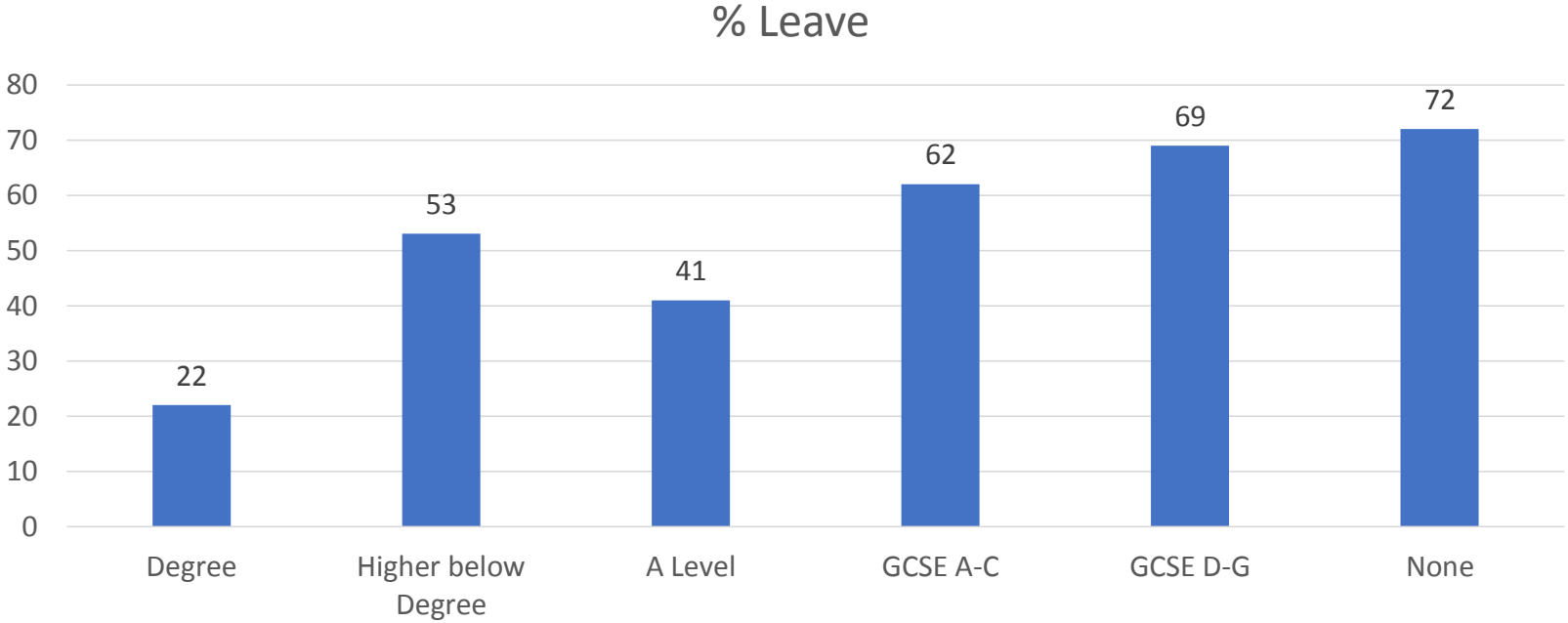
Source: Average of 4 polls conducted just before referendum by ORB, Opinium, Survation and YouGov

A Sharp Division by Age



Source: British Social Attitudes 2016

And by Education

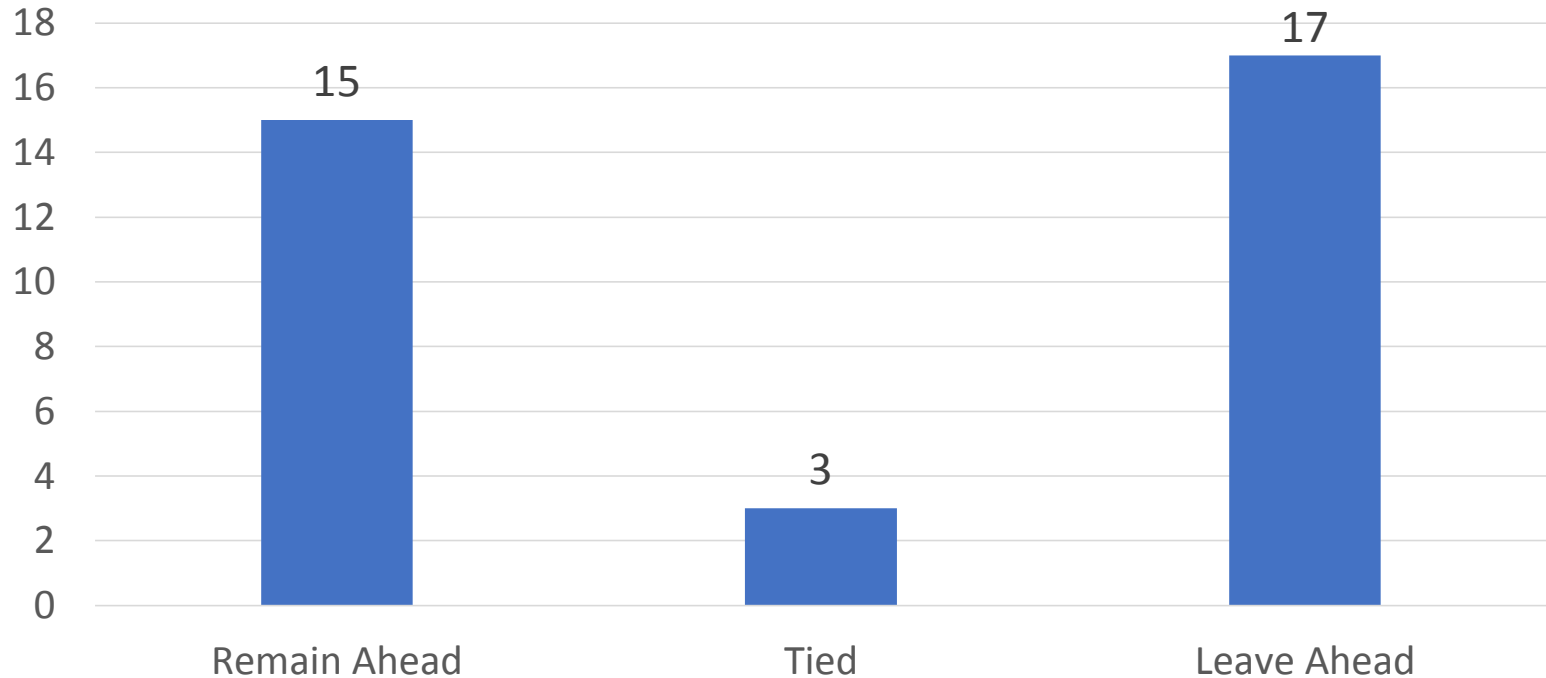


Source: British Social Attitudes 2016

Two Questions and a Leitmotif

- Could the overall outcome have been anticipated?
- To what extent was the demographic (and political) variation in evidence long before?
- And along the way – how has the development of social (survey) research enabled us to address these questions?

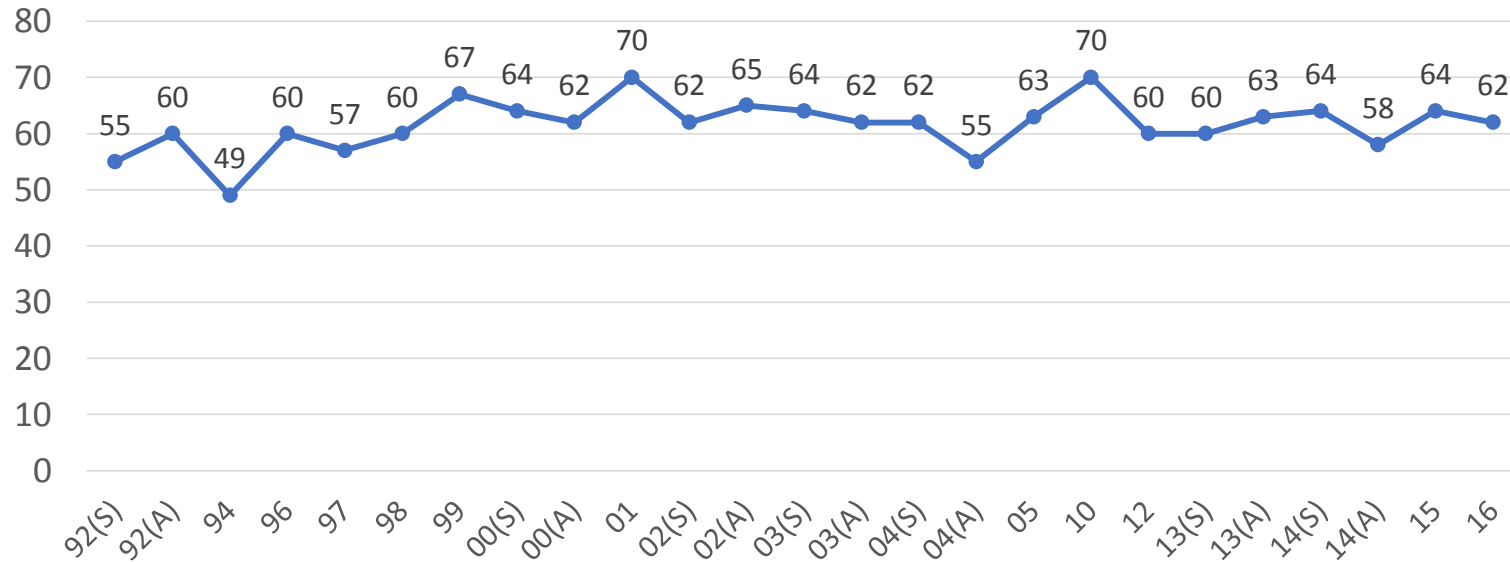
What the Campaign Polls said



Based on all polls conducted 27.5.16 to 22.6.16 by BPC companies

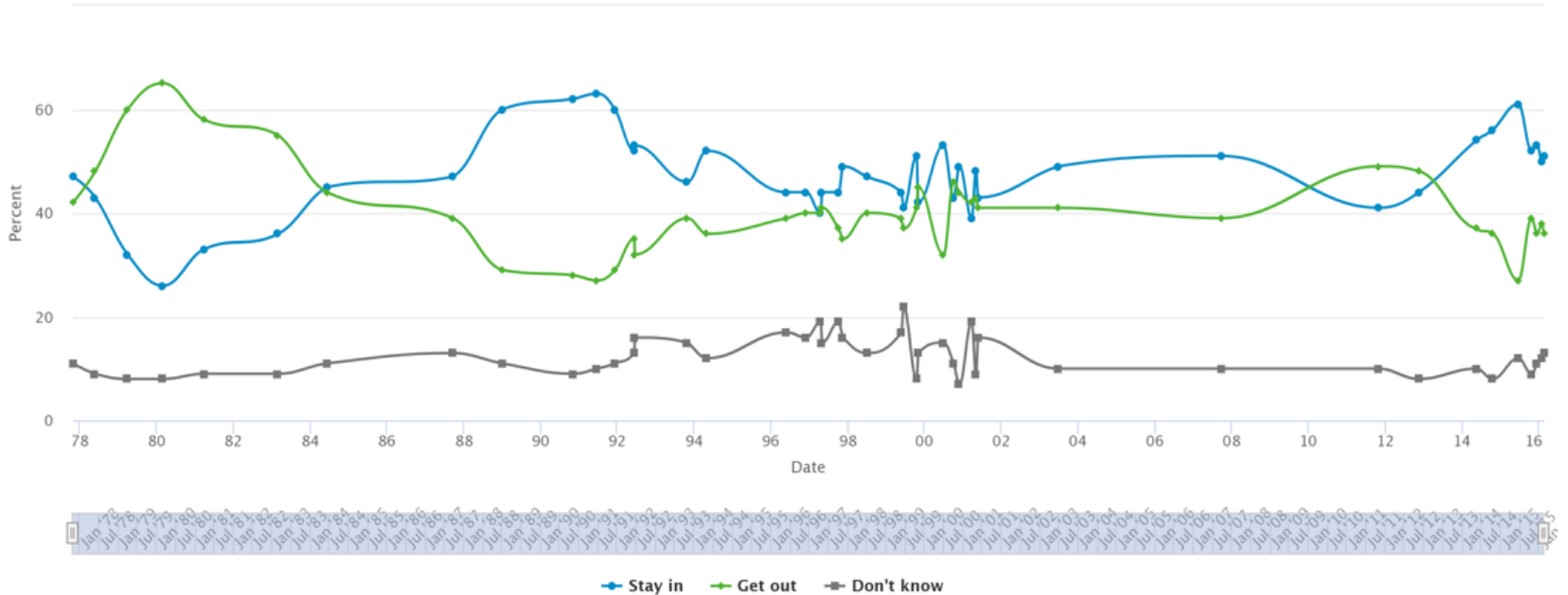
Britishness has persistently been a mostly exclusive identity

% Moreno identity: British, not European



Forty Years of Polling on EU Membership

How would you vote in a referendum now on whether Britain should stay in or get out of the EU?

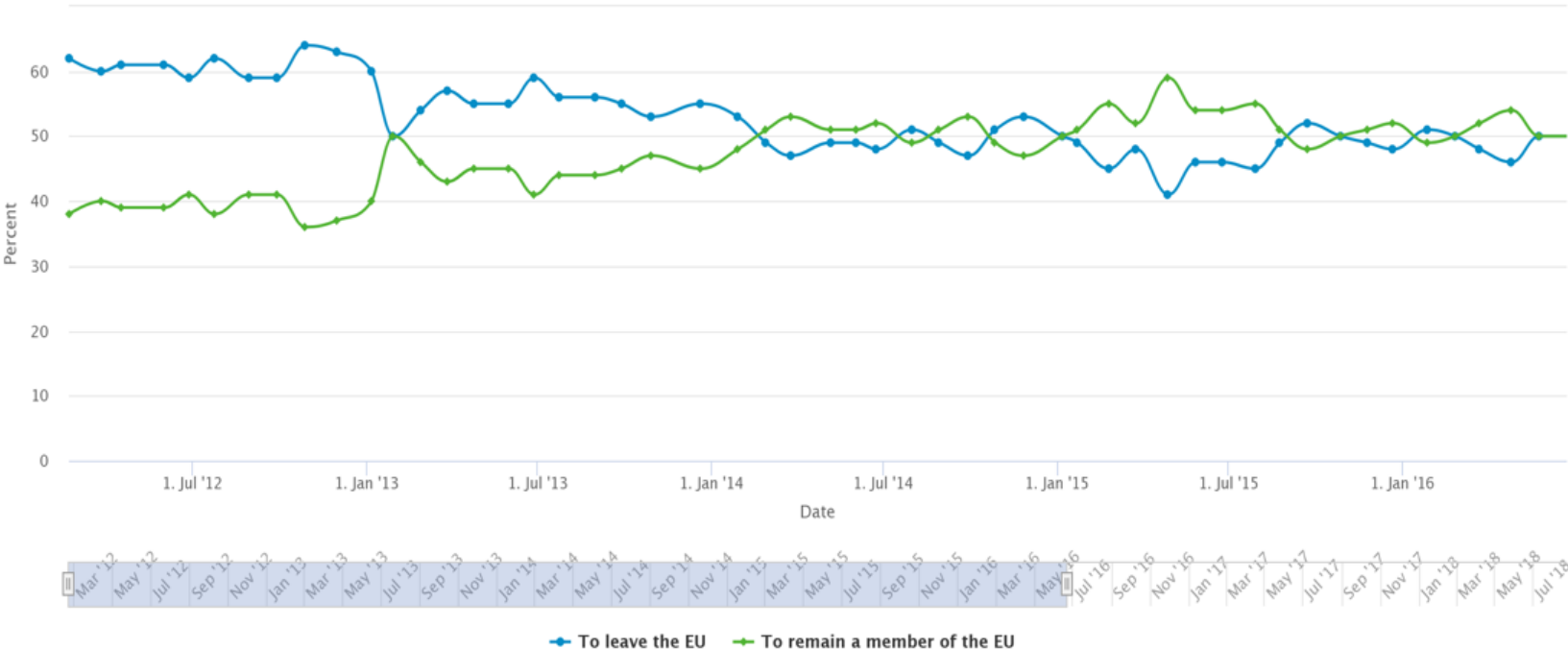


Source data at www.WhatUKThinks.org/EU run by NatCen Social Research

Source: Ipsos MORI f2f and phone polls (all f2f until 1992; all phone from June 2008)

The More Recent Pattern

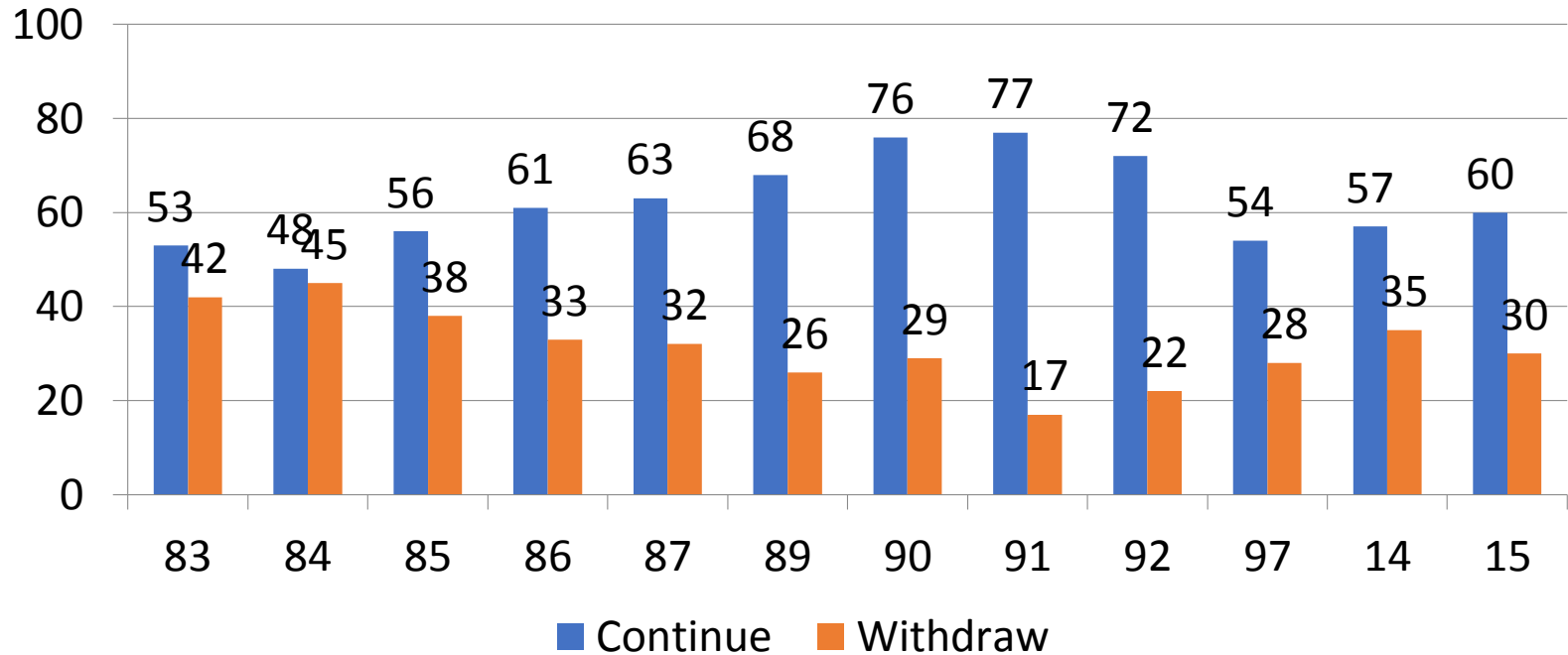
If there was a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU, how would you vote? (Eurotrack)



Source data at www.WhatUKThinks.org/EU run by NatCen Social Research

Source: YouGov Internet Polls: The company's domestic time series from 2010 to 2015 shows a similar pattern.

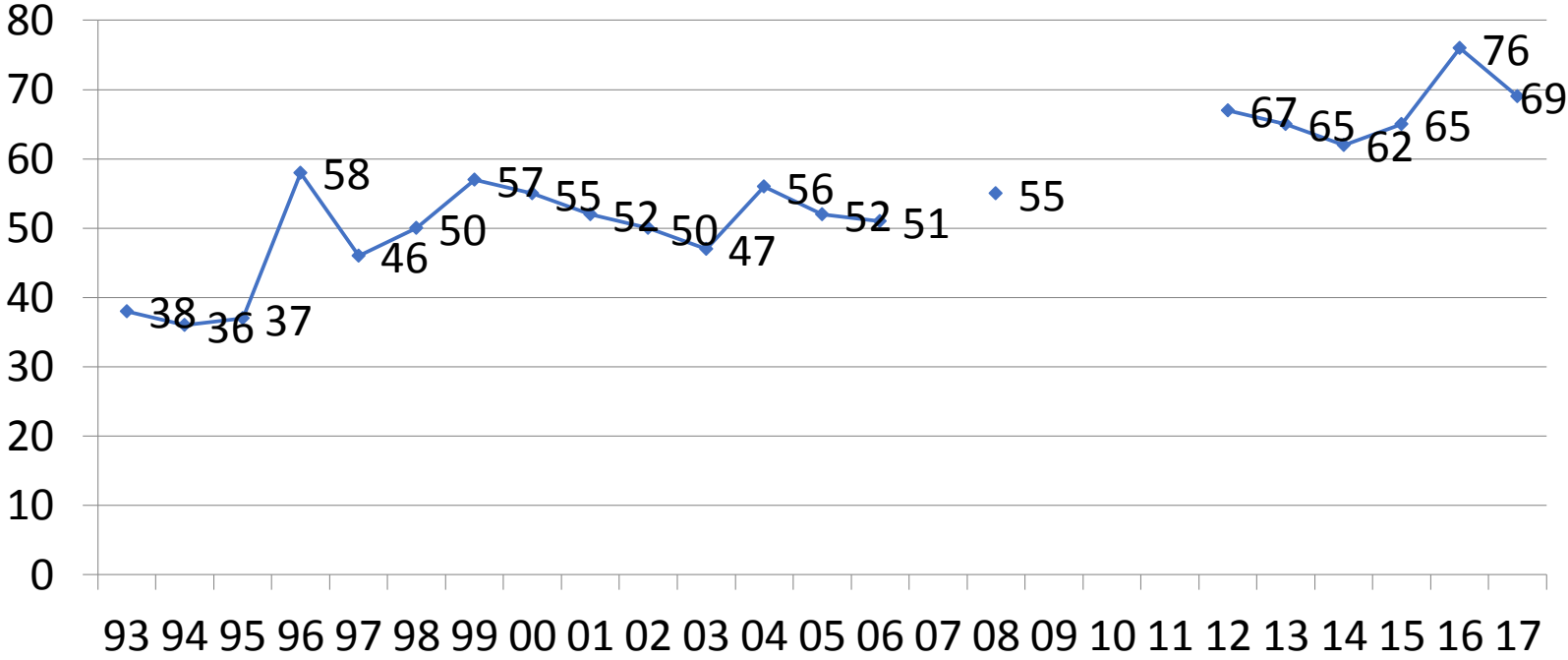
Should Britain 'continue' as an EU member or 'withdraw'?



A More Nuanced Approach

- 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?

The Long Rise of Euroscepticism

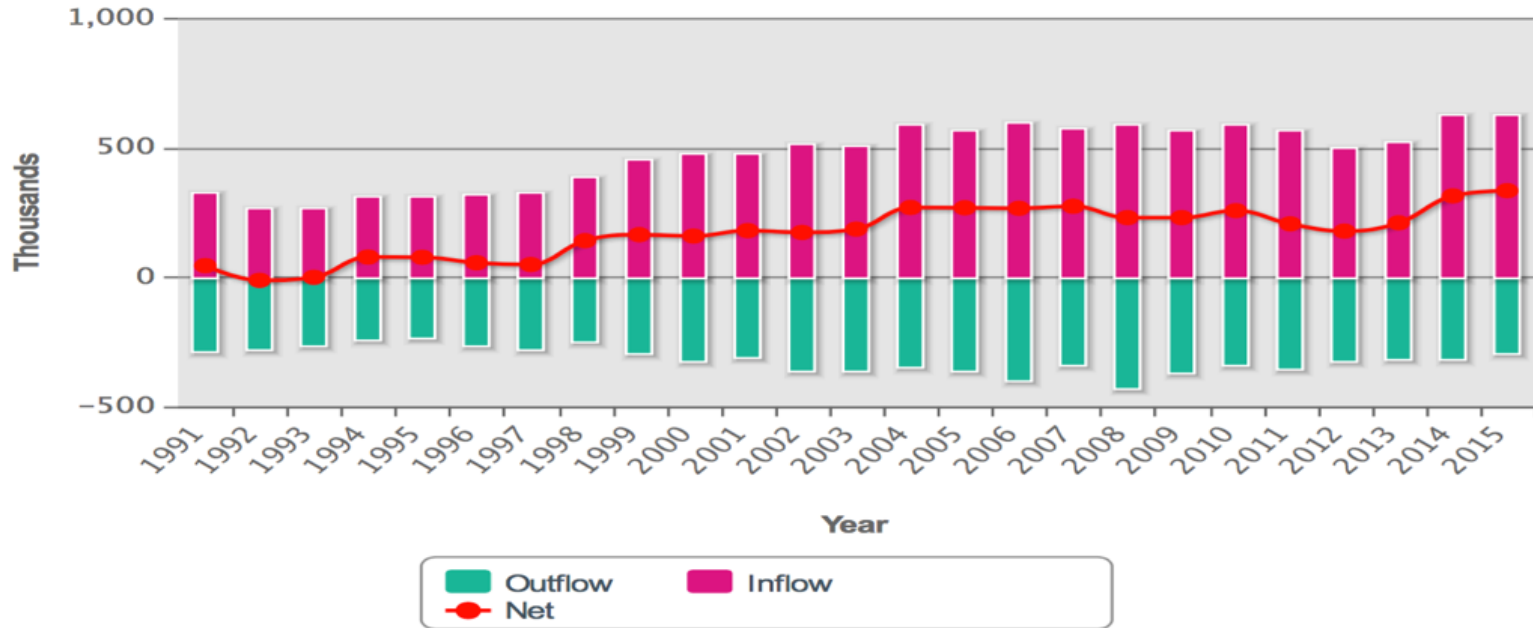


Source: British Social Attitudes

UK Migration 1991-2015

Emigration, immigration and net migration in the UK

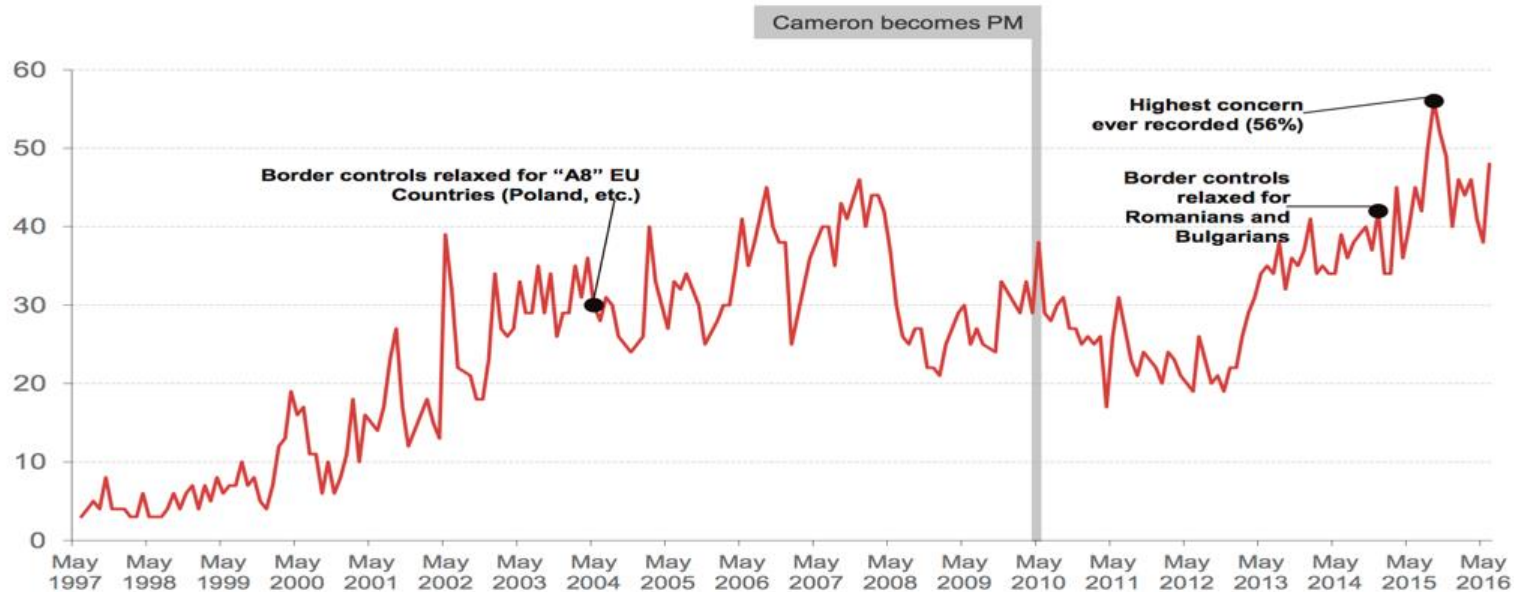
Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Issues Facing Britain: Immigration / Immigrants

What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain today?

5



Base: representative sample of c.1,000 British adults age 18+ each month, interviewed face-to-face in home
NB Until Sept 2014 the code was race relations/immigration/immigrants

Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index

Ipsos MORI

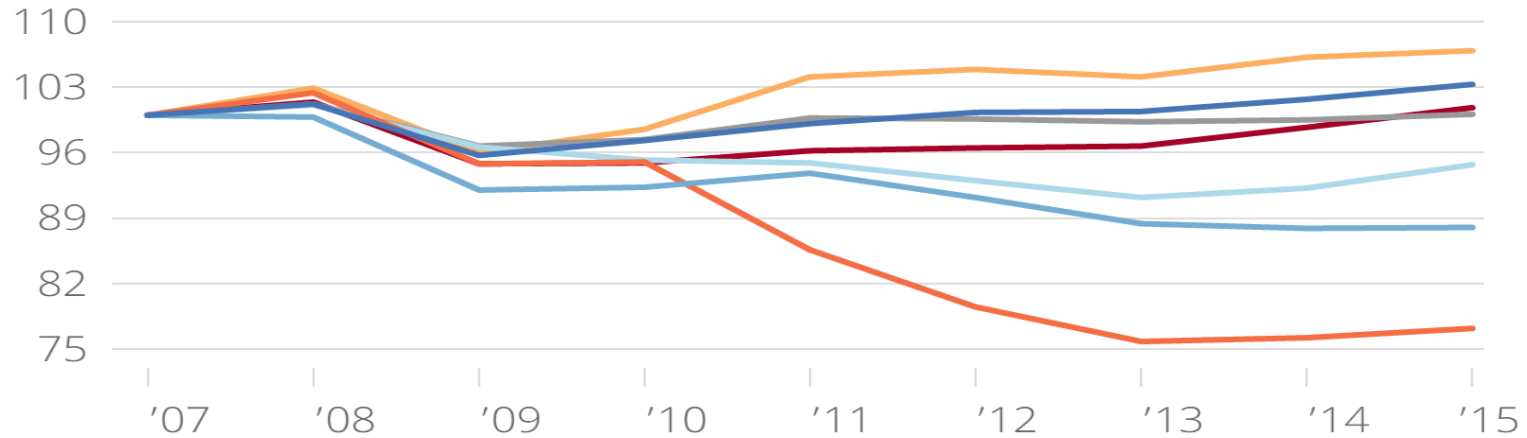


Index started in 1974. Monthly from 1983

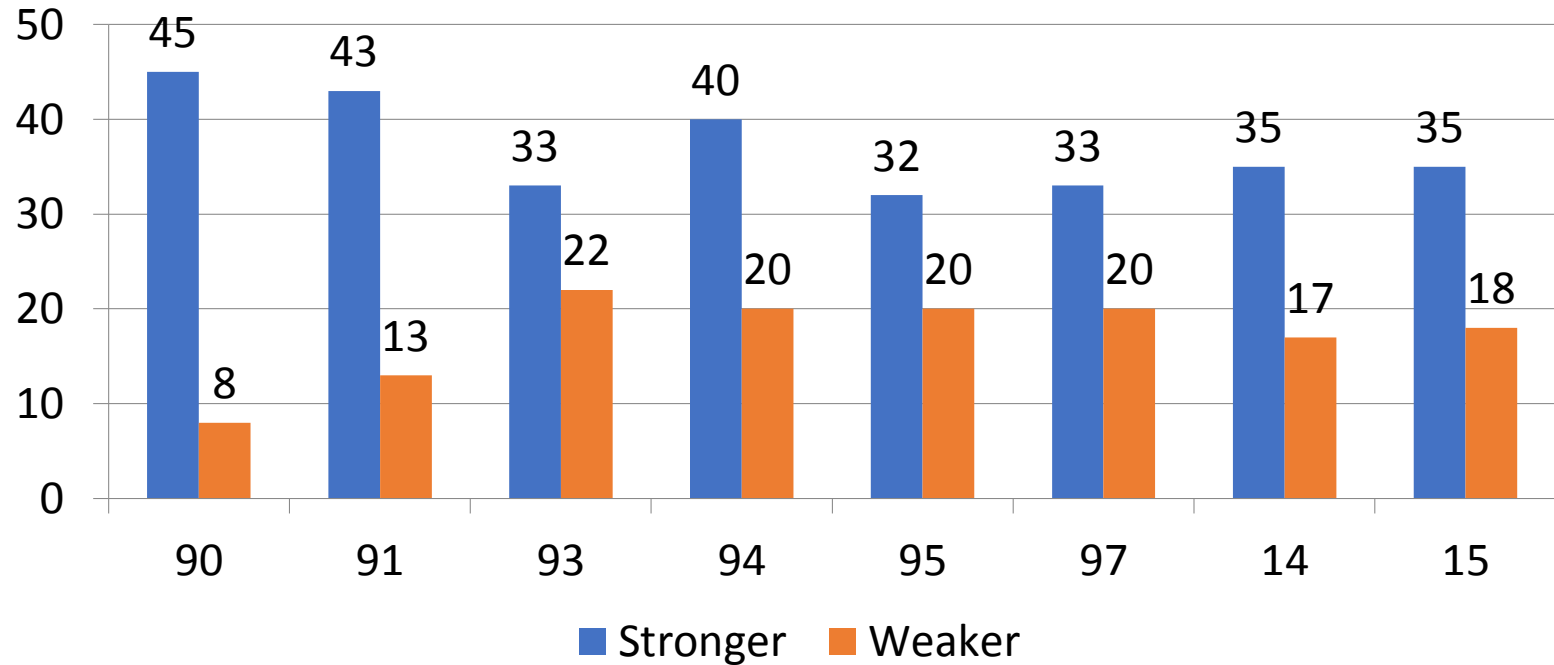
Comparative Economic Trends

GDP per capita (Index, 2007=100)

■ UK ■ Germany ■ France ■ Spain ■ Greece ■ Italy ■ OECD total



Perceived Economic Consequences of Stronger EU Links



The Arithmetic of Economic Perceptions

Perception of Impact of Leaving	% Holding that view	Of whom % vote Remain	Of whom % vote Leave	Value to Leave
Better Off/ No Difference	54	13	87	47
Worse Off	46	95	5	2
Total				49

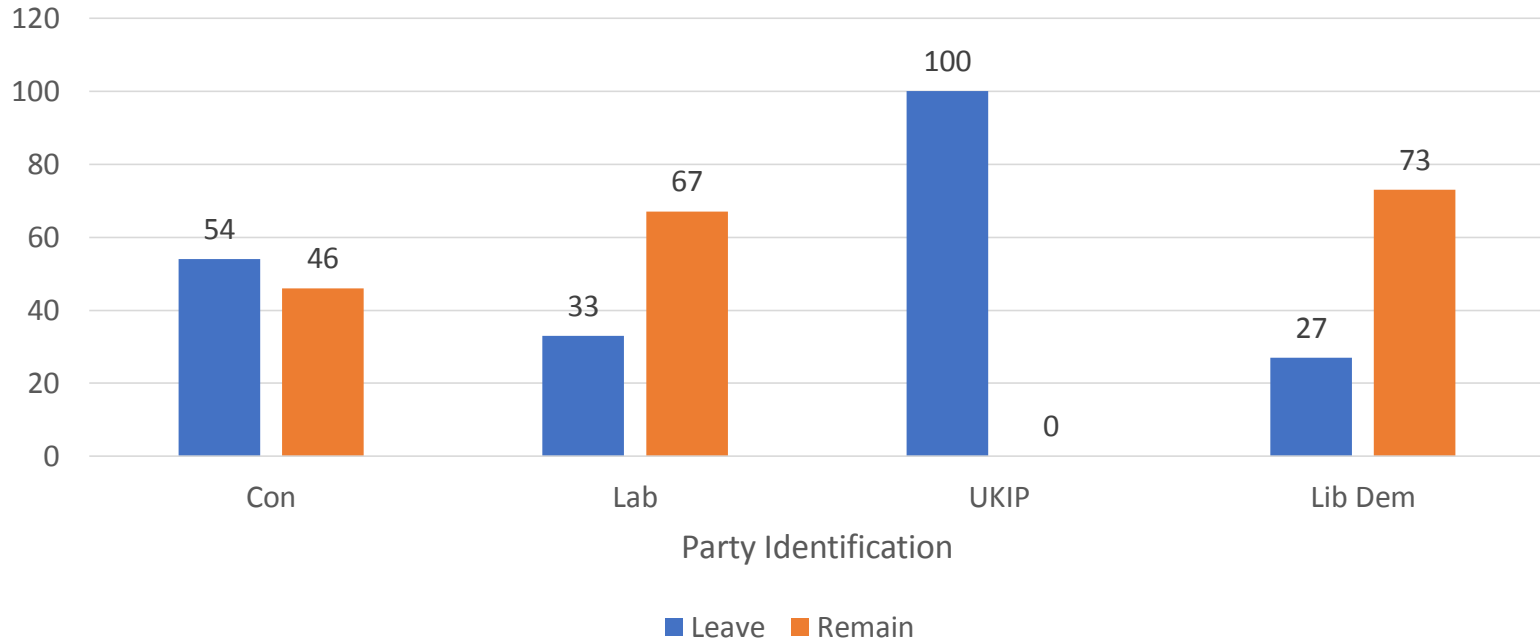
Source: Calculated from YouGov 20-22.6.16

The Arithmetic of Immigration Perceptions

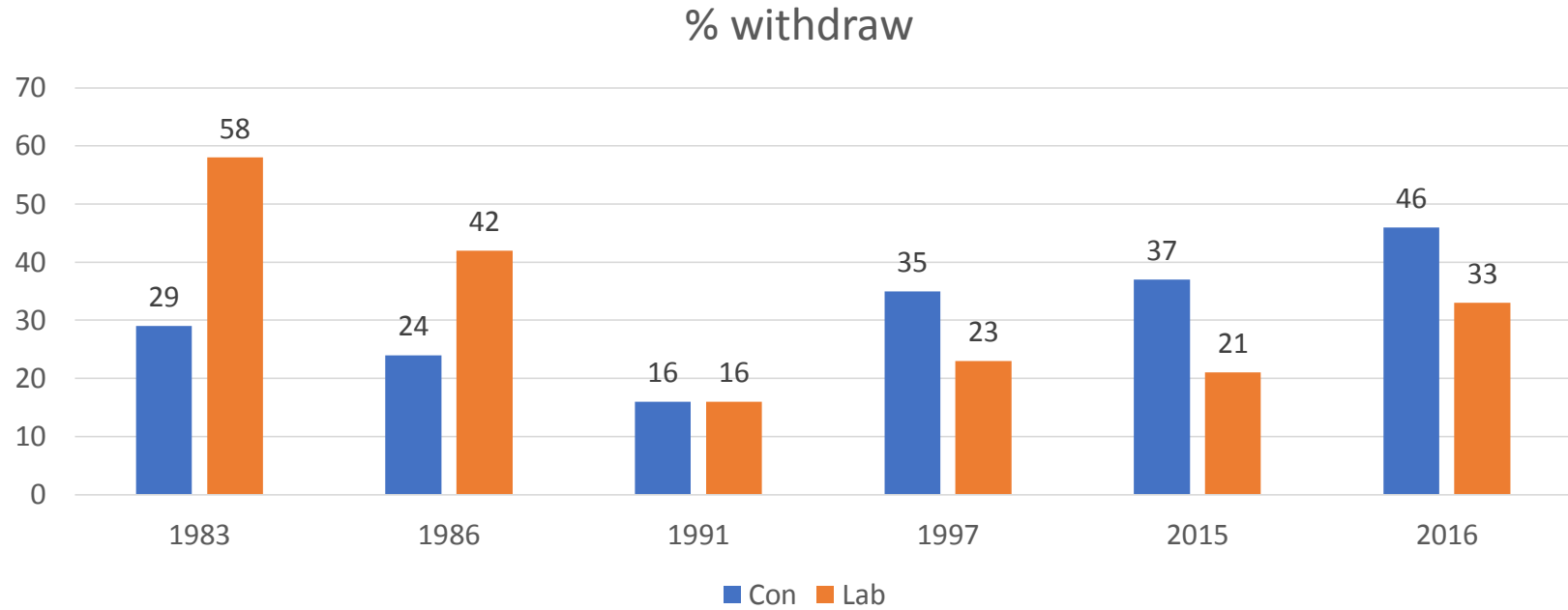
Perception of Impact of Leaving	% Holding that view	Of whom % vote Remain	Of whom % vote Leave	Value to Leave
Less	59	25	75	44
More/No Difference	41	84	16	7
Total				51

Source: Calculated from YouGov 20-22.6.16

A Partisan Muddle

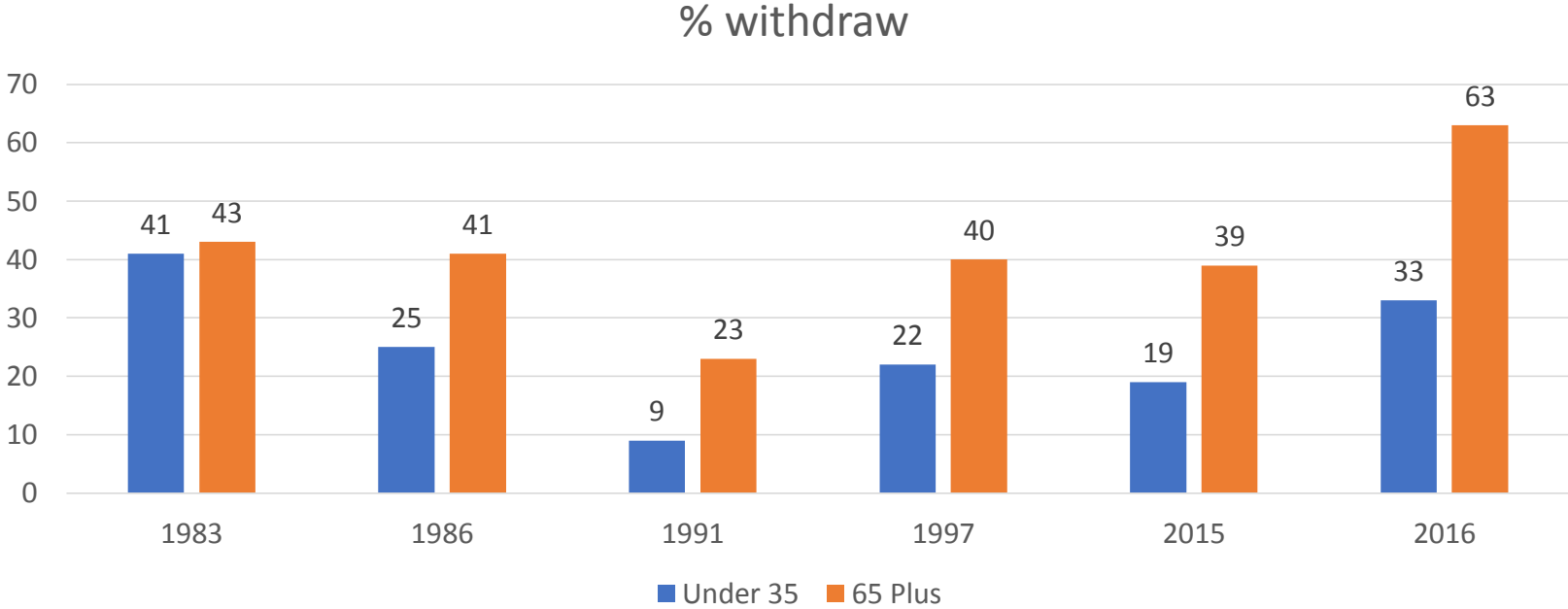


Changing Party Politics



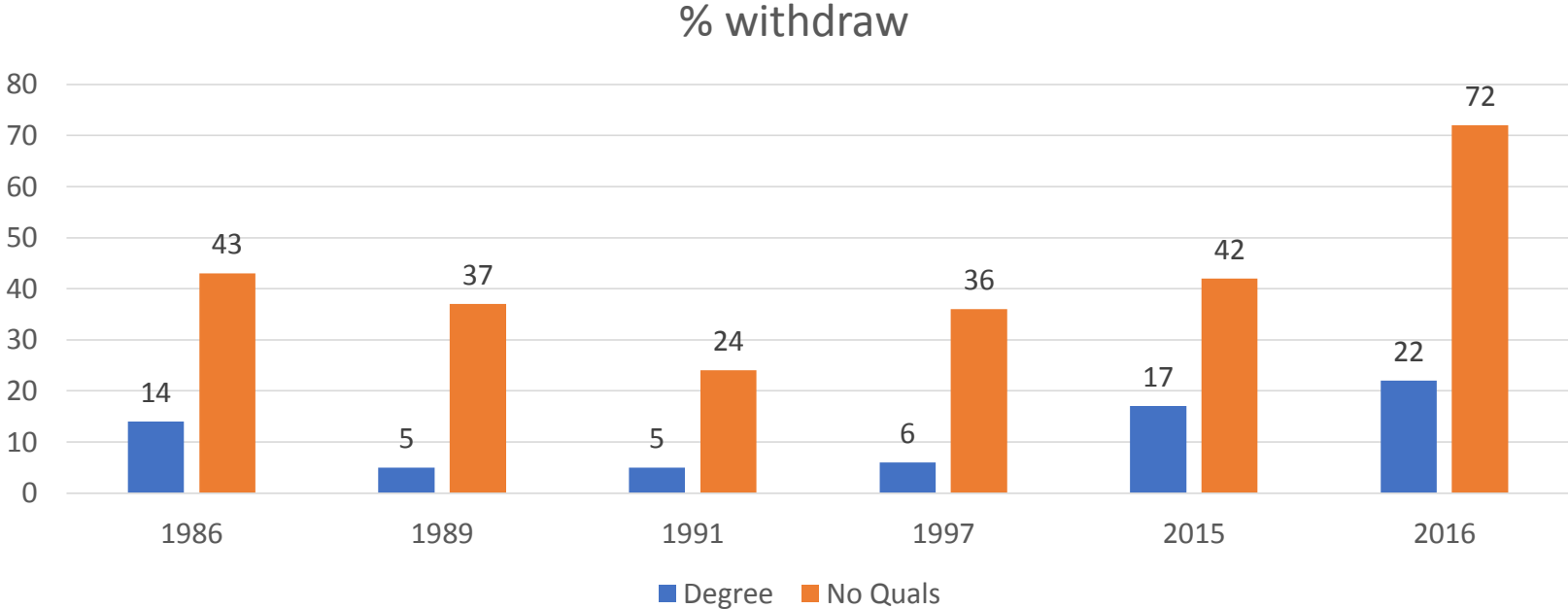
Source: British Social Attitudes. 2016 represents % Leave among those voting in the referendum

The Almost Persistent Age Gap



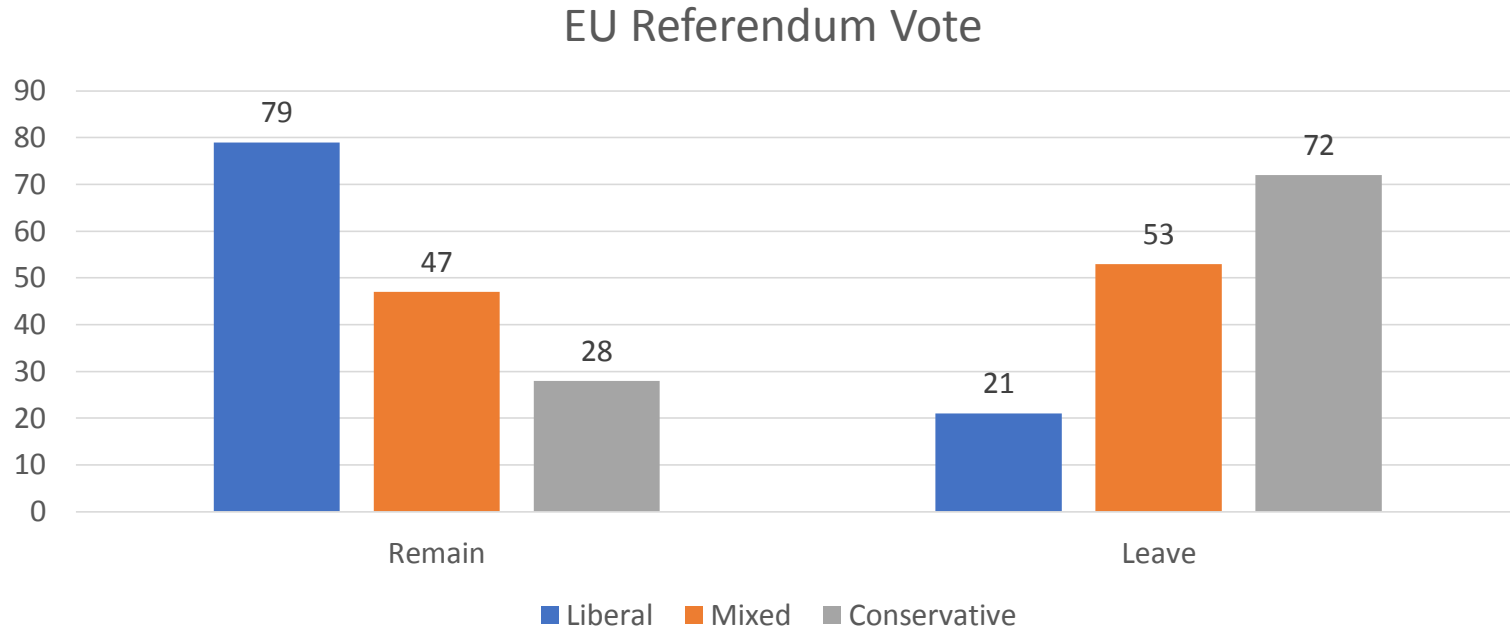
Source: British Social Attitudes. 2016 represents % Leave among those voting in the referendum.

The Long-Standing Educational Divide



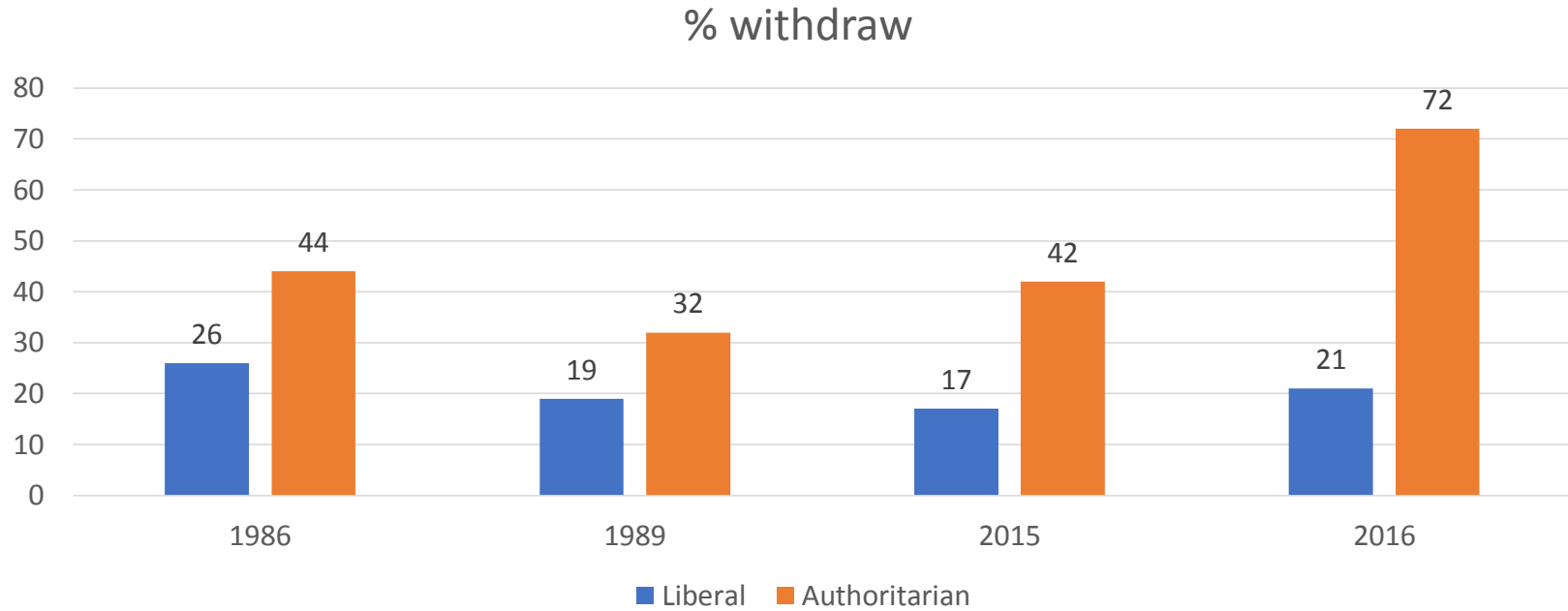
Source: British Social Attitudes. 2016 represents % Leave among those voting in the referendum

The Division Between Social Liberals and Conservatives



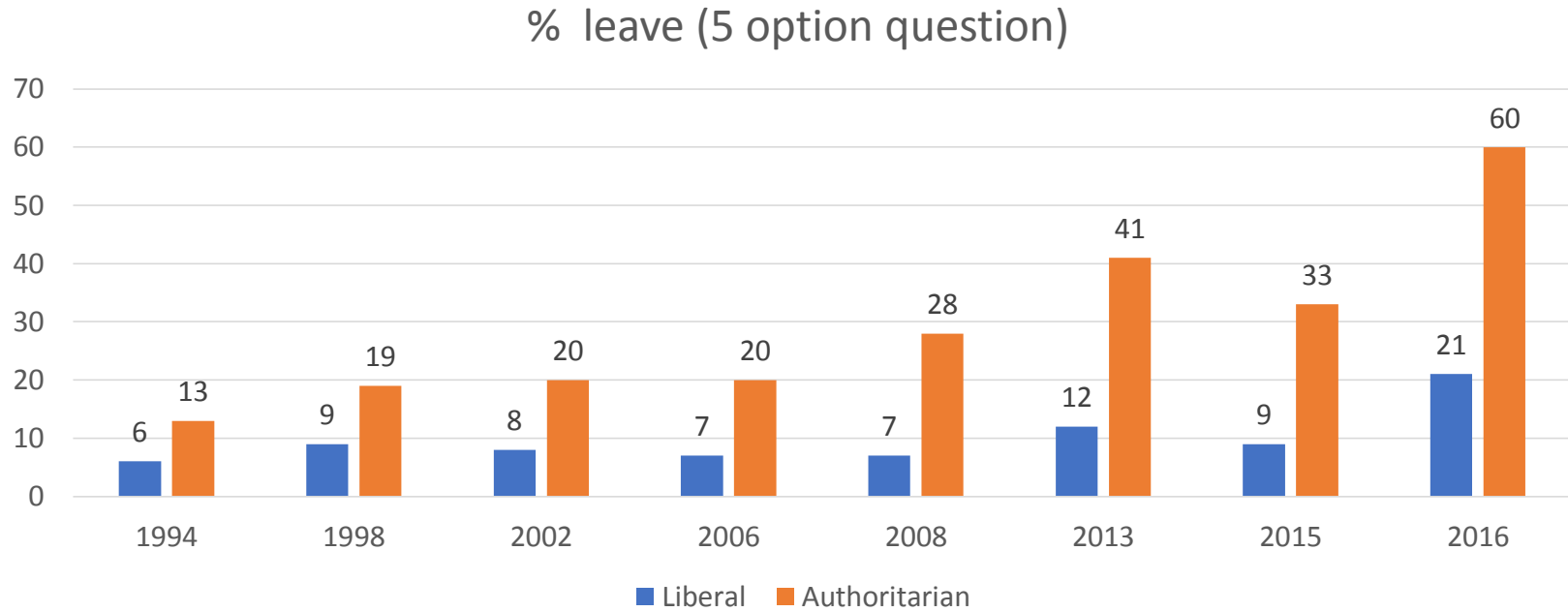
Source: British Social Attitudes 2016

How The Value Divide Widened - 1



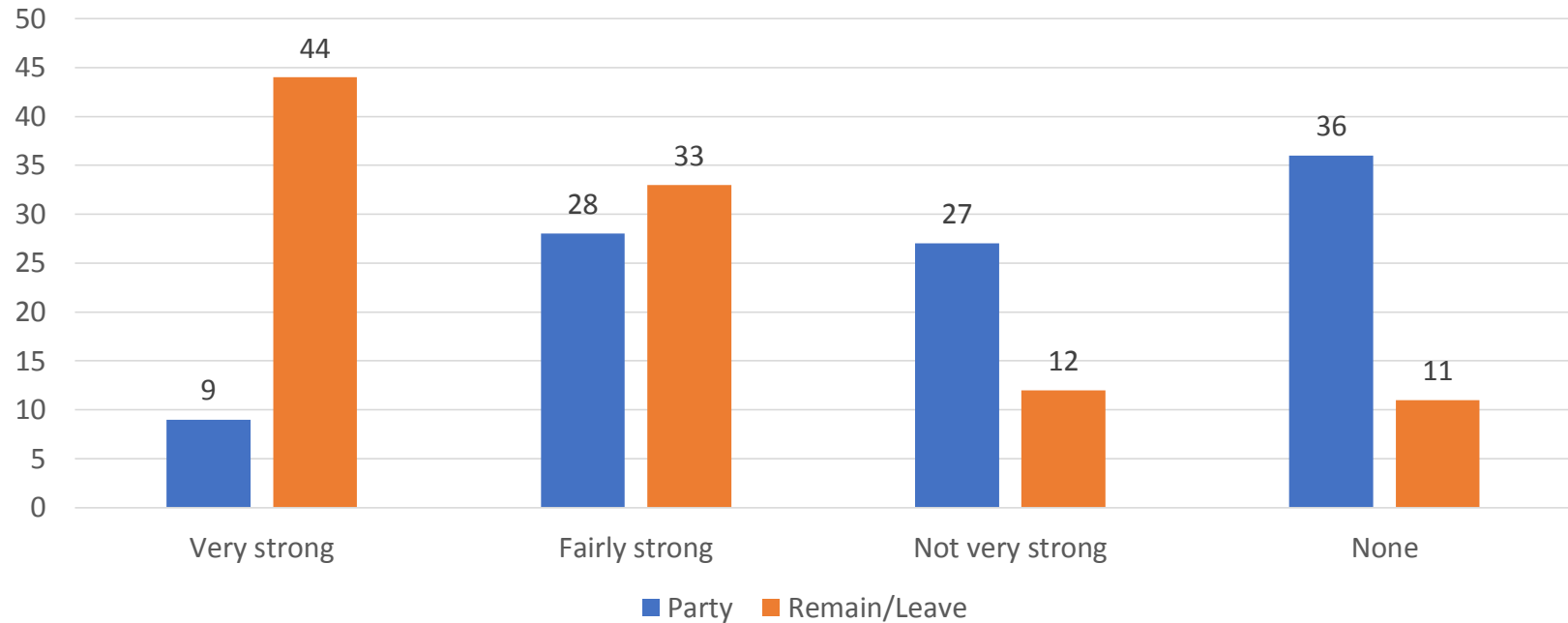
Source: British Social Attitudes. 2016 represents % Leave among those voting in the referendum

How The Value Divide Widened - 2



Source: British Social Attitudes.

Reported Strength of Remain/Leave and Party Identity



The 'Turnover' of Votes in the NatCen Panel

Vote Now/Vote 2016	Remain (%)	Leave (%)
Remain	90	12
Leave	6	81
Would Not Vote	4	6

How AbGret Has Evolved

EURef2 Preference	Sept 16 (%)	Feb 17 (%)	July 17 (%)	Oct 17 (%)	June 18 (%)
Remain	43	39	55	48	49
Leave	32	28	26	28	23
Wouldn't Vote	25	33	23	24	27

Conclusion

- The potential signs had always been there
 - Weak European identity
 - Periods when majority support for leaving – as recently as 2012
- Potential realised thanks to increased concern about immigration and reduced faith in economic benefits
- The signs of relative scepticism among some groups has long been evident – albeit some of the divisions have widened
 - Older people
 - Those with fewer qualifications
- But above all the referendum sharpened the nascent value divide
- Long-term social research has paid dividends!