

31st October 2019

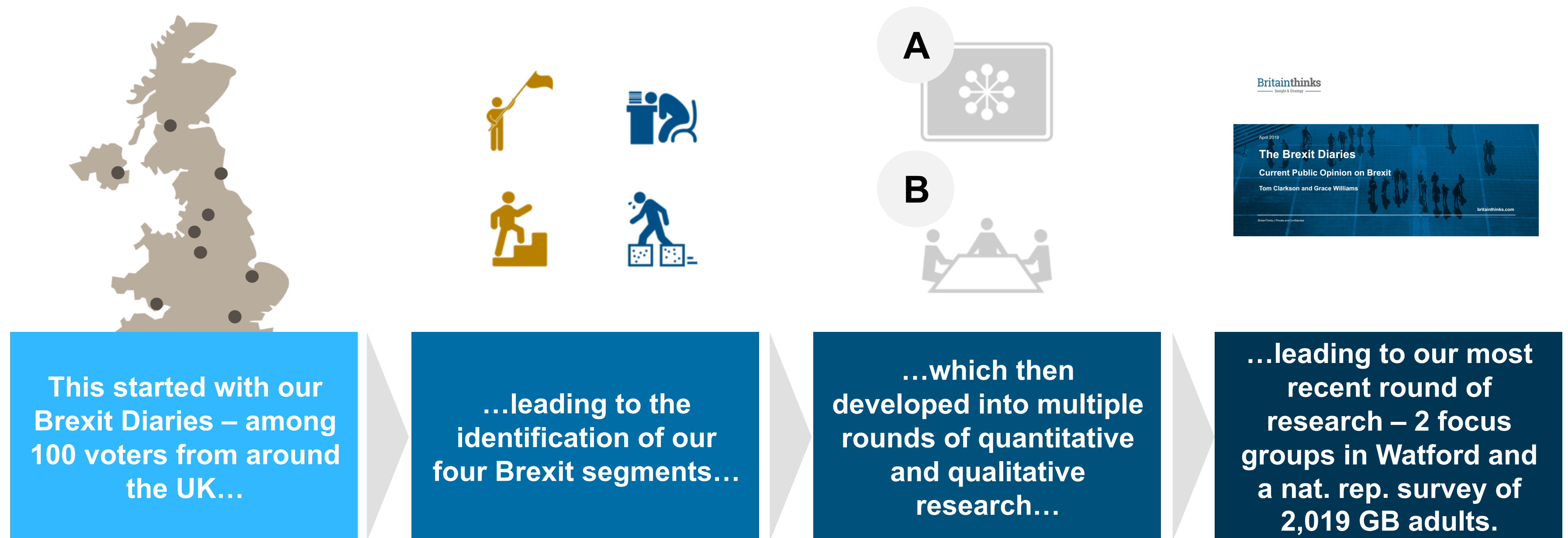
The Brexit Diaries

Current Public Opinion on Brexit

Deborah Mattinson and Nick Downes

britainthinks.com

Since 2017, we have conducted extensive research on how people experience the Brexit process



Some of you may be familiar with our voter segments from across our Brexit Diaries series:



Die-hards

Pleased about the result and have no significant concerns about leaving



Cautious Optimists

Pleased about the result but have some significant concerns about leaving



Accepting Pragmatists

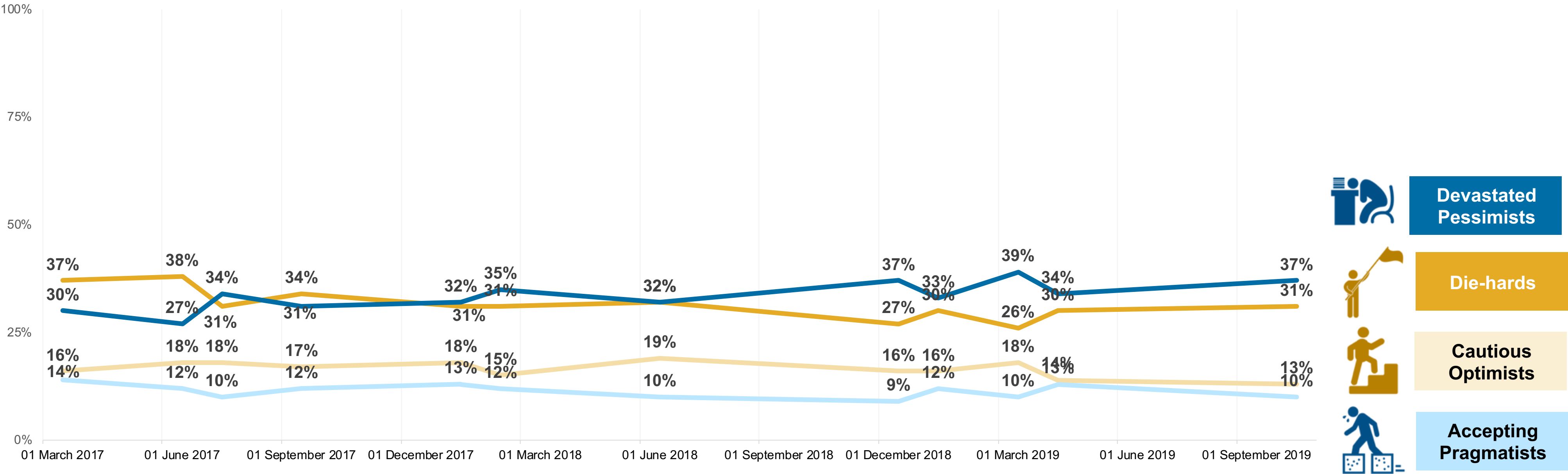
Disappointed by the result but can see some significant positives to leaving



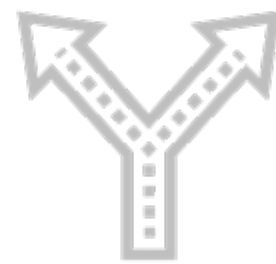
Devastated Pessimists

Disappointed by the result and can see no significant positives to leaving

A quick update on our Brexit segments shows that the fundamental positions haven't changed over the year



The most important findings from this research:



**1. The public
crave a return to
normality – but
cannot agree on
how to get there**



**2. Boris
Johnson's deal
is welcome
progress, but
there is
confusion about
where it has
gone**



**3. Boris
Johnson has a
clear edge over
Jeremy Corbyn**



**4. But this is
likely to be a
particularly
unpredictable
election**



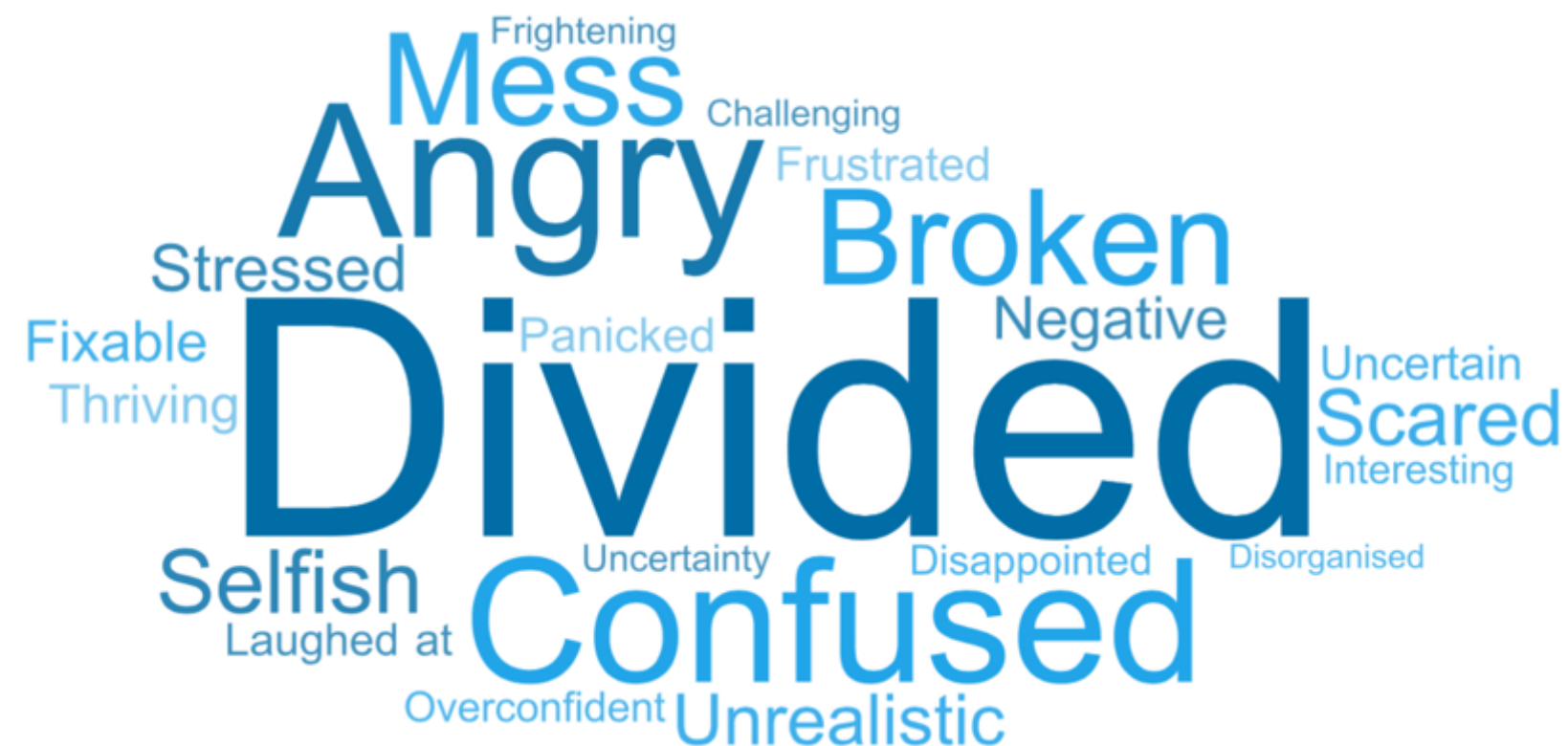
**5. There is
concern that an
election will
exacerbate
rather than
resolve Brexit
tensions**

1

**The public crave a return to normality
– but cannot agree on how to get there**

The mood of the nation is grim

‘Write down three words to describe the UK today.’



This is in part Brexit and in part the opportunity cost of Brexit



“There’s a lot of anger about Brexit, everybody’s blaming each other, shouting at each other. And it spreads, now whenever there is a traffic jam we’re swearing at each other. It doesn’t take much to spark that anger.”



“If you look at other countries compared to where we are, knife crime is ridiculous. We’ve put Brexit first, and everything else like health and violence gets put to the side.”

The public are united in craving a return to normality

Make Britain _____ again

One nation

"It's very divided. There will be lots of demonstrations when we leave. It's a bad divorce, it will be acrimonious for a long time."

Calm

"We've always had fights, but over the last three years it's got way out of hand. It's not about having a cup of tea anymore it's about going out and yelling at someone."

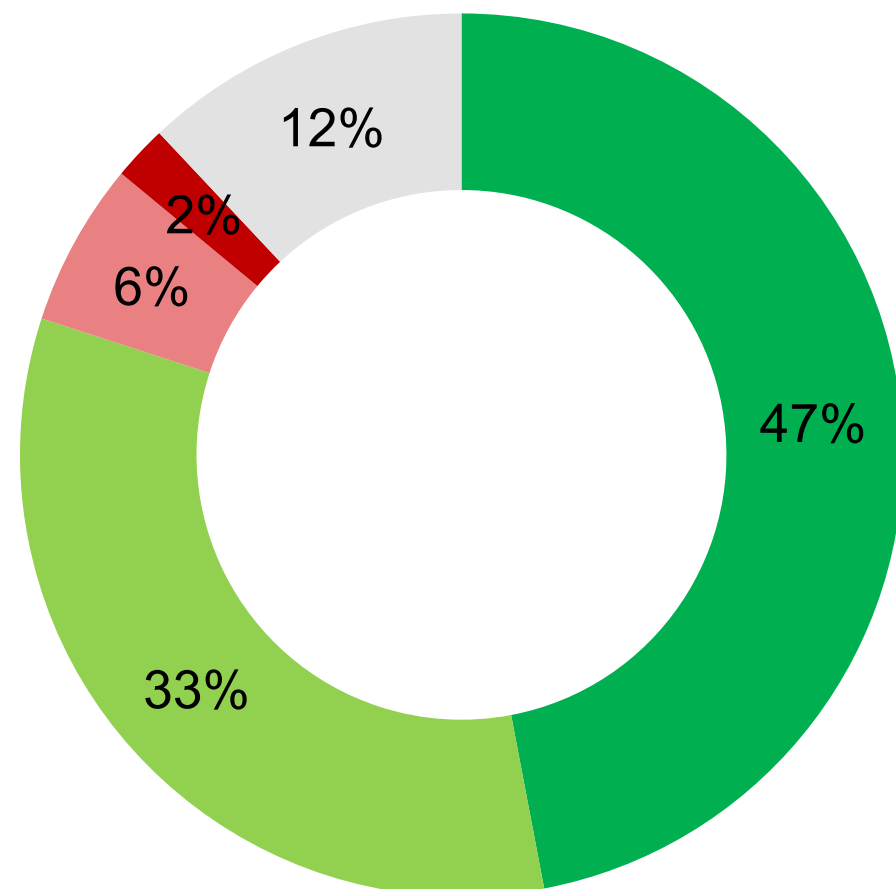
Normal

"I just want life to go back to normal. Not having to hide your feelings from your mates. Even my twin brother, he almost threw me out his house."

And many, even among Leave supporters, think that life would be better if the referendum had never happened

The UK's focus on Brexit has significantly hampered our ability to deal with other major issues facing the country

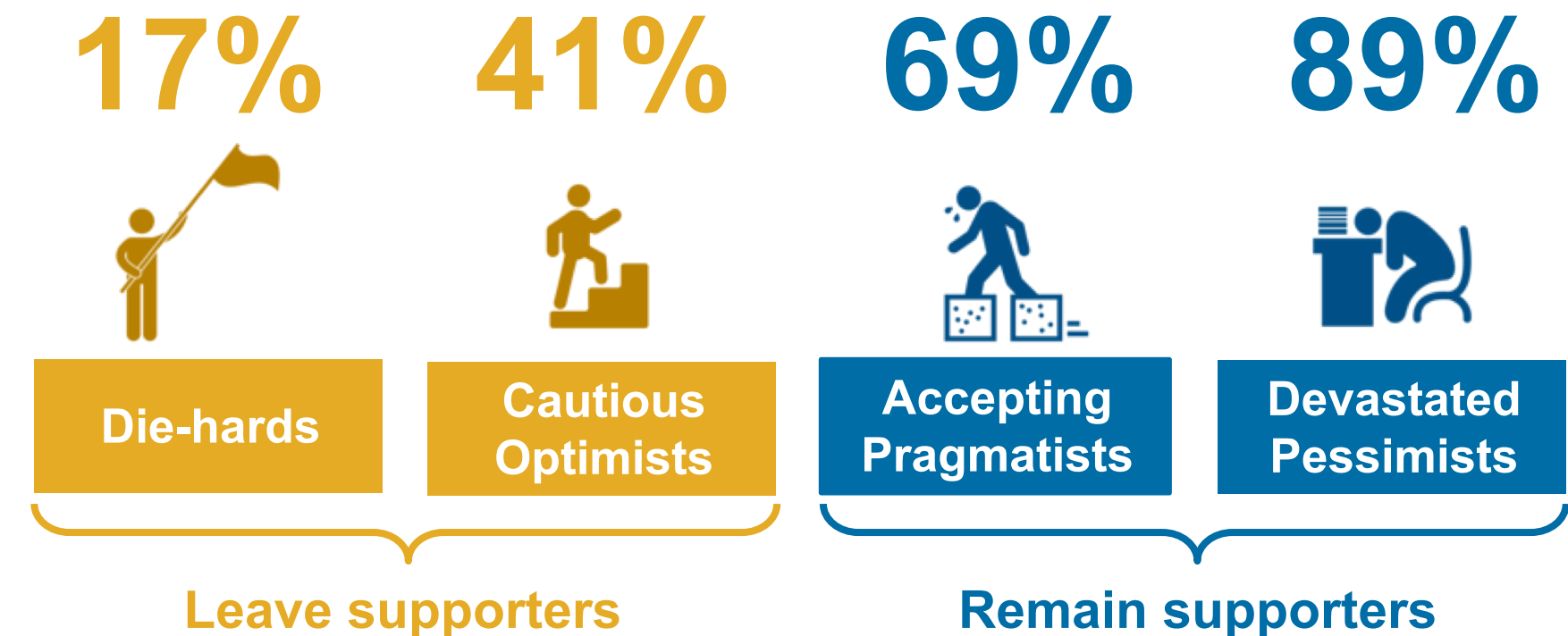
Strongly agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree Don't know



Life in the UK would be better if we never had the EU referendum

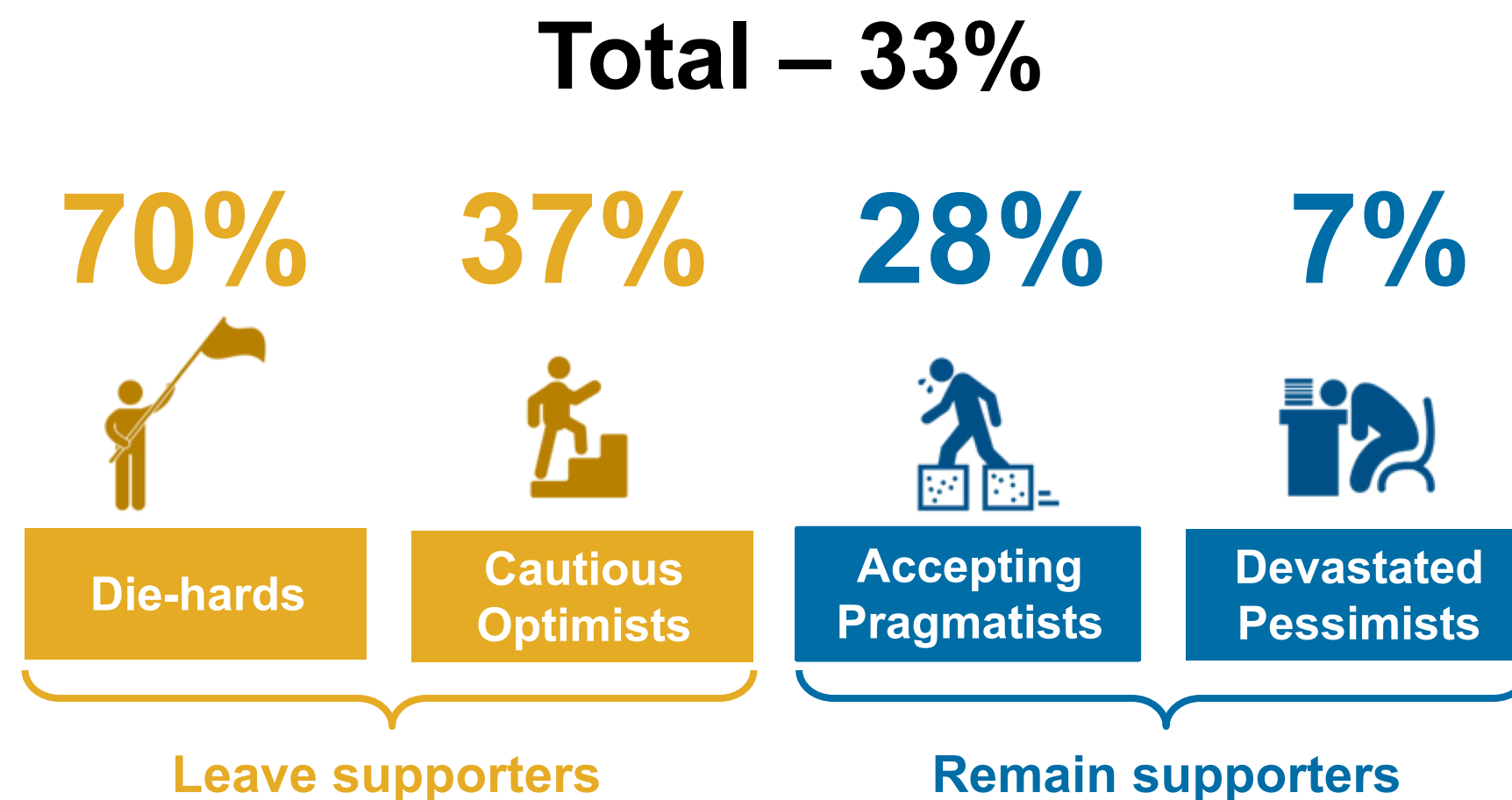
- Showing % of each segment who agree

Total – 53%



Few, except Die-hard Leave supporters, think that leaving the EU will bring life in the UK back to normality

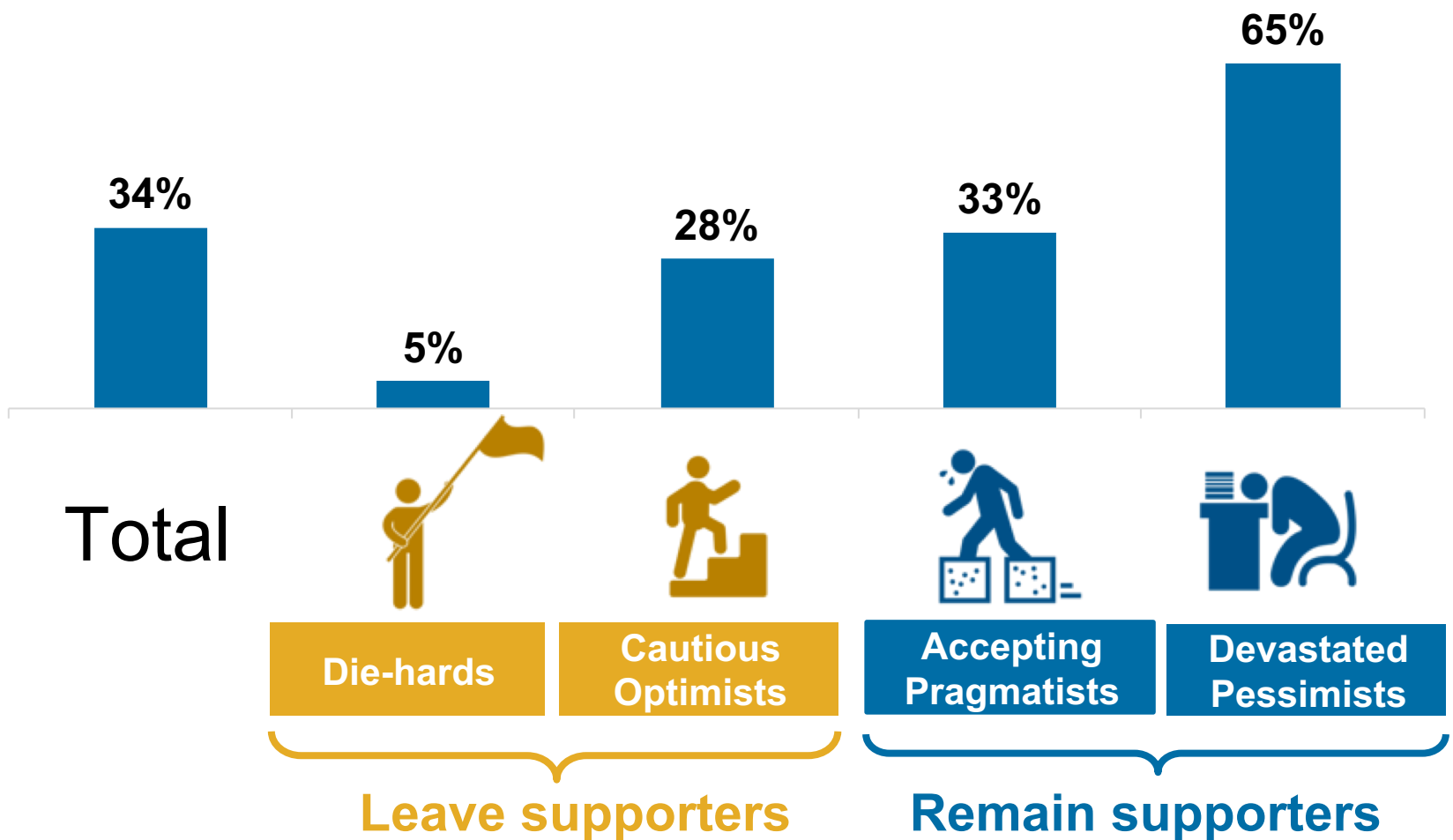
As soon as we leave the EU, life in the UK will go back to normal
- Showing % of each segment who agree



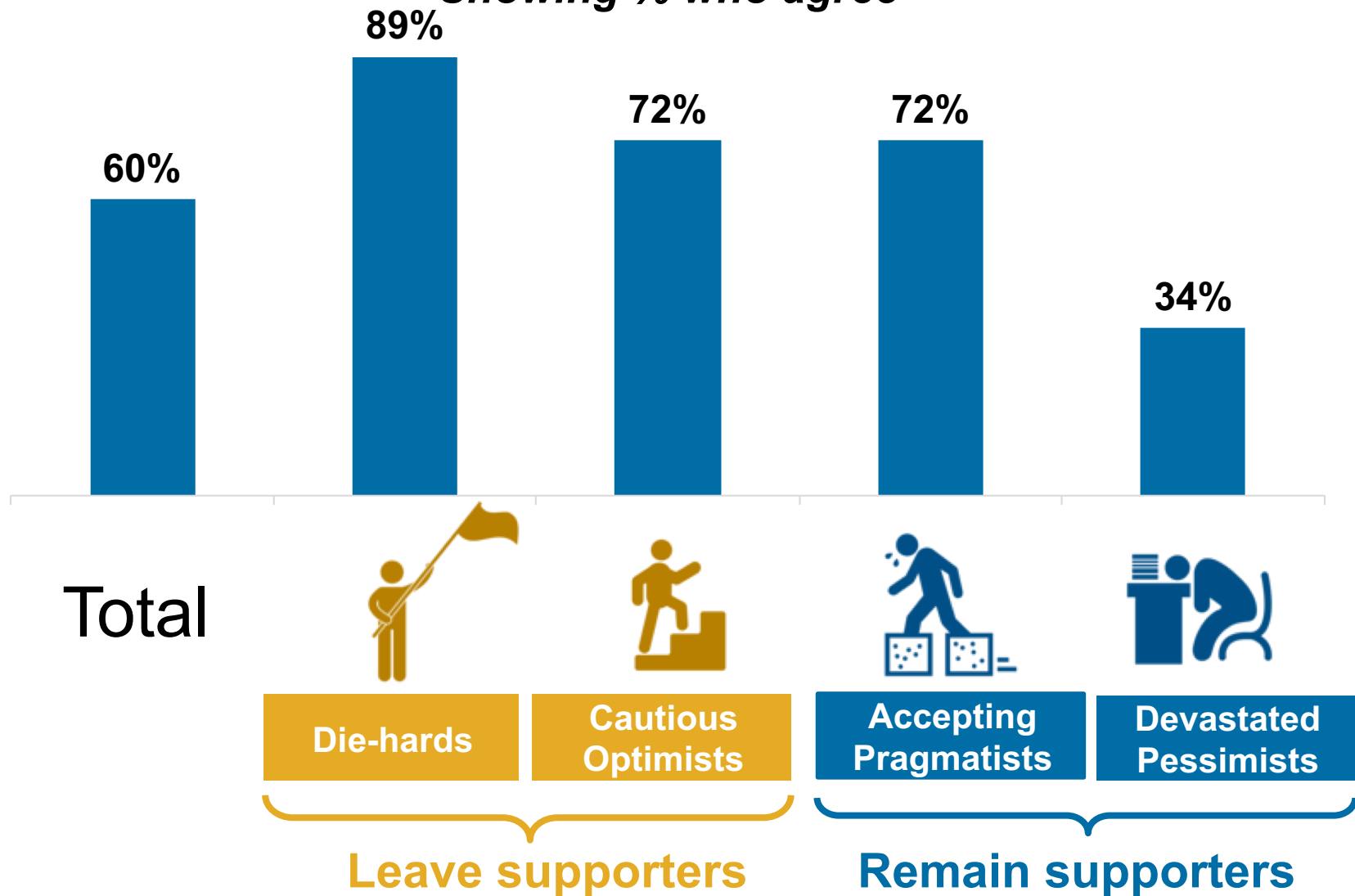
- **Older age groups are more likely to be positive about this than younger age groups**
 - 43% of those aged 65+ vs. 23% of those aged 18-24 year-olds agree with this statement
- **Men are more likely to be positive about this than women, but still in a minority**
 - 39% of men vs 28% of women agree with this statement

Similarly, support for a second referendum to solve Brexit is low among all but the most ardent Remain supporters

A second referendum would help resolve Brexit once and for all
Showing % who agree



A second referendum would further divide the country
Showing % who agree



2

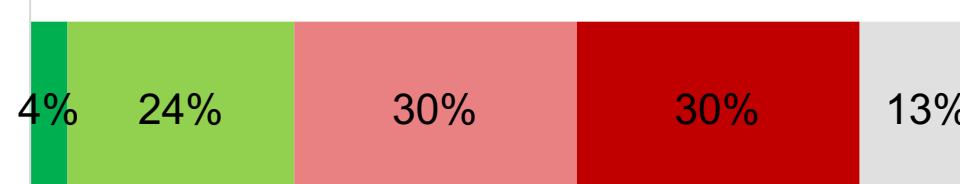
Boris Johnson's deal is welcome progress, but there is confusion about where it has gone

While there is some awareness that there has been some action in Parliament, the specifics of Boris Johnson's deal are not known

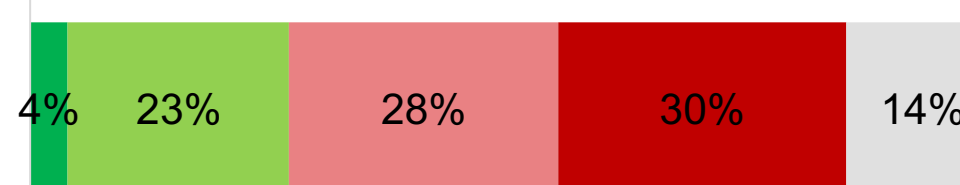
Understanding of the deal

■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Don't know

I would be able to explain what is in Boris Johnson's deal to someone else



I would be able to explain the difference between Boris Johnson's deal and Teresa May's deal to someone else



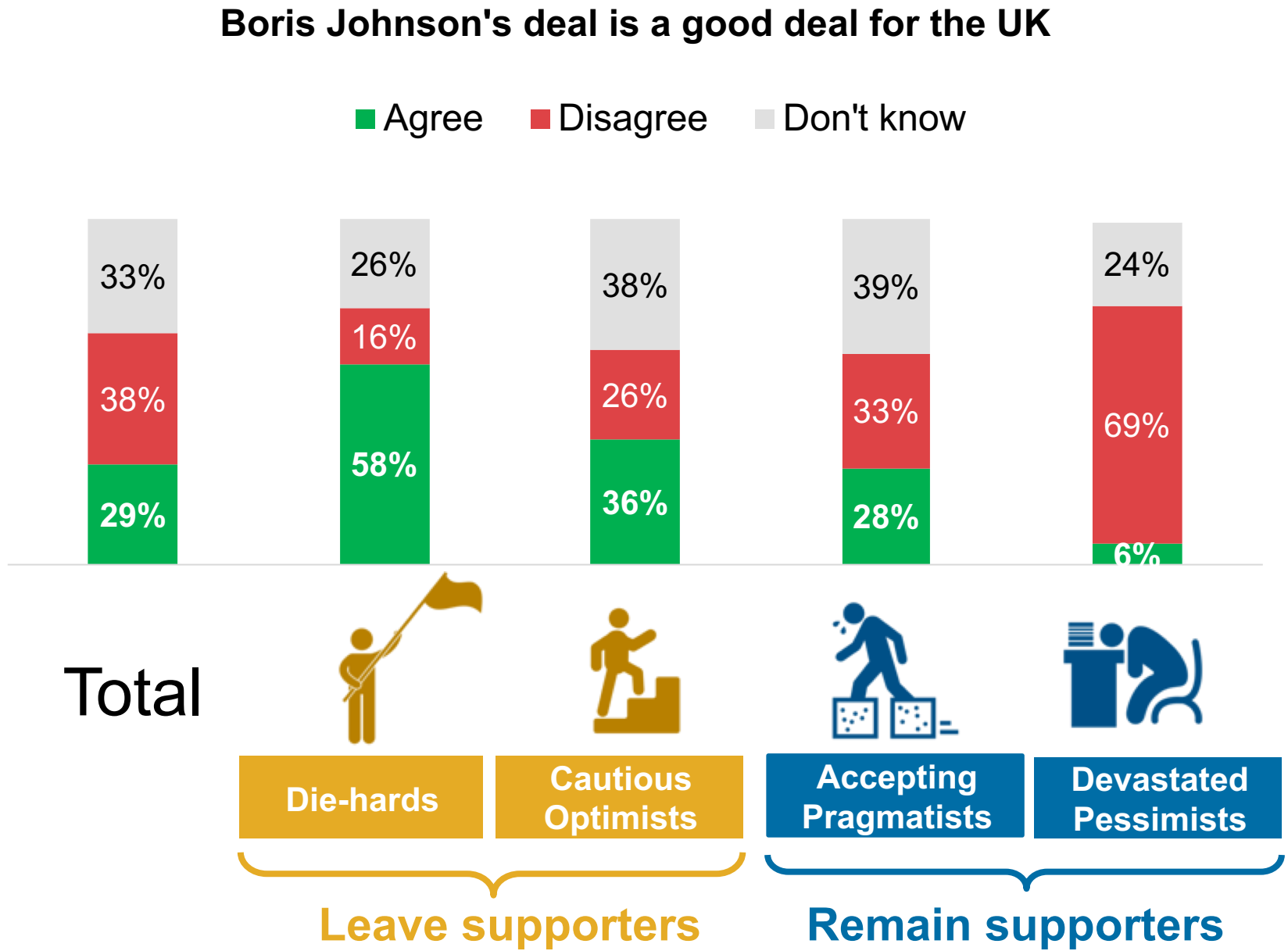
- Leave supporters (33%) are more likely than Remain supporters (26%) to say that they could explain Johnson's deal
- Men (37%) are more likely than women (19%) to say that they could explain Johnson's deal

Cautious Optimist Leave supporters

"I don't think I actually know any changes, I just know that changes have been made."

"There is a change to having a border in the Irish sea. I don't know what that means, but that's what's changed."

Despite low levels of understanding, there is support for Johnson's deal among leave supporters – and even relief that progress has been made among some of those opposed to Brexit



And while those opposed to Brexit are not embracing Boris Johnson's deal, for some it is welcome progress after years of stasis

53%

Of the public as a whole think Boris Johnson has made progress on Brexit since becoming Prime Minister

Only our hardest anti-Brexit segment (Devastated Pessimists) are more likely to disagree with this statement than agree

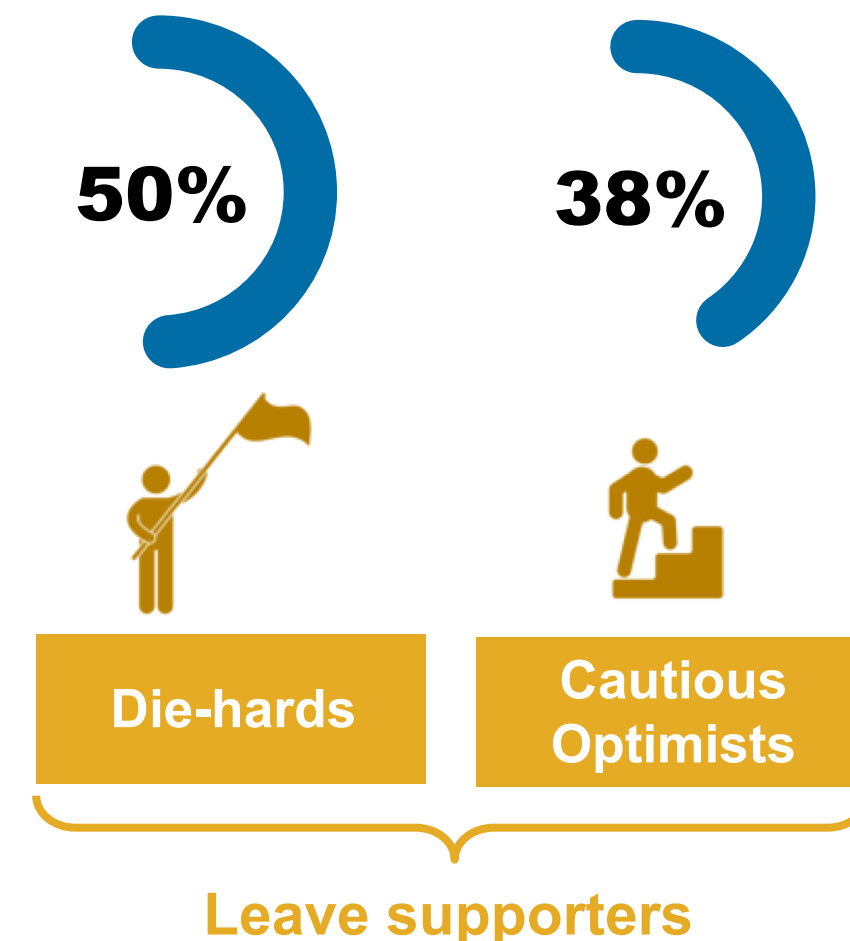


"It's positive. It proves that the majority now want the deal done. That's a positive."

This represents a stark difference to Theresa May's deal, which, despite being equally ill understood, was panned by Leave supporters



Theresa May's deal represents
the worst of all worlds
Showing % agree

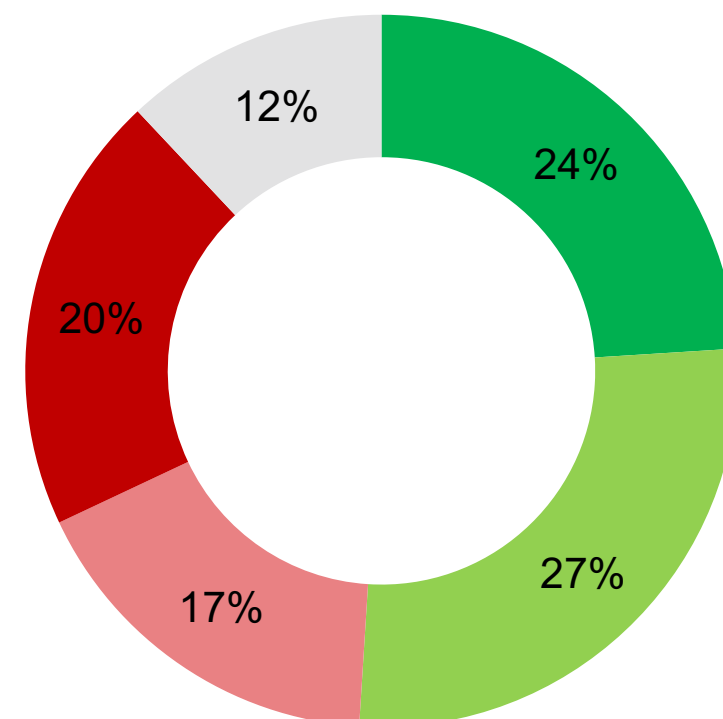


- Our research at the time showed that while there was little understanding of Theresa May's deal, there were a number of trusted dissenting figures, including Boris Johnson, who were instrumental in shaping public opinion to the deal
- Compare this today, where currently the only figures that are seen to be speaking out against the deal are distrusted by Brexit supporters (Labour and the Lib Dems)
 - Criticism from the Brexit Party has (currently) not cut through

Most people are fairly relaxed about there being a delay to allow parliament to scrutinise this new deal, though the public were mystified about why the bill had been withdrawn

I don't mind delaying Brexit for a short period to give MPs more time to properly scrutinise Boris Johnson's deal

Strongly agree Tend to agree Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree Don't know



Cautious
Optimist
Leave
supporter

"There are so many nuances to the deal, it's 600 pages, it's unreasonable to expect people to read and debate that in three days. You can't agree to something just for the hell of it in three days."



Accepting
Pragmatist
Remain
supporter

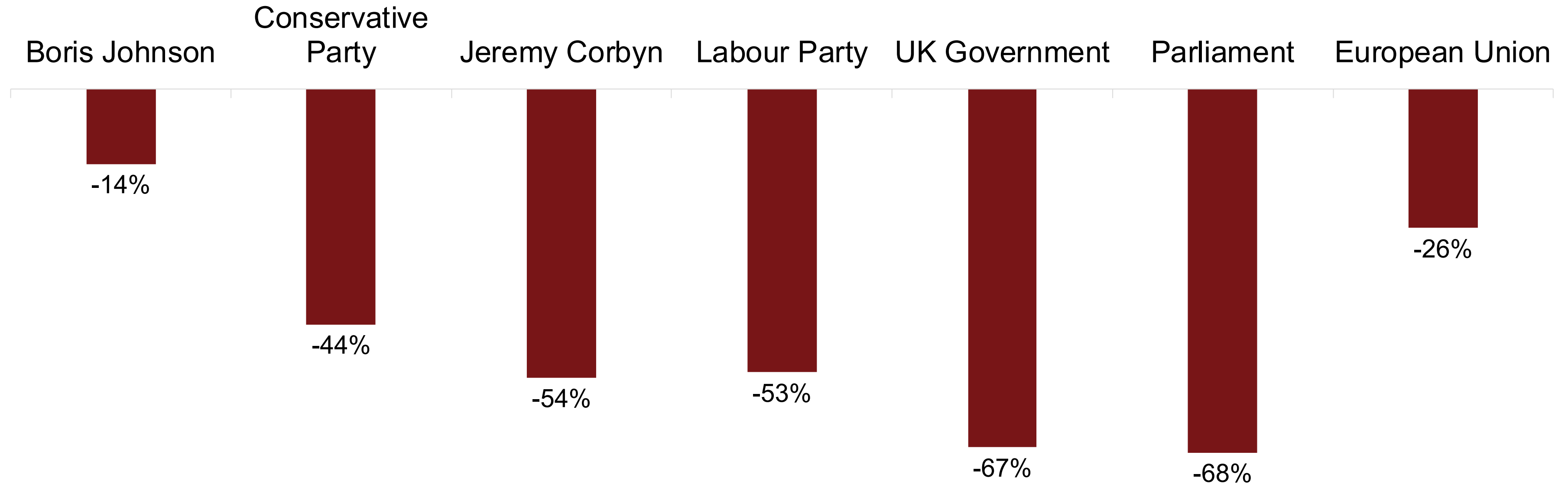
"It finally got through but it wouldn't pass in the next few days. He said he might put it on hold... If it's so good why aren't they passing it now?"

3

Boris Johnson has a clear edge over Jeremy Corbyn

Reputations have been damaged across the board since 2016, but Johnson has escaped relatively unscathed compared to Corbyn

Showing NET change of impressions since 2016 EU referendum (% better minus % worse)

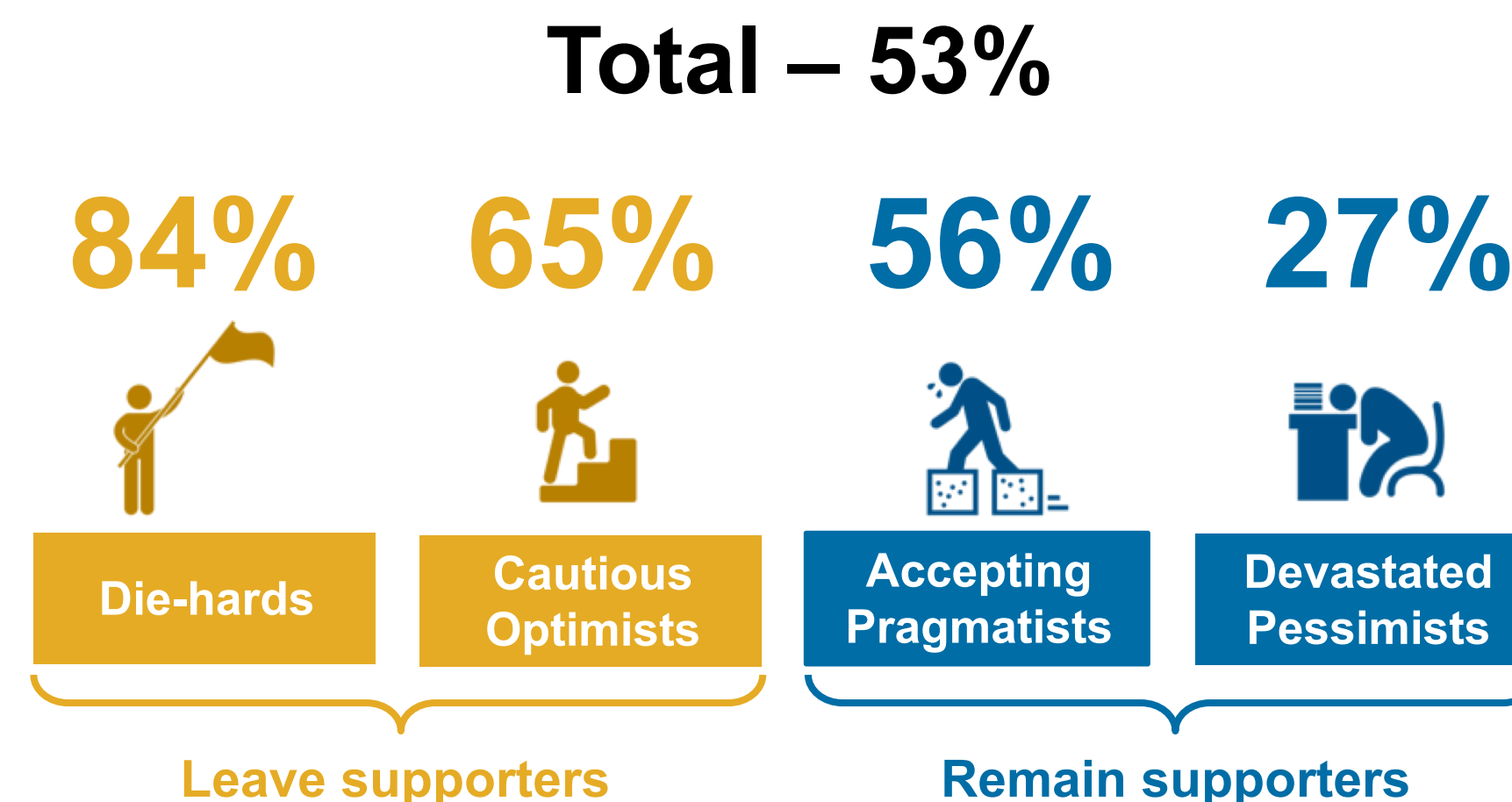


Johnson is seen to have made some progress on a Brexit stalemate lasting years, helping his reputation across the divide

- Leave supporters are satisfied to see a new deal being struck against the odds
- Remain supporters might not like him or his deal, but there is tangible relief that *something* has changed

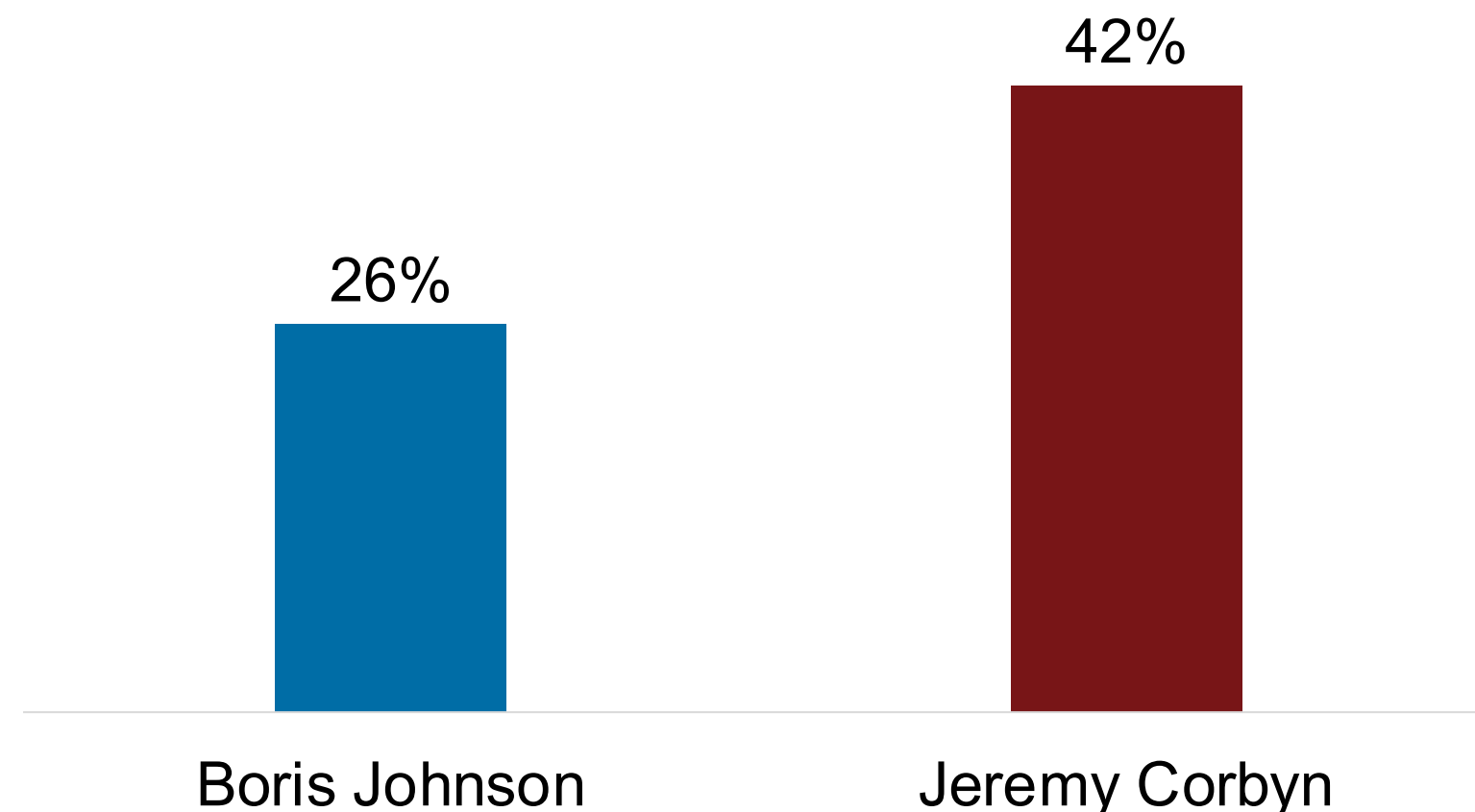
“When you’ve got a divided nation, you’ve got 70 or 80% of politicians who want to Remain, you take over from May who was a Remainer. He annoyed people, including the EU, but then he got a deal. We’re moving forward, like it or not.”

Boris Johnson has made progress on Brexit since becoming Prime Minister
- Showing % of each segment who agree



Jeremy Corbyn is seen to be stifling this progress without a clear rationale

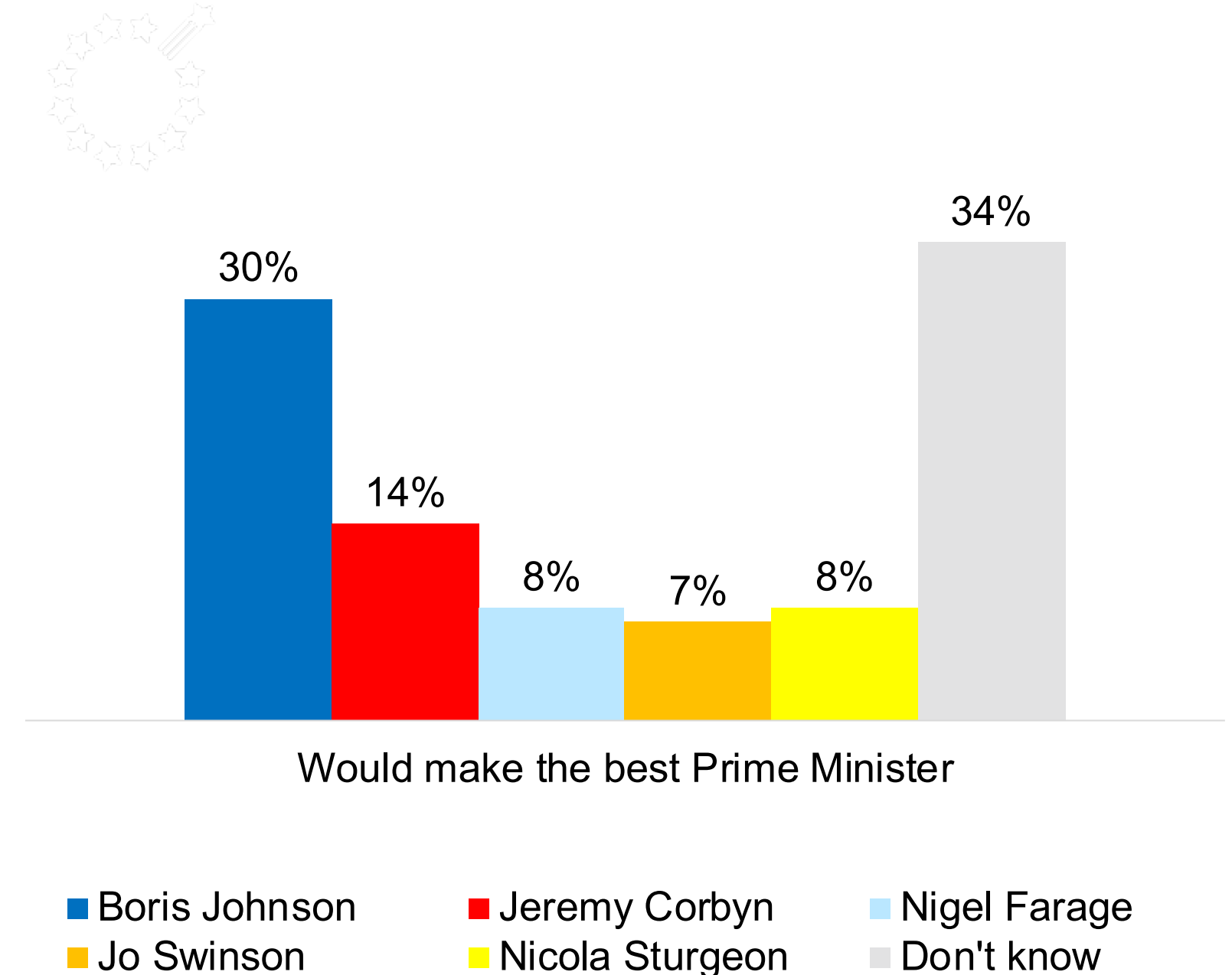
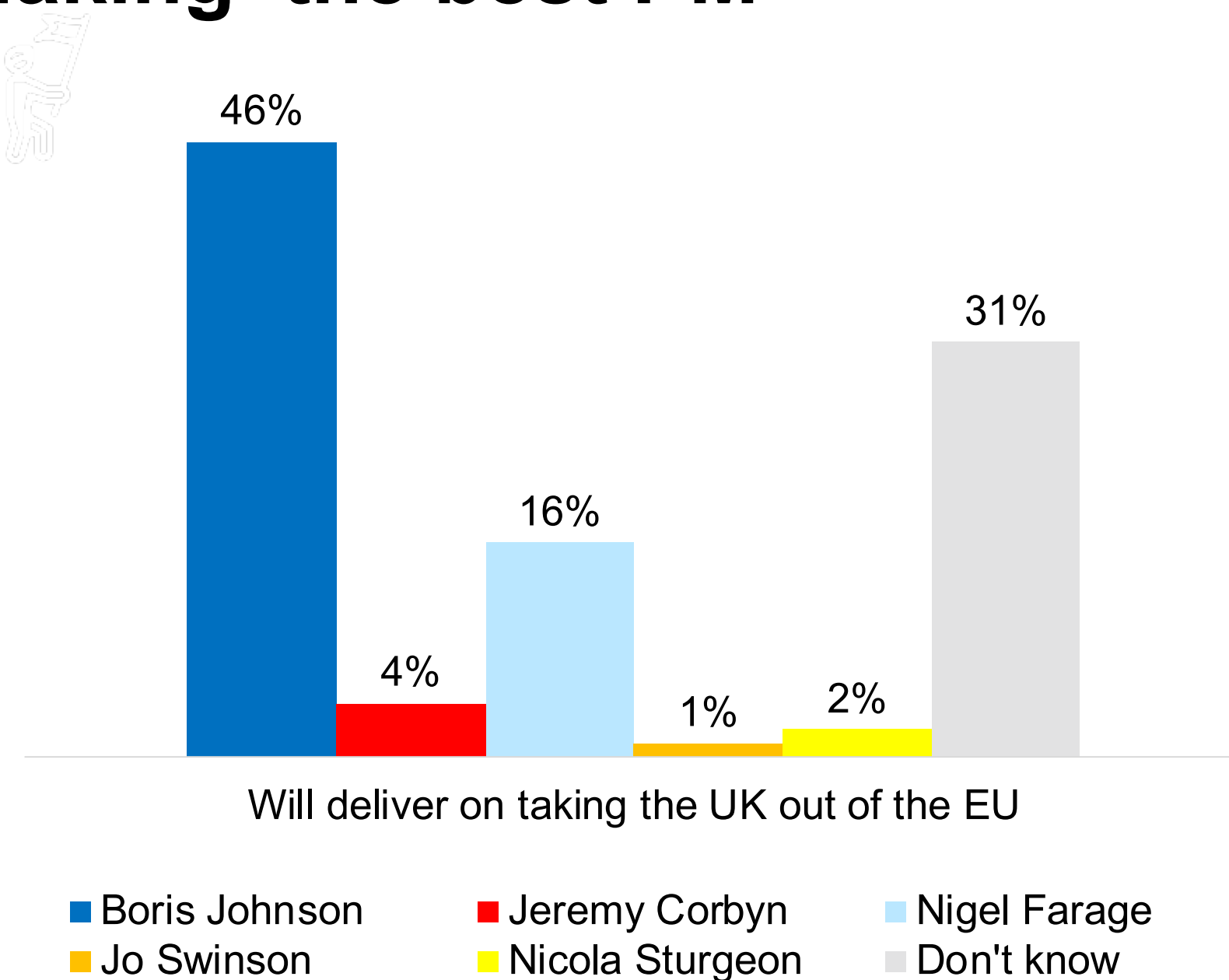
If Brexit is delayed beyond the 31st October, the person responsible for the delay will be...
- Showing % who agree



- And while the public would love to talk about other things in this Election, there is a widespread feeling that it is going to be all about Brexit
- His perceived lack of a plan beyond delay causes frustration, including for Remain supporters

"I used to like him but everything he says now just grates on me. He's just so negative about everything. I kind of want to get the Brexit thing over and done with and move in. He's one of the people dragging it on."

In addition to being seen as more likely to deliver Brexit, Boris Johnson has the edge over Jeremy Corbyn on leadership and making 'the best PM'



Johnson suffers from a lack of trust, but has an edge as a stronger leader

“Complete idiot. That’s being nice. He is just an absolute joke. He came in and said he was going to get everything sorted and he’s done the opposite. He’s too busy doing his own thing and not really caring.”

A word cloud centered around the word "Liar" in large, bold, blue letters. Other words in various shades of blue and sizes surround it, including: Ruthless, Strong, Confident, Laid-back, Scumbag, Adulterer, Focused, Crook, Selfish, Ambitious, Power-hungry, Buffoon, Laughable, Useless, Joker, Smart, Idiot, Leader, and Smart. The word "Liar" is the most prominent, with "Strong" and "Buffoon" also being quite large.

“At least Boris Johnson has a pair and is standing up for what he said he would do.”

For Leave supporters, Johnson is a James Bond figure in control of the situation, but Remain supporters see him as a confused Homer Simpson

‘If Boris Johnson was a fictional character who would he be?’



“I put James Bond, he’s trying to get things done, I like him, and there are loads of obstacles in the way.”



“Boris, he's a bit like a buffoon. Homer Simpson, in the power plant, thinking what do I press here? What do I do?”

Corbyn is still seen as weak, but his 'principled' image has rubbed off and he now seems like just another politician

May 2017

unknown idealist
boring **unsure** passionate
nice infighting ineffective vague
warm
genuine not credible liability sad unelectable
underdog incompetent fair honest devious principled
divisive visionary looney left
weak



October 2019

Racist Tree-hugger
Power-hungry Fair
Unsure Untrustworthy
Idiot Selfish **Weak** Rude
Liar Boring Fence-sitter Caring
Antisemitic Finished
Dishonest Untidy Hate

"I feel he will change to whichever situation will give him power. That's why I don't trust him, he's not standing on the principles, he's blowing in the wind. The closer he got to possibly having power he showed his true colours."

Corbyn is seen as shying away from big debates, leading to comparisons to “Where’s Wally?”

‘If Jeremy Corbyn was a fictional character who would he be?’

Labour under Corbyn is felt by both Leave supporters and Remain supporters to be putting off making a decision on Brexit, damaging their credibility



“I thought he was a breath of fresh air... But when Brexit happened he was a bit silent and I didn't know where he was with it. That chipped away at me, where is the Labour leader?”

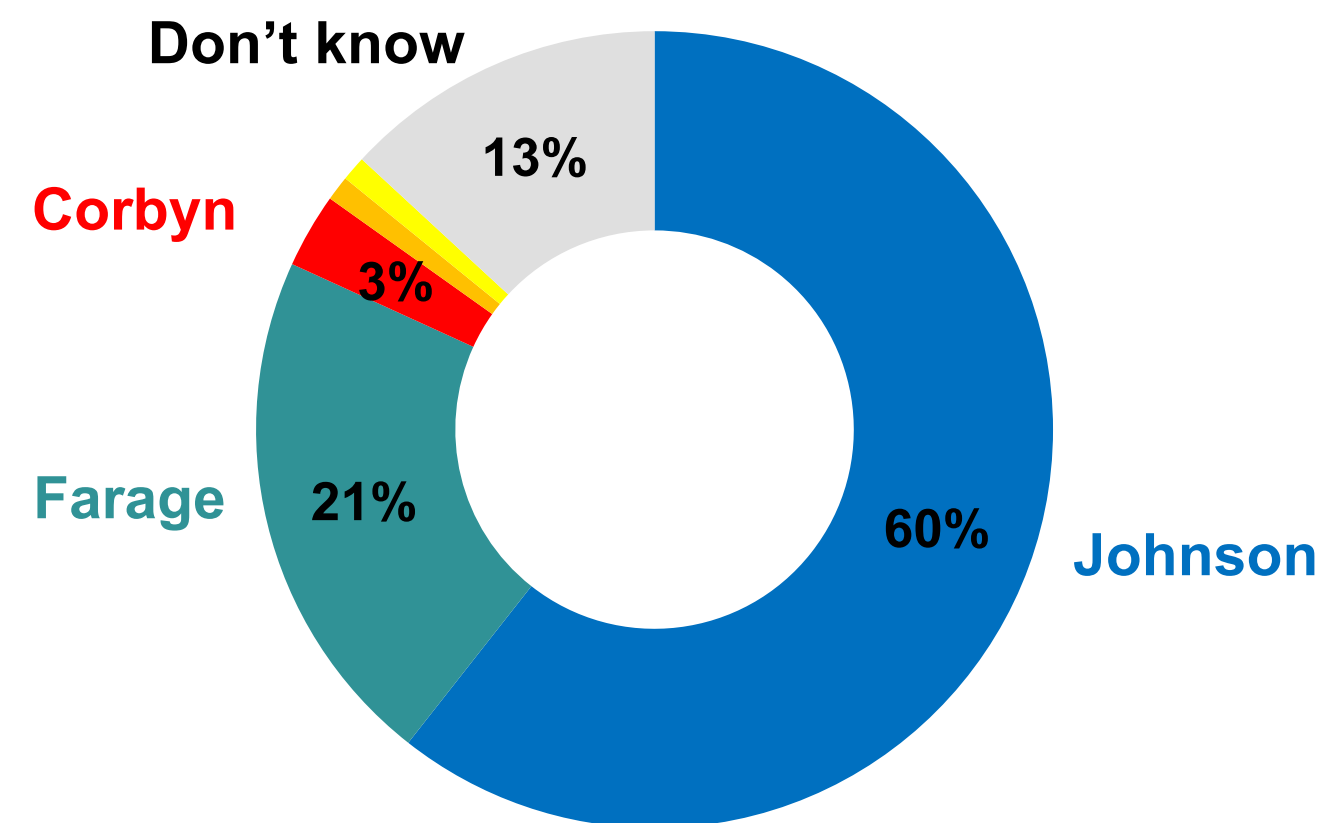
“At first I agreed with what he was saying, it was a breath of fresh air and it was very liberal. But now he's shot himself in the foot so many times. Going back on his word, coming out with some crazy statements.”

4

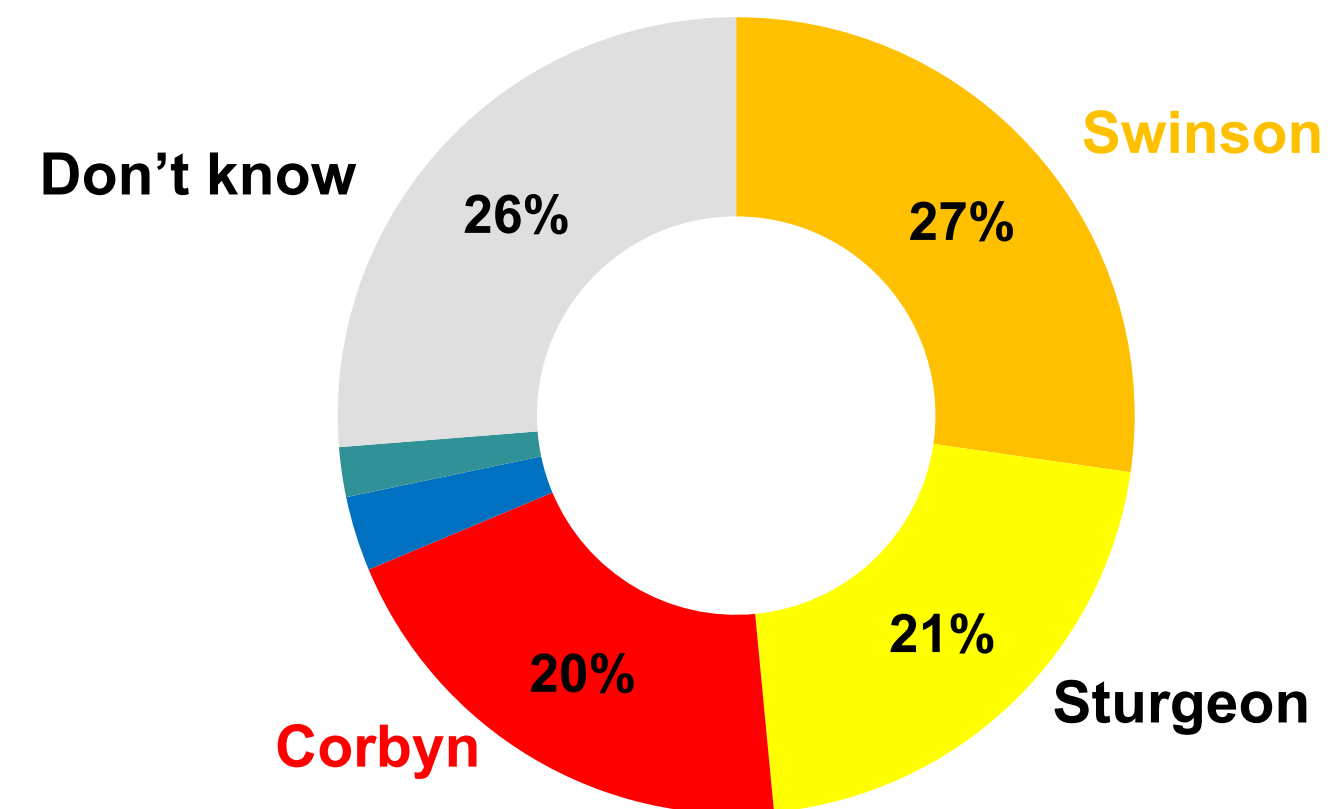
**But this is likely to be a particularly
unpredictable election**

Boris Johnson is entering this election with strong support among past Leave voters

Leave supporters are more certain that Boris Johnson will deliver Brexit



Remain supporters are split on which leader will fight to keep the UK in the EU

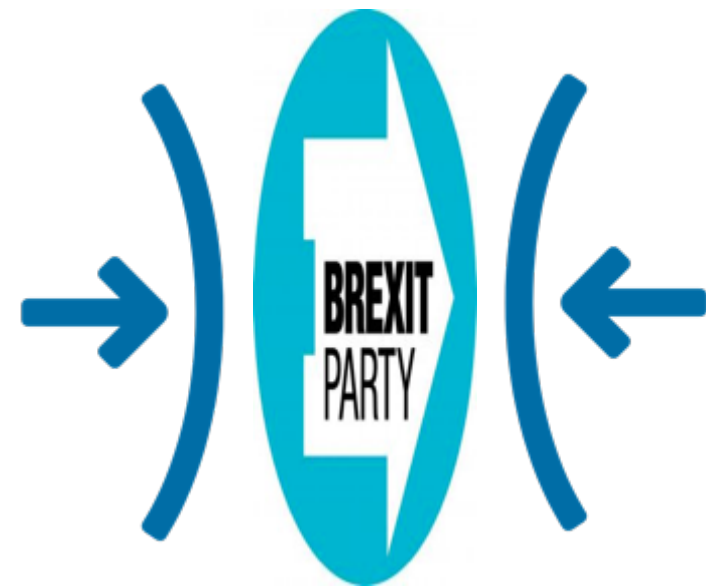


But we don't know the effect that Boris Johnson's delay will have on his position

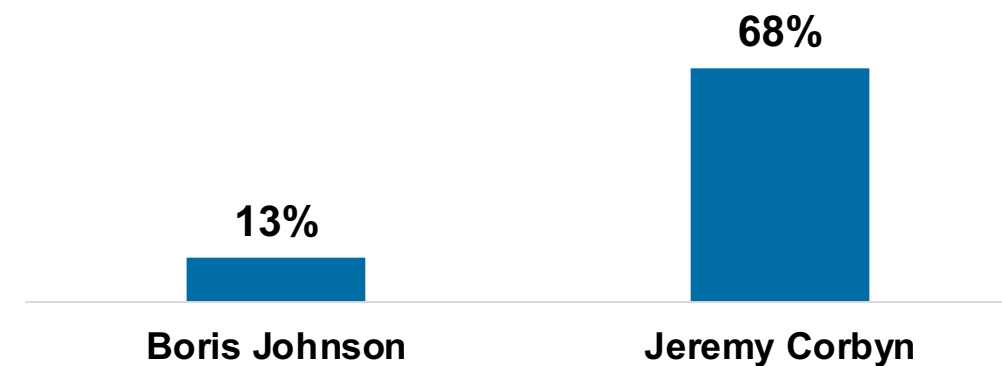
The Conservative's have effectively squeezed the Brexit Party vote share, from a high of 20% in June to around 11% now, by steadfastly promising an EU departure by 31st October

Currently, Boris Johnson isn't being held responsible for the delay

But it is still early days, and we have seen the seeds of doubt being sewn among some Brexit supporters



Is responsible for delay
Showing % of Leave supporters who agree



Cautious
Optimist
Leave
supporter

"He seemed really strong, like the man who could get stuff done. But he doesn't look like that anymore."

It's going to be an uphill struggle for Boris Johnson and the Conservatives

Likely to lose seats that leaned heavily to Remain to the SNP and a newly rejuvenated Lib Dems



And hoping to more than replace these with gains from Labour in seats that leaned heavily towards Leave



...although they will need to overcome a toxic Conservative brand among some Labour Leave voters

Cautious
Optimist
Leave
supporter



*"I would never vote for
Conservative, I've never done in
my life."*

This election is going to be particularly unpredictable

1. Volatile electorate

British Election Study found that 49% of voters have changed the party they voted for across the election 2010-2017

2. Christmas and the cold

Bad weather and busy Christmas schedules could greatly impact turnout

3. Voter fatigue

The public have grown exasperated with politics, with many hoping to avoid the upcoming election campaigns

“Given the UK’s recent history of vote switching and the unpredictability of the current climate, it would be unwise for any political party or commentator to presume how voters will behave in a general election.”

Professor Edward Fieldhouse (University of Manchester)



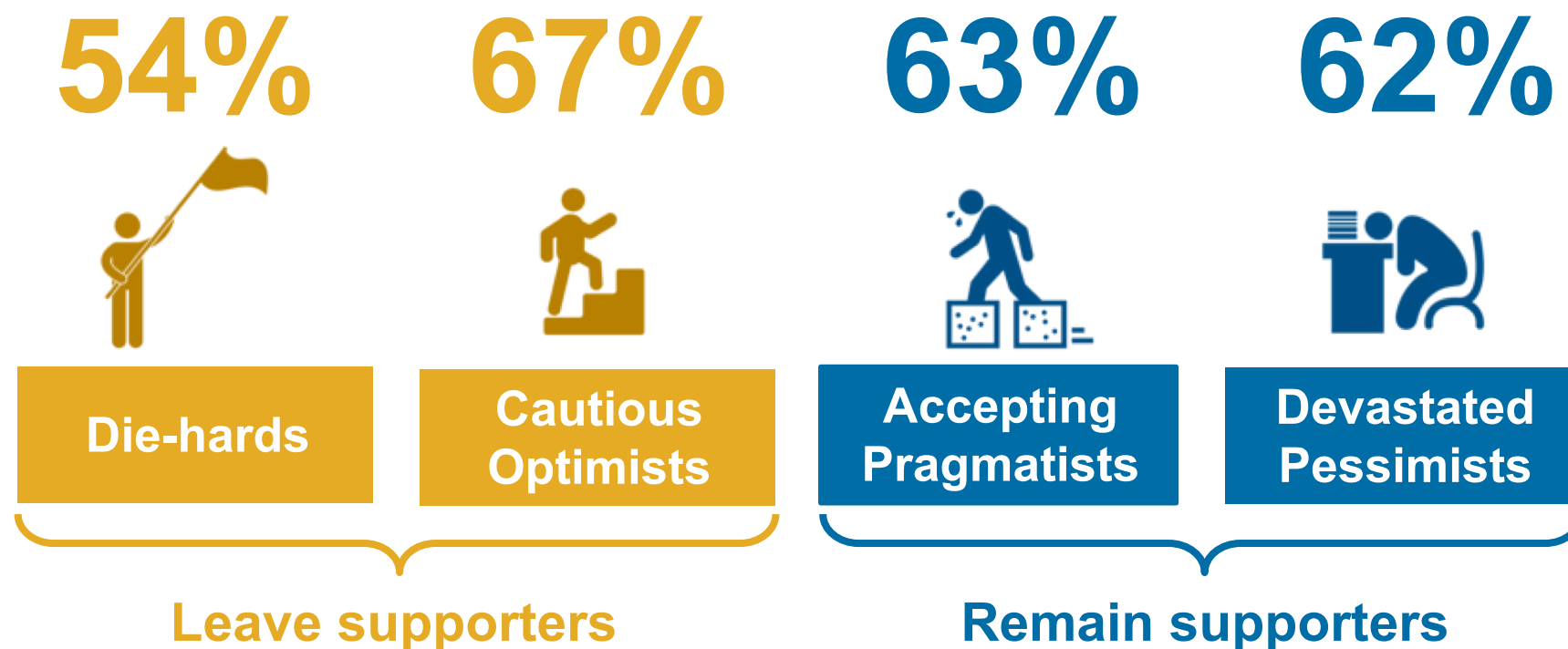
Cautious
Optimist
Leave
supporter

“I’ve always voted and thought it was the best way to run the country, democratically. But recently I’ve wondered what was the point, if they don’t like how we vote they will just delay and delay.”

For the public, there is a deep concern that this election won't resolve Brexit, and only lead to greater delay and frustration

Having a General Election would not resolve anything on Brexit
- Showing % of each segment who agree

Total – 58%



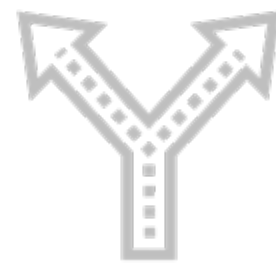
"It's such a bad idea, it's not going to make any difference whatsoever."



"It just delays it further as well, annoying the general population who just want it over and done with."

Conclusions

The most important findings from this research:



**1. The public
crave a return to
normality – but
cannot agree on
how to get there**



**2. Boris
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