

January, 2019

Brexit: The Final Countdown

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britainthinks.com

Since early 2017, the Brexit Diaries have explored how people experience the Brexit process:



This week, we have conducted fresh research to update our understanding.

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

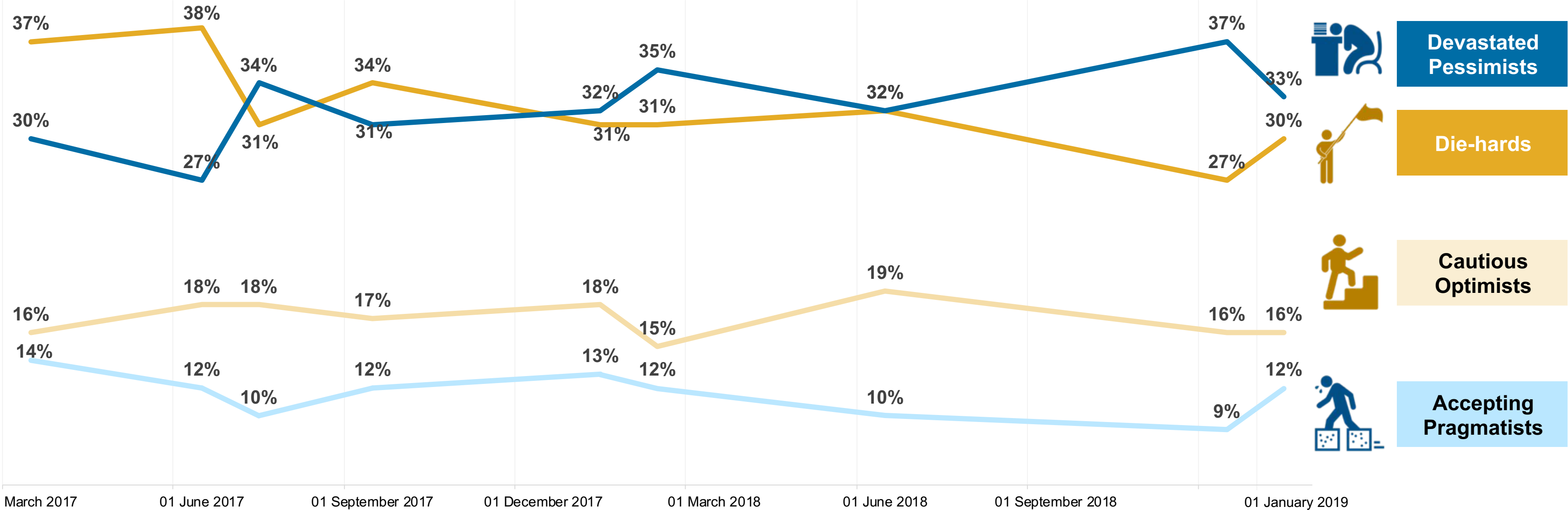
Disappointed by the result but can see some significant positives to leaving



Devastated Pessimists

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

The size of these segments remains stable.

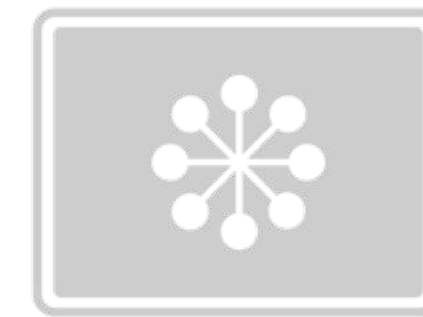


(Q. In 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, in a referendum on 23rd June. Thinking about this referendum, which of the following comes closest to describing your viewpoint? [Base: All respondents (n=2047)])

This presentation draws on both qualitative and quantitative techniques:

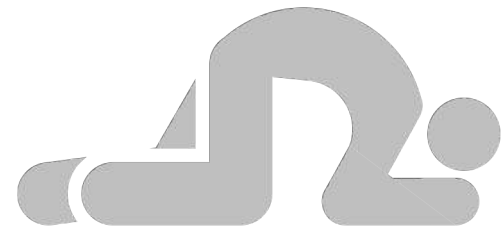


**Focus groups in Slough
with the two “swing”
segments**

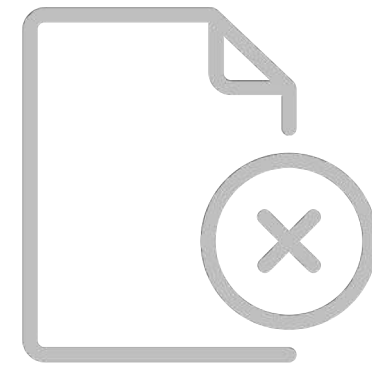


**Nationally representative
survey of 2047 GB adults**

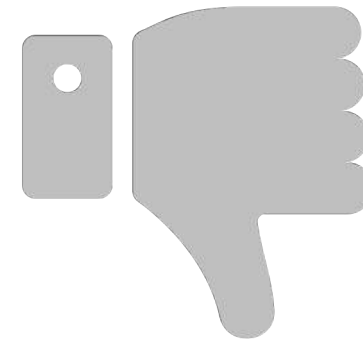
The most important findings from this research:



1. There is absolute despair at the whole political class, with Brexit seen as a distraction from more urgent issues.



2. Impressions of Theresa May's deal are negative, but rarely rooted in engagement with the detail.



3. Any optimism about leaving is gone.



4. Many voters think the consequences of a 'no deal' Brexit are impossible to predict.



5. Nobody is coming out of Brexit well – including Jeremy Corbyn.

1

There is absolute despair at the whole political class, with Brexit seen as a distraction from more urgent issues.

For voters, there are far more urgent priorities than Brexit.

Biggest concerns for the UK

- Cost of living
- Immigration
- Insufficient police resources
- Crime
- Housing supply
- House prices
- Homelessness
- Insufficient funding for the NHS
- Funding cut from schools

“The NHS, the police force – everything is having cut backs.”



“We’ve got record numbers of young kids being murdered in this country, and no one is paying any attention.”

However, they feel they are getting little support from those in charge to help tackle these challenges.

% of each segment who agree that ‘the UK’s focus on Brexit has significantly hampered our ability to deal with other major issues facing the country’ – 73% overall

66%



76%



80%



84%



“They need to look at it from a longer timeframe, rather than just the here and now.”



“They’re not doing what is in the national interest.”

This idea that the political elite has ‘taken its eye off the ball’ acts as the backdrop to subsequent political views.

(Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? ‘The UK’s focus on Brexit has significantly hampered our ability to deal with other major issues facing the country’ [Base: All respondents (n=2047)])

Voters feel let down by politicians, with recent debate on Brexit being seen as party politics at its worst.

1. Total despair and disillusionment, with politicians not seen to be taking any decisive action.

2. Political factions are seen to be playing games in a bid to gain/retain power and keep their jobs.

3. The focus on a 'People's Brexit' is thought to have been lost.

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"Just make a decision – leave or not leave. [What would you choose?] I don't know anymore."



"[If politicians in the UK could make one thing better, what would it be?] Resign."

"Don't make false promises and not follow them through."



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"It's being pulled by extremes, games between the factions are not really of interest to the general public."



"Labour have gone down the route of 'let's blame the Conservatives'."

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"[The Conservative cabinet] don't want the deal to go through but are they going to come through and have no confidence in May for the good of the country? No. Just shows you it's not about the People's Brexit but about keeping power."



"They're not interested in the general public, they just want to keep their party in."

Anger and frustration is directed at the whole political class as well as specific individuals.

% of each segment who agree that 'the entire political establishment has failed the country on Brexit' – 83% overall

86%



88%



85%



85%



"There was an opportunity for the politicians to show that they can do something... it feels too late now."

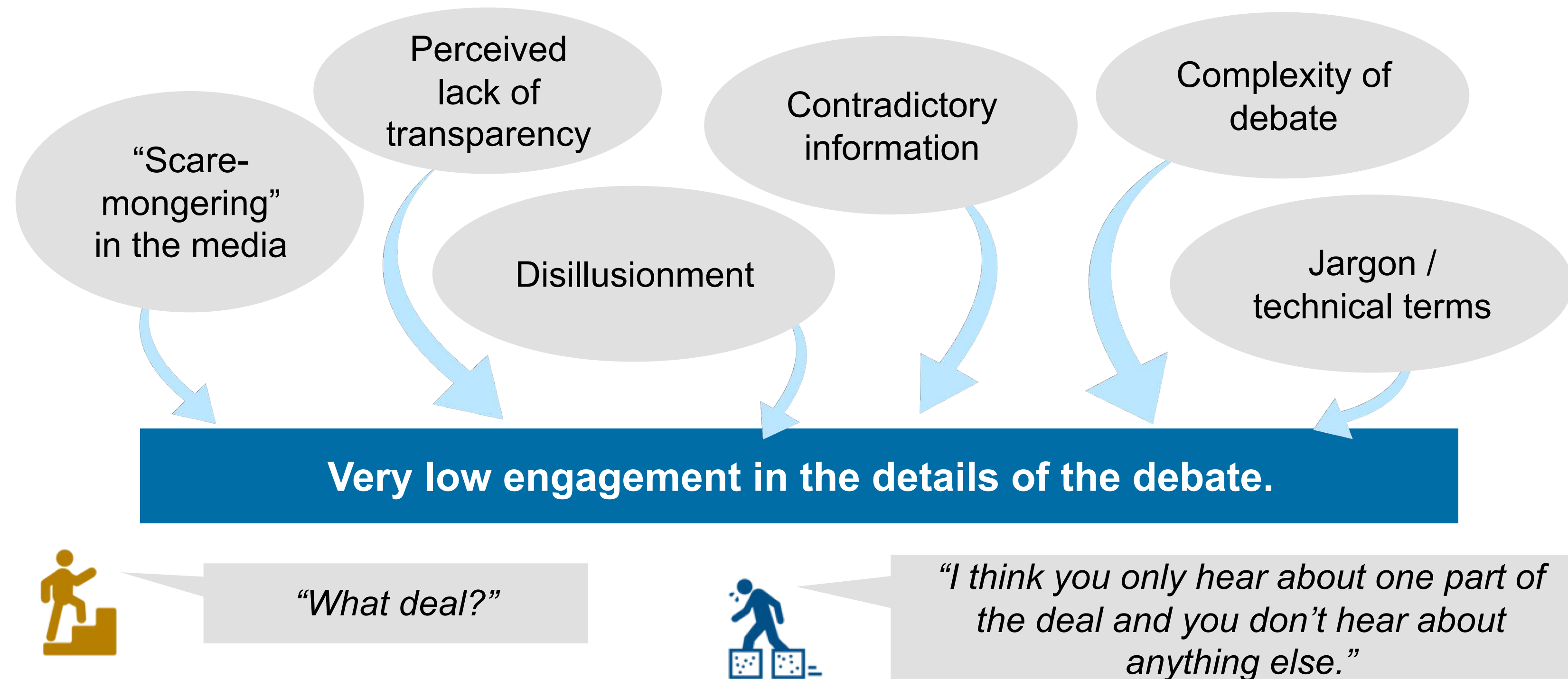


"Politicians don't have a clue."

(Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? 'The entire political establishment has failed the country on Brexit' [Base: All respondents (n=2047)])

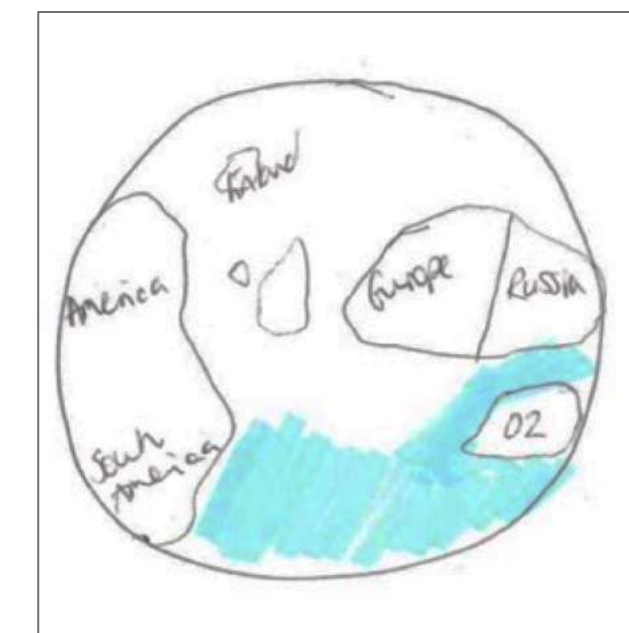
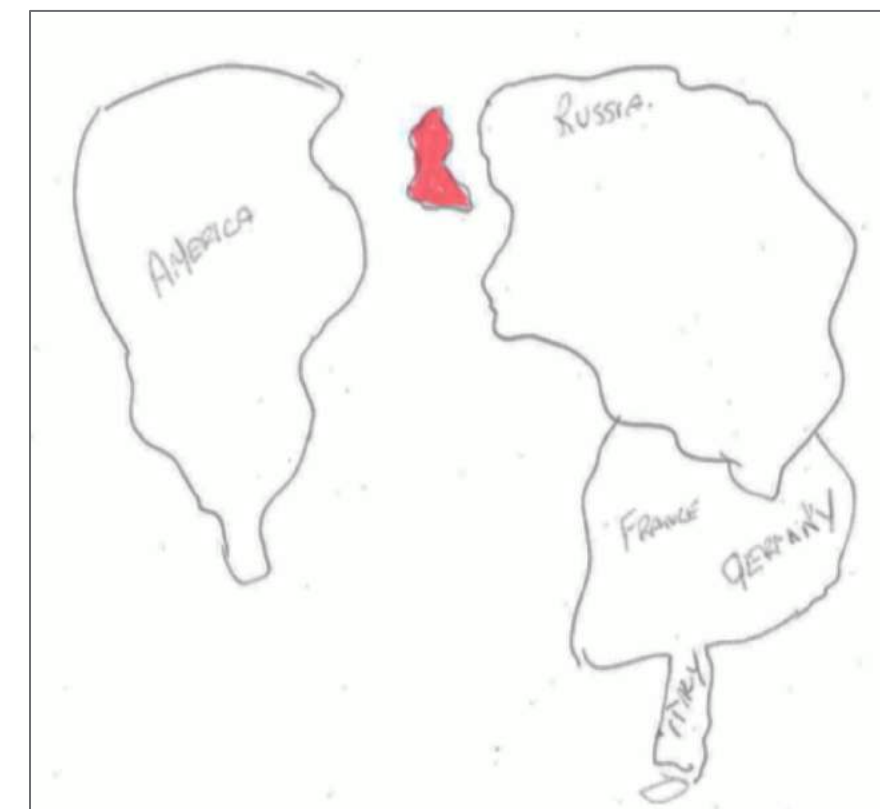
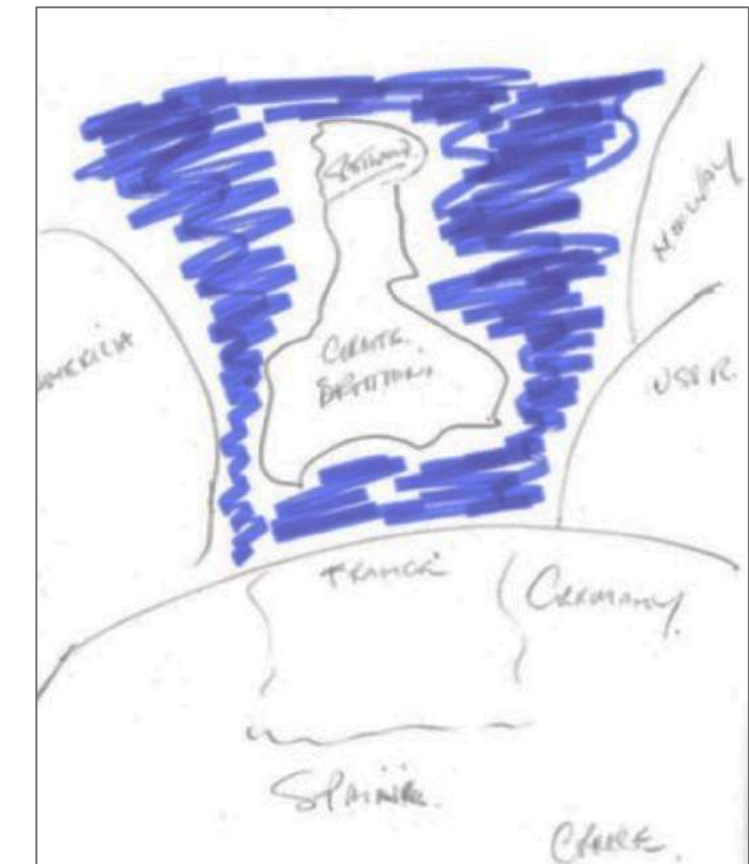
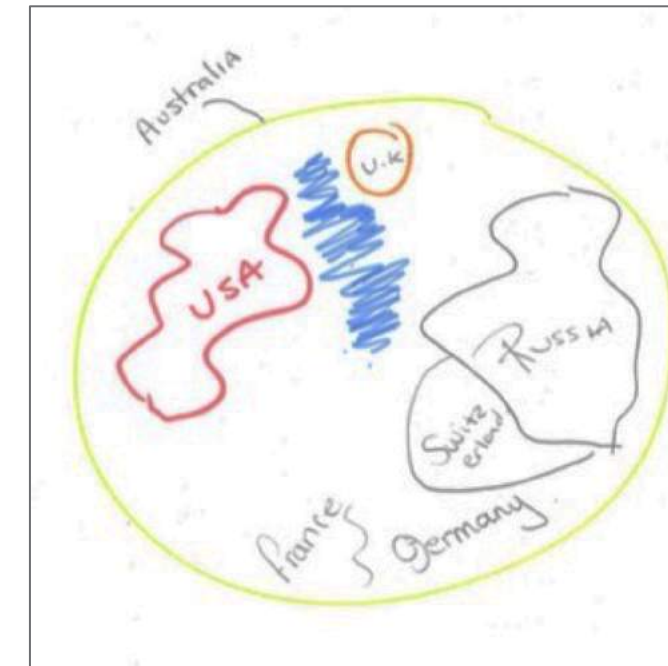
2 Impressions of Theresa May's deal are negative, but rarely rooted in engagement with the detail.

Swing voters are more confused about Brexit than ever before.



Divergent worldviews shape the way that Leavers and Remainers see the Brexit debate.

- *We asked swing voters to draw a map of the world, including the UK.*
- Some Leave voters drew a large UK at the centre, with Europe comparatively small on the sidelines.
 - They also depicted the UK as geographically close to the USA.
- Remain voters' maps positioned the UK closer to Europe and further from the USA.
- For both Leave and Remain voters, Ireland was often entirely absent, as was Africa.



Awareness of Theresa May's Brexit deal is incredibly low, as voters continue to be disengaged despite the looming deadline.

- Many are not aware of the deal at all.
 - When asked how much they know about the deal on a scale of 0-10 –
 - 7 of 8 Leave voters said they knew nothing about the deal (0 out of 10)
 - Most Remain voters said they knew very little (≤5 out of 10)
- It's a vicious circle – the more complex the debate gets, the less some people pay attention.
 - The Die-hards and Devastated Pessimists might be listening, but the centre-ground is not.

% of each segment who agree that '*I have a good understanding of the deal that Theresa May has negotiated about the UK's withdrawal from the EU*' – 38% overall

58%



29%



33%



33%



(Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? '*I have a good understanding of the deal that Theresa May has negotiated about the UK's withdrawal from the EU*' [Base: All respondents (n=2047)])

This disengagement is proactive, with many turning off the news once Brexit is mentioned.

"I just turn it over, because it just goes on... I'm sick of hearing the same thing."



"It's just the same thing over and over again. A lot of people are not actually listening to it – when it comes on the news, you think 'just turn over'."



"I didn't watch what happened last night [MPs' vote on May's Brexit deal], it would just infuriate me."



"I blame the press as much as I blame anyone else."



Impressions of Theresa May's deal are negative. But they are rarely based on analysis of the detail.

- Opinions on the detail of Theresa May's deal are based on confirmation bias rather than knowledge or analysis of the facts.
 - For Leave voters, there is disappointment that their high expectations are not going to be met.
 - For Remain voters, their antipathy towards Theresa May makes them predisposed to dislike the deal.



“The whole point was that people are fed up with how this country is run, but from what I can make out... the deal [Theresa May's] put together is a worse situation than what was in place beforehand.”

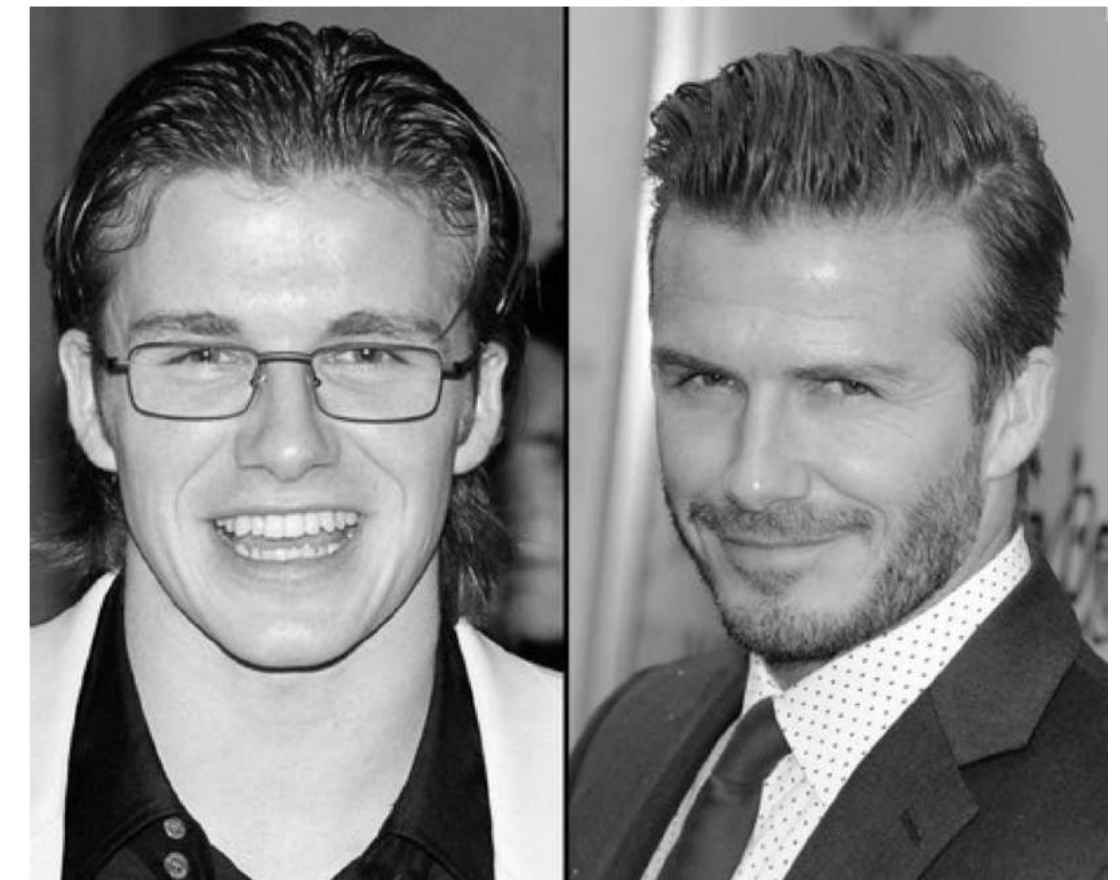
3

Any optimism about leaving is gone.

Previously, most swing voters still believed that Brexit would be a success.

In focus groups over the last 2 years, swing voters told us...

- That Brexit was seen as having the potential for success if those in charge got on with it.
- That the right decisions would be made.
- That anything was possible!



"I am looking forward to it. This is a fantastic opportunity to rebuild the country: more police, better hospitals, more schools and teachers."



"Brexit is like David Beckham, because I think it's going to get better with age. Because once we're out of the EU, it will get better, but it will take some time."

Voters now think Brexit won't deliver what they hoped.

- Voters, including the Cautious Optimists, are feeling negative and deflated about the prospects of Brexit.
- Key desirable outcomes have not changed, including:
 - Greater sovereignty
 - Reducing the impact of immigration
 - Free trade with the rest of the world
- ... however, voters are now unconvinced that Brexit will deliver on these.



“We’ve not got anything back, we’ve given loads of concessions, they’re in control... Britain ain’t worth a carrot and we’re back to square one.”

Negative associations with Brexit are now paramount, with many also alluding to a sense of hopelessness.

‘If Brexit were an animal, what animal would it be?’



*“Bull in a china shop
– it’s a mess!”*



*“A sheep – we’re
followers not making
any decisions.”*



*“A chameleon
because it keeps
changing.”*



*“A fish – opening its
mouth, nothing coming
out, and forgetting what
they said yesterday.”*



4 Many voters think the consequences of a 'no deal' Brexit are impossible to predict.

There is still low understanding of a ‘no deal’ scenario, although awareness is rising.

June 2018

Many had not heard the term ‘no deal’ before, and most were confused by it.



“I don’t know what it means.”



“I have no idea.”

January 2019

Familiarity is higher, with most at least aware of the term.



“I think we should leave with no deal... they need us more than we need them.”



“It’s now all going towards a no deal which is what they [hard right] really want.”

To some Leave voters, “no deal” feels like the Brexit they voted for.

- To some Leave voters, “no deal” feels like a pure Brexit:
 - It feels like a major break with the past.
 - On the key issues of immigration and sovereignty, these Leave voters feel it would fundamentally change the status quo.
 - Attractively for some, it also feels like a blunt message to Brussels.

- Among Remain voters, uncertainty is a key fear:
 - A potential shortage of food and medicines is frequently cited.
 - Others talk about the lack of clarity for EU citizens living in the UK.
 - But some also think that it could be positive for the UK.

“Even if it costs me money, that’s okay with me to get away from Europe.”



“If there is no deal then we can make our own rules about what we want to do next.”

“Lack of food and medicine. Stuff will take longer to come over.”



Gloomy scenarios feel unlikely – many think it impossible to predict what might happen in an unprecedented ‘no deal’ scenario.

% of each segment who agree that ‘it is impossible to predict what will happen if the UK leaves the EU without agreeing a deal’ – 69% overall

53%



81%



83%



81%



“[It’s like] Y2K – all the panic and the doom and the soothsayers saying the world’s going to end, and then everyone woke up and it was just the 1st of January.”

- Consistent with a rejection of political predictions in general, many have adopted a mindset of ‘wait and see’ on the likely consequences of leaving without a deal.
- Few are setting much store by adverts and news stories about the likely consequences.
- There is also implicit belief that “they” won’t let things get out of hand.
 - With “they” implicitly meaning the broader “establishment”, rather than specific actors (e.g. the civil service).

(Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? ‘It is impossible to predict what will happen if the UK leaves the EU without agreeing a deal’ [Base: All respondents (n=2047)])

5

**Nobody is coming out of Brexit well –
including Jeremy Corbyn.**

Previously, Jeremy Corbyn has been seen as a man of principle.

In focus groups over the last 2 years, voters told us...

- That Jeremy Corbyn sticks to his principles and “tells it how it is” – from both his supporters and his detractors.
- That his position on Brexit has been confusing, but also not integral to his reputation.
 - His “insurgent” status and his domestic policy positions were more important.
 - Voters of all Brexit stripes were willing to ignore his position and move into his capacious Brexit tent.



“He’s more of a people person than Theresa May is. And if he says something, he’ll stand by it.”

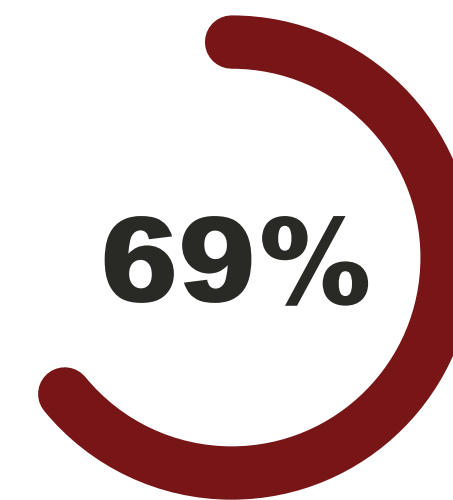
But now he is seen as playing party politics rather than acting in the national interest.

1. His actions and words in Parliament do not feel like they are driven by principle.

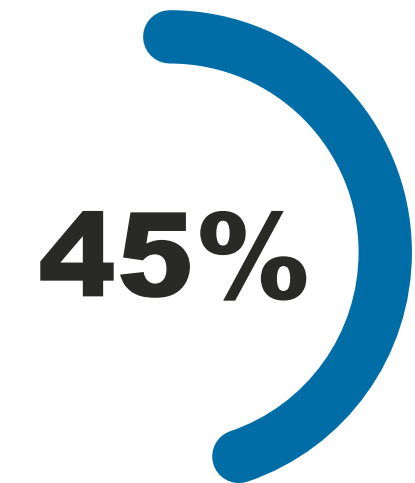
2. They also feel tangential to the key issue – most are not clear how a General Election would solve Brexit.

3. And for the first time, it feels to some of his supporters like he is on the backfoot relative to Theresa May.

% who agree that 'on the issue of Brexit, Jeremy Corbyn/Theresa May is more concerned about party politics than the national interest'



Jeremy Corbyn



Theresa May

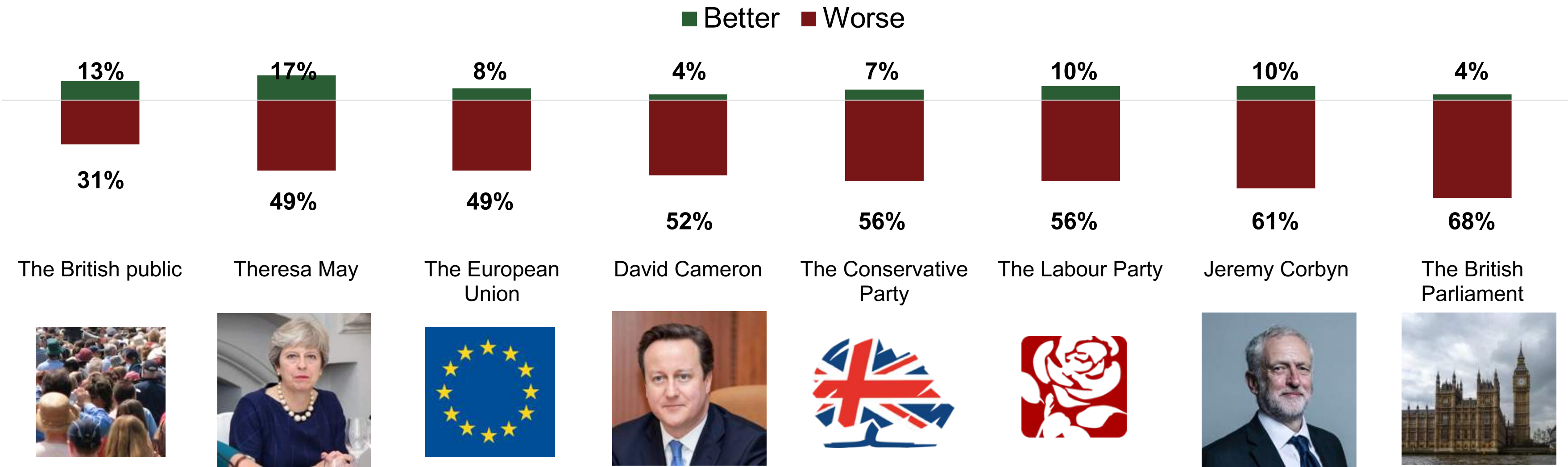


"A General Election – what would that do?"

(Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? 'On the issue of Brexit, Jeremy Corbyn/Theresa May is more concerned about party politics than the national interest' [Base: All respondents (n=2047)])

Three in five members of the public say that their impressions of Jeremy Corbyn have got worse since the EU referendum.

The UK voted to leave the EU in a referendum on 23rd June 2016. Since then, has your impression of the following people and organisations got better or worse?



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Theresa May is respected, but there is no enthusiasm for her leadership.

- Voters respect the stubbornness of the Prime Minister and her devotion to her cause. There is widespread pity for the hand she has been dealt.
- But this respect does not stretch to enthusiasm:
 - Leavers still doubt her motivation.
 - Remainers feel disenfranchised.
- Voters are already looking past her to the next Prime Minister – but rarely do so with excitement.



“She’s doing her best, she can only do what they can let her do.”

Voters' choices for leaders to solve the mess speak to what they feel they are lacking:



"He managed to sort out the England football team, so maybe he can sort out this."



"He's a man of principle."

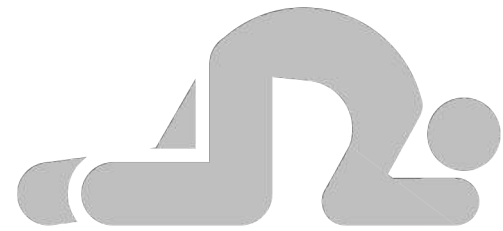


"If he can sort out the people that go on that programme, he can sort anything out."

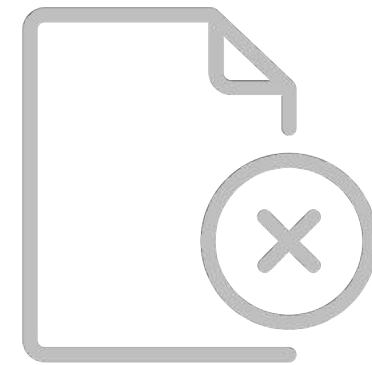


Conclusions

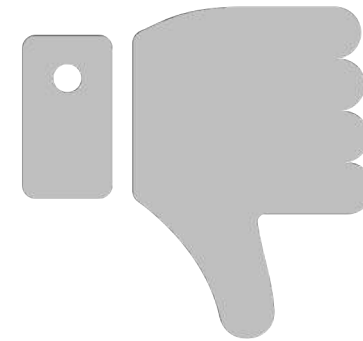
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