

Social Perceptions and the EU Referendum

Sara Hobolt
Thomas J. Leeper
James Tilley

University Vienna Workshop

25 November 2017

Puzzle

Background

Empirics

Conclusion

How do citizens form opinions about policy issues?

How do citizens form opinions about policy issues?

What role does *social* information play?

1 Puzzle

2 Background

3 Empirics

4 Conclusion

1 Puzzle

2 Background

3 Empirics

4 Conclusion

Opinion Formation

- A *political attitude* is a cognitive evaluation of some object that expresses favour or disfavour toward that object
- Generally understood that attitudes are a weighting of belief considerations:
$$A = \sum_{x=1}^I \text{Belief}_i * \text{Weight}_i$$
- Most research focuses on *information* or *arguments* that are likely to change beliefs

Cues

- *Cues* are seen as a particularly important type of information
- Cues are information communicated from (better-informed? other?) individuals about how to evaluate an object
- Enable citizens to be cognitive misers
 - Outsourcing information processing (Downs 1957)

What do we know about cues?

- Two broad categories of cues have been studied:
 - Elite cues (mostly partisan endorsements)
 - Explicit/implicit racial or ethnic group references

What do we know about cues?

- Two broad categories of cues have been studied:
 - Elite cues (mostly partisan endorsements)
 - Explicit/implicit racial or ethnic group references
- Debate about when and why people follow cues

What do we know about cues?

- Two broad categories of cues have been studied:
 - Elite cues (mostly partisan endorsements)
 - Explicit/implicit racial or ethnic group references
- Debate about when and why people follow cues
- Limitations of extant work
 - Most research is in the United States
 - Most research is on fairly low-stakes issues
 - Most research focuses on elite cues

“Atomic” Citizens

- Most research portrays citizens as “atomic” actors
- Exceptions to this:
 - Network studies (Huckfeldt and Sprague; Mutz)
 - Deliberation experiments (Karpowitz and Mendelberg)
 - Normative behaviour experiments (Bolsen; Gerber, Green, and Larimer)

“Atomic” Citizens

- Most research portrays citizens as “atomic” actors
- Exceptions to this:
 - Network studies (Huckfeldt and Sprague; Mutz)
 - Deliberation experiments (Karpowitz and Mendelberg)
 - Normative behaviour experiments (Bolsen; Gerber, Green, and Larimer)
- But citizens are necessarily embedded in a social context that seems like to shape their beliefs

“Atomic” Citizens

- Most research portrays citizens as “atomic” actors
- Exceptions to this:
 - Network studies (Huckfeldt and Sprague; Mutz)
 - Deliberation experiments (Karpowitz and Mendelberg)
 - Normative behaviour experiments (Bolsen; Gerber, Green, and Larimer)
- But citizens are necessarily embedded in a social context that seems like to shape their beliefs

Social cues signal “attitudinal norms”

- *Attitudinal norms*
 - “widespread viewpoints held by members of a social group”
 - A form of “impersonal influence”
 - Cues about group rather than elite attitudes
- Driven by inherent needs for belongingness (Baumeister and Leary 1995)
- Individuals should conform to norms when they identify with a group

Social cues signal “attitudinal norms”

- *Attitudinal norms*
 - “widespread viewpoints held by members of a social group”
 - A form of “impersonal influence”
 - Cues about group rather than elite attitudes
- Driven by inherent needs for belongingness (Baumeister and Leary 1995)
- Individuals should conform to norms when they identify with a group
- Very little research on this form of impersonal influence

But maybe that's because people don't know
anything about or care about what other
people think.

We don't think so.

Our Research

- Examine social cues in a novel context
 - Outside the United States
 - Norms of non-partisan and non-racial/ethnic groups that are not heavily politicized
 - Conservative test of social influence
 - High-stakes issues (British referendum on EU membership and subsequent deal)
- Use experiments to manipulate access to social cues and measure effects on opinion

Our Research

We think this might suggest one or two mechanisms:

- 1 Social identity mechanism: people conform to the opinion of the group they identify with
- 2 Informational mechanism: people use attitudinal norm cues as information or evidence in favour and against a policy

But we do not test for this (yet).

1 Puzzle

2 Background

3 Empirics

4 Conclusion

Experiment 1: Study Design

- Interested in attitude formation with regard to the British referendum to leave the EU
- Examine identification with three one of three social group types:
 - Social class: Working class (anti EU) versus middle class (pro EU).
 - Nationality: English (anti EU) versus British (pro EU).
 - Age: Old (anti EU) versus young (pro EU).
- Randomly supply information about vote intentions of these groups

Study Design

Group	Treatment	Control
Class	493	481
Nationality	465	498
Age	486	487
Control		n = 492

Expectations

Cues should increase support for group-normative attitude:

- For those identifying with a “remain” group, treatment should make attitude more pro-remain.
- For those identifying with a “leave” group, treatment should make attitude more pro-leave.

Most people think of themselves as either young or old. What do you think of yourself as?

Young

Old

Neither

How close do you feel to other (young/old) people?

Very close

Fairly close

Not very close

Not close at all

Most people think of themselves as either middle class or working class.

What do you think of yourself as?

Middle class

Working class

Neither

How close do you feel to other (middle/working) class people?

Very close

Fairly close

Not very close

Not close at all

Identification w/ Social Groups by Experimental Condition

Group	Leave group	Remain group	Neither
Age	21%	33%	46%
Nationality	40%	53%	7%
Class	45%	37%	18%
<i>Total</i>	35%	40%	24%

Most people in Britain think of themselves as either British or English. What do you think of yourself as?

British

English

Neither

How close do you feel to other (British/English) people?

Very close

Fairly close

Not very close

Not close at all

YouGov

In June this year the British people will vote in a referendum on whether the United Kingdom will remain in or leave the European Union.

Most people who consider themselves British say they will vote to remain in the EU, whereas most people who consider themselves English say they will vote to leave the EU.

On a scale from 0 to 10, what do you think about Britain's membership of the European Union?

Britain should definitely leave
the European Union



Britain should definitely remain
in the European Union



YouGov

In June this year the British people will vote in a referendum on whether the United Kingdom will remain in or leave the European Union.

On a scale from 0 to 10, what do you think about Britain's membership of the European Union?

Britain should definitely leave
the European Union



Britain should definitely remain
in the European Union



YouGov

In the upcoming referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, voters will be asked "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?". How do you think you will vote?

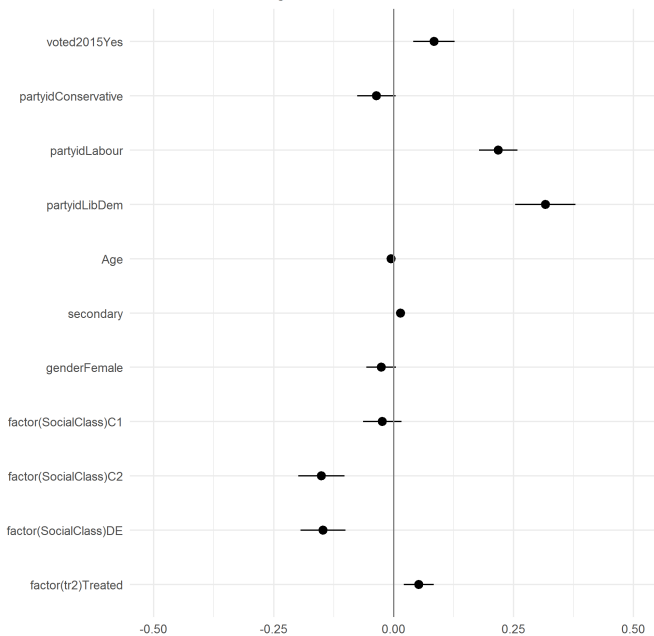
- To remain a member of the European Union
- To leave the European Union
- I will not vote
- Don't know



Implementation

- Two days of the YouGov Omnibus panel
 - 18–20 April 2016
 - Median completion time: 5 minutes
- Total sample size $n=3,402$
 - Power to detect $d = 0.07$
- Not strictly representative, but poststratified

Predictors of Voting Remain

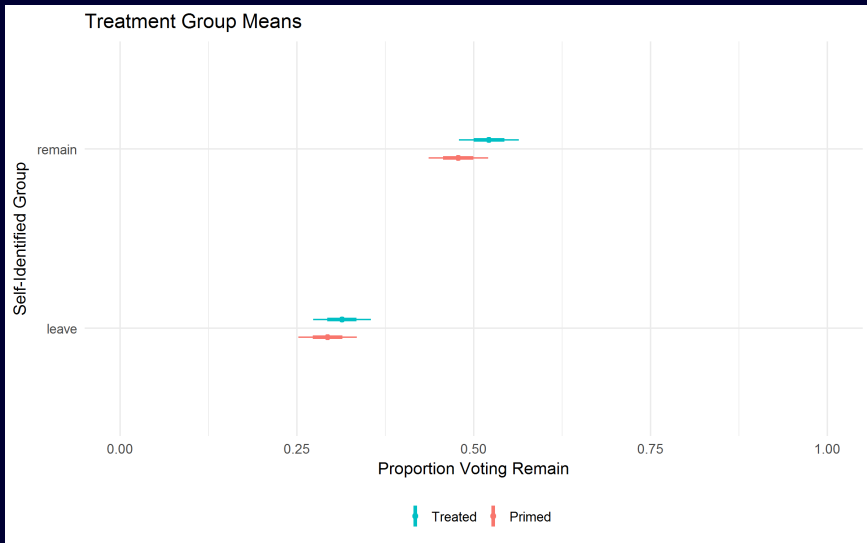


Results

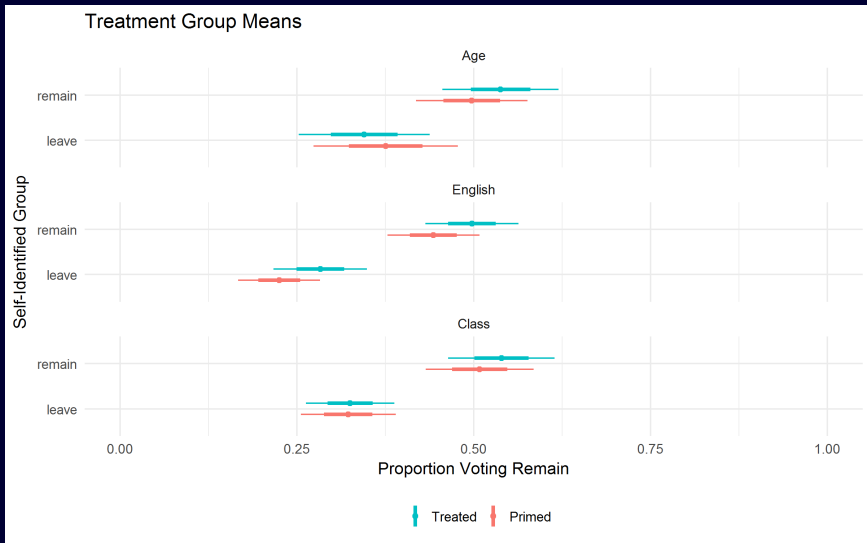
- Really small effects!

Results: % Vote Remain

Results: % Vote Remain



Results: % Vote Remain



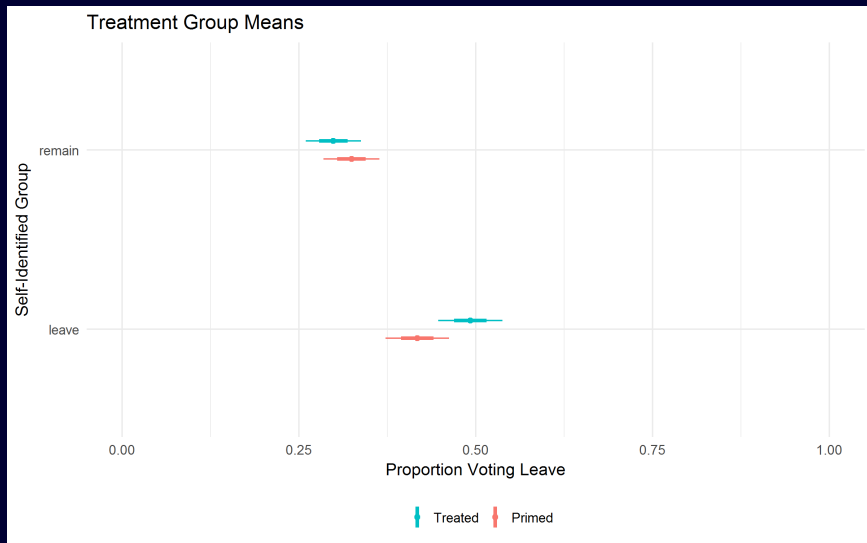
Puzzle

Background

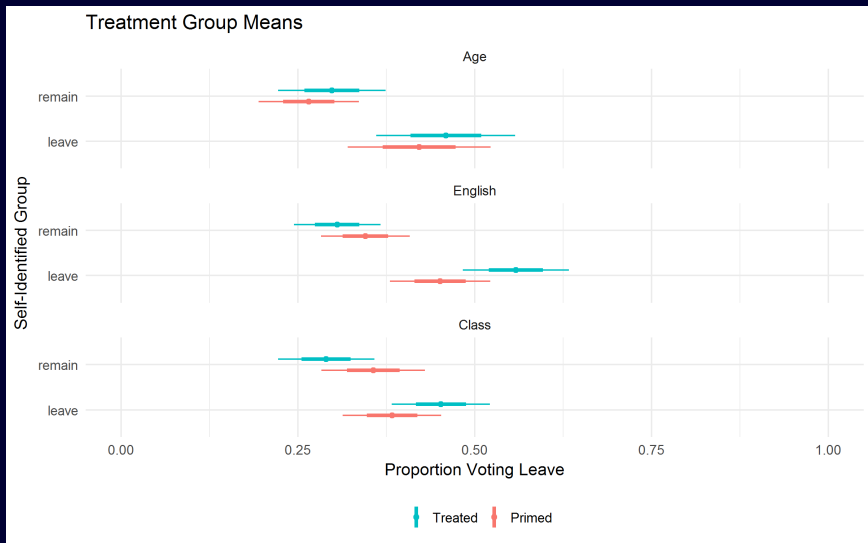
Empirics

Conclusion

Results: % Vote Leave



Results: % Vote Leave



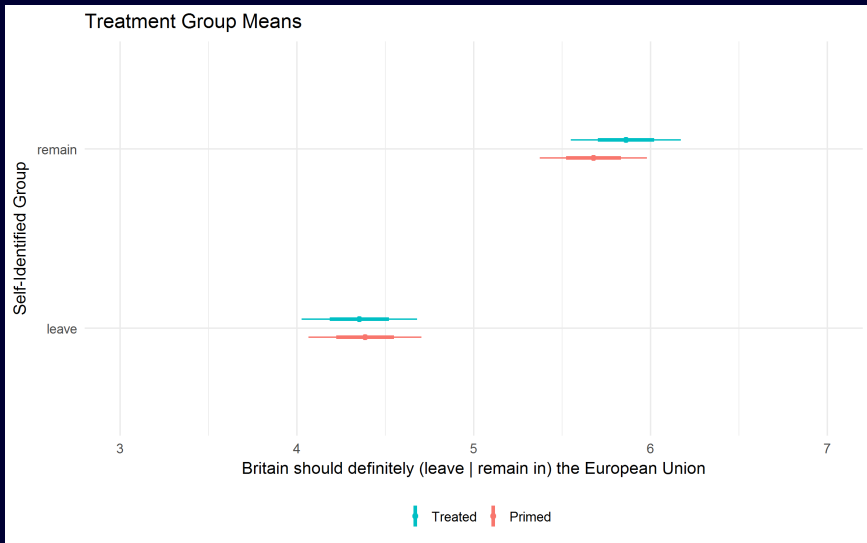
Puzzle

Background

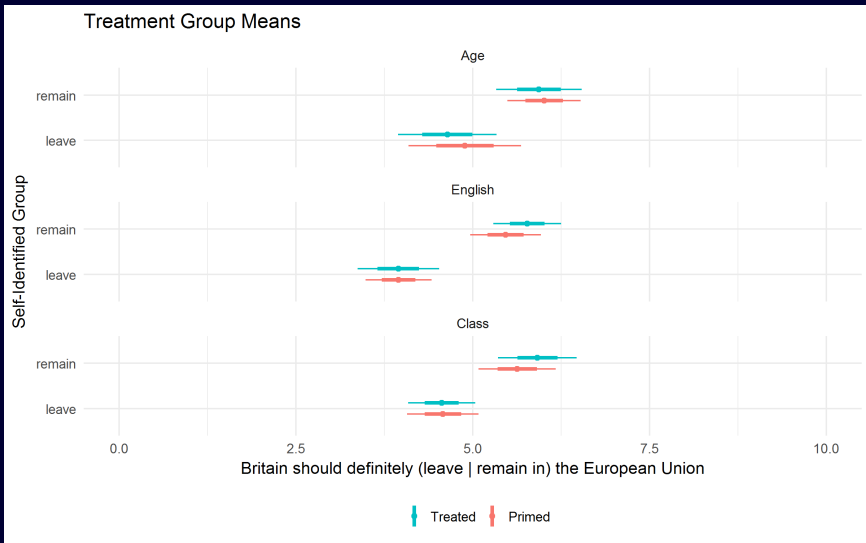
Empirics

Conclusion

Results: Scale



Results: Scale



Puzzle

Background

Empirics

Conclusion

Experiment 2: A Replication

- Replicate our Experiment 1 results
- But focus only on:
 - class identity
 - one specific aspect of the issue (immigration/market trade-off)
 - try to distinguish informational from conformity effects

Experiment 2: Design

Self-identification	Control	Favour	Oppose
Working class	1	2	3
Middle class	4	5	6

- Measure self-identification
- Measure perceptions of that group's views
- Randomly assign to "favour" or "oppose" cue
- Measure respondent's view
- Manipulation check

YouGov

Do you think of yourself as belonging to a social class? If so, which one?

Middle class

Working class

Other (please specify)

None



The YouGov logo is displayed in the top left corner of the white content area. It consists of the word "You" in red and "Gov" in grey, with a small grey dot above the "o".

Last June the majority of British people voted in favour of Britain leaving the EU. A key issue in the British government's negotiation with the EU about Brexit is whether to prioritise free trade with the EU or to prioritise controlling immigration from the EU.

Do you think that a majority of working class people support allowing unrestricted immigration from EU countries in return for free trade with the EU?

- Yes, the majority of working class people favour allowing unrestricted immigration in return for free trade
- No, the majority of working class people oppose allowing unrestricted immigration in return for free trade
- Don't know



YouGov

A majority of working class people oppose allowing unrestricted immigration from the EU in return for free trade with the EU. To what extent do YOU agree or disagree with the following statement:

'The government should allow unrestricted immigration from EU countries in return for free trade with the EU'

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know



YouGov

For each of the following groups, do you think **a majority of that group** support allowing unrestricted immigration from EU countries in return for free trade with the EU?

	Majority favours allowing immigration in return for free trade	Majority favours controlling immigration at the cost of free trade	Don't know
Middle class people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
British people as a whole	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working class people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



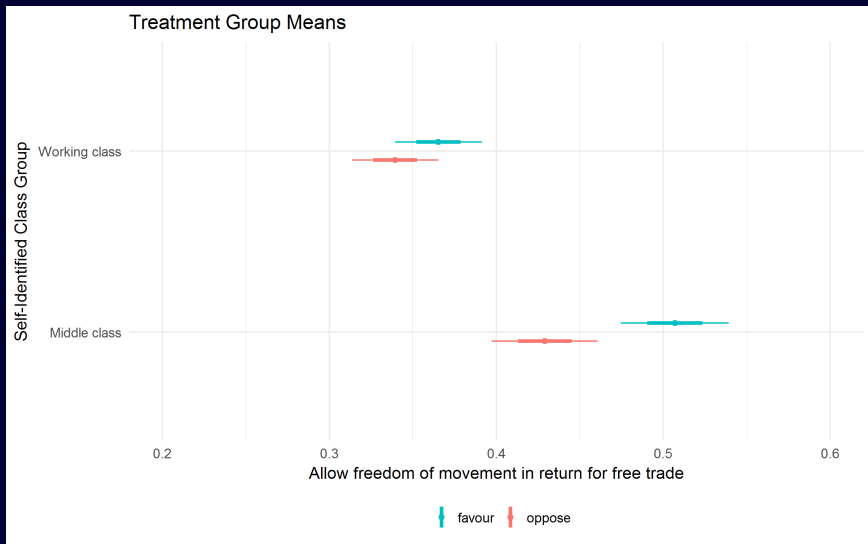
Puzzle

Background

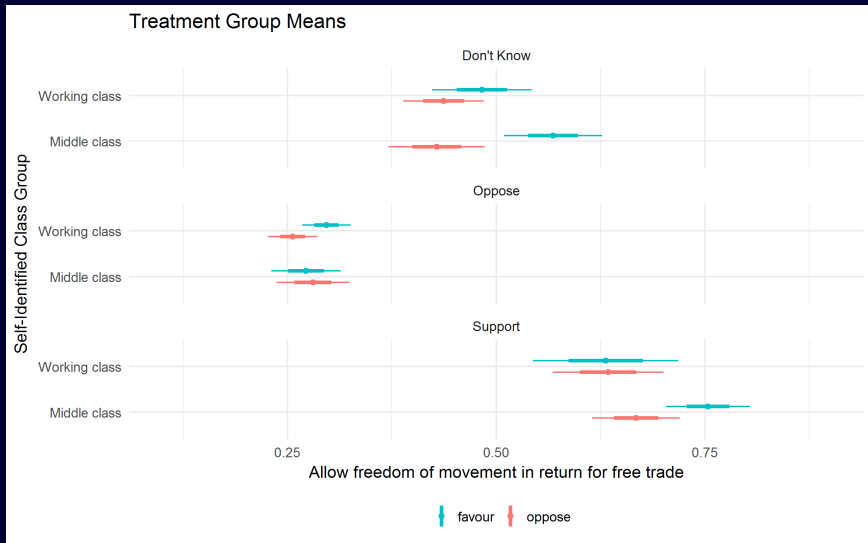
Empirics

Conclusion

Results



Results, by Cue Knowledge



1 Puzzle

2 Background

3 Empirics

4 Conclusion

Conclusion I

- Cues seem to be an important part of citizen reasoning about policies
- We offer some of the first *non-US* experimental data on *social* cues among *nonpartisan* groups
- Results suggest fairly small effects

Conclusion II

- Brexit continues to be an interesting site to study social influence because of the transformation of a two-stage process that seems to be progressing:
 - Citizens use social identity cues to form opinions on Brexit
 - Brexit itself is leading to new *opinion-based group* identities (“Leave” and “Remain”)

Conclusion II

- Brexit continues to be an interesting site to study social influence because of the transformation of a two-stage process that seems to be progressing:
 - Citizens use social identity cues to form opinions on Brexit
 - Brexit itself is leading to new *opinion-based group* identities (“Leave” and “Remain”)
- We can learn a lot about Brexit — but also political psychology generally — by examining how these group identities affect perceptions and preferences in the coming year(s)

In June this year the British people will vote in a referendum on whether the United Kingdom will remain in or leave the European Union.

Most people who consider themselves young say they will vote to remain in the EU, whereas most people who consider themselves old say they will vote to leave the EU.

On a scale from 0 to 10, what do you think about Britain's membership of the European Union?

Britain should definitely leave the European Union

—

Britain should definitely remain in the European Union

In June this year the British people will vote in a referendum on whether the United Kingdom will remain in or leave the European Union.

Most people who consider themselves middle class say they will vote to remain in the EU, whereas most people who consider themselves working class say they will vote to leave the EU.

On a scale from 0 to 10, what do you think about Britain's membership of the European Union?

Britain should definitely leave the European Union

—

Britain should definitely remain in the European Union

In June this year the British people will vote in a referendum on whether the United Kingdom will remain in or leave the European Union.

Most people who consider themselves British say they will vote to remain in the EU, whereas most people who consider themselves English say they will vote to leave the EU.

On a scale from 0 to 10, what do you think about Britain's membership of the European Union?

Britain should definitely leave the European Union

—

Britain should definitely remain in the European Union

In the upcoming referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, voters will be asked "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?" How do you think you will vote?

To remain a member of the European Union

To leave the European Union

I will not vote

Don't know

*How will you feel if Britain votes to
leave the EU?*

Very unhappy

—

Very happy

How will you feel if Britain votes to leave the EU?

- Very unhappy
- Somewhat unhappy
- A little unhappy
- Indifferent
- A little happy
- Somewhat happy
- Very happy



*On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means very negative and 10 means very positive, how would you describe your feelings toward **people who plan to vote to remain** in the European Union?*

Very negative

—

Very positive

On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means very negative and 10 means very positive, how would you describe your feelings toward people who plan to vote to remain in the European Union?

Very negative 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very positive



*On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means very negative and 10 means very positive, how would you describe your feelings toward **people who plan to vote to leave** the European Union?*

Very negative

—

Very positive

On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means very negative and 10 means very positive, how would you describe your feelings toward people who plan to vote to leave the European Union?

Very negative 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very positive



