

Brexit Diaries | 2018

Press Release | 11th December 2018

New qualitative and quantitative research from BritainThinks indicates shifts in public opinion on Brexit – with a decrease in the strongest supporters of Brexit and an increase in the most pro-Remain audiences.

Background

In early 2017, BritainThinks conducted its Brexit Diaries research among 48 Remain voters and 52 Leave voters to understand the attitudes of the British public as the Brexit process continued. We then followed this diary exercise with a nationally representative survey of the British public. Our initial research indicated that there were four types of people on Brexit:

- 'Die-hards' – people who were pleased with the referendum result and can see no significant negatives to leaving the EU (who initially amounted to 37% of the public);
- 'Cautious optimists' – people who were pleased with the referendum result but can see some significant negatives to leaving the EU (originally 16%);
- 'Accepting pragmatists' – people who were disappointed with the referendum result but can see some significant positives to leaving the EU (originally 14%);
- 'Devastated pessimists' - people who were disappointed with the referendum result and can see no significant positives to leaving the EU (originally 30%).

We have updated this research at numerous intervals over the last two years. This latest piece of research includes a nationally representative survey of 2,092 British adults and a qualitative diary project with 26 of our original 'Brexit Diarists'.

Key findings

1. **The size of the 'Devastated Pessimists' group (the most pro-Remain of our EU segments) has increased since June 2018; at the same time, the size of the 'Die-hard' segment (the most pro-Leave segment) has decreased.**

5. Support for a public vote on the deal has dropped slightly relative to June 2018.

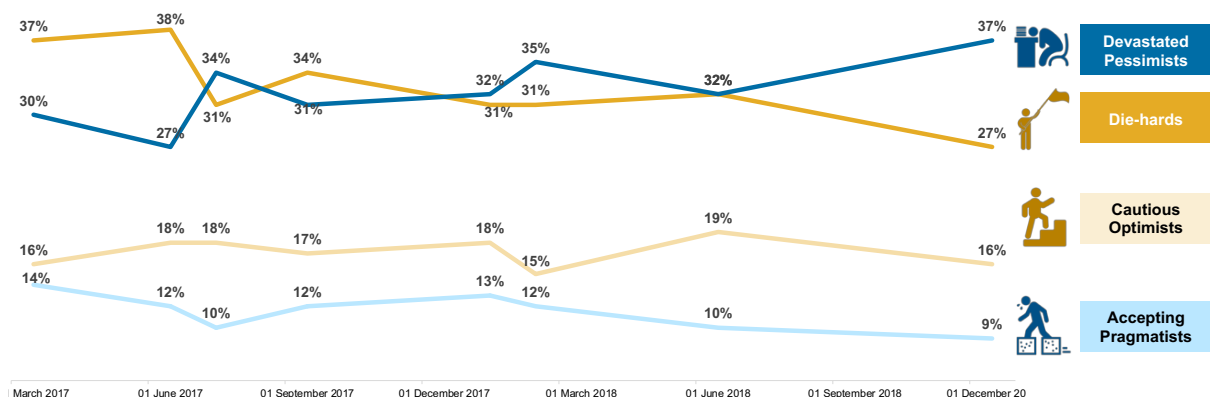
Detailed findings

1. **KEY FINDING 1:** The size of the ‘Devastated Pessimists’ group (the most pro-Remain of our EU segments) has increased since June 2018; at the same time, the size of the ‘Die-hard’ segment (the most pro-Leave segment) has decreased.

	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

Since June this year, we have seen the following changes in the sizes of our Brexit segments:

- A fall in the proportion of Leave-supporting ‘Die-hards’ from 32% in June to 27% now
- A fall in the proportion of Leave-supporting ‘Cautious optimists’ from 19% in June to 16% now
- A slight fall in the proportion of Remain-supporting ‘Accepting pragmatists’ from 10% in June to 9% now
- A rise in the proportion of Remain-supporting ‘Devastated pessimists’ from 32% in June to 37% now



- **Diehards** are not happy with how this year has turned out – descriptions include ‘exasperating’. And most feel May’s deal is a dilution of the Brexit promise, capitulating to demands of the EU.

- **Cautious optimists** also feel the year has gone badly, describing it as ‘uncertain’ and ‘frustrating’. They have lost trust in May as the implementer of Brexit and now express concern about leaving and even regret.
- **Devastated pessimists:** uncertainty, ‘shock’ and frustration dominate their view of 2018. They are likely to highlight divisions in May’s party when commenting on the Brexit deal, but to say a deal that makes the UK independent without affecting the economy is impossible regardless.

“A very diluted and watered-down deal attempting to please everyone whilst ending up pleasing no-one. Unlikely to be voted through by MPs and therefore somewhat pointless in over-analysing. Disappointed in the content and vague in many areas.”
– Die-hard

“I think she has negotiated a worse deal than we currently had and I’m finding it hard to trust her.” – Cautious optimist

2. KEY FINDING 2: There is still little consensus among the public on the future impact of Brexit, with the vast majority of ‘Die-hards’ saying Britain will be more in control of its sovereignty in 3 years’ time, while ‘Devastated Pessimists’ are convinced of the opposite and also think it will bring economic calamity.

Uncertainty about what Brexit will mean is widespread, with 56% of the population agreeing that they are ‘unsure about what Brexit will mean for me and my family’. There are some differences between the segments with 71% of ‘Devastated Pessimists’ agreeing with this statement, compared to 30% of ‘Die-hards’.

When thinking about the specific impacts of Brexit, the public are concerned about the impact of Brexit on Britain in the next 3 years:

- 44% think that Britain will be worse off economically as a result of Brexit (vs 30% who do not)
- 45% think that Britain will have more control of its sovereignty as a result of Brexit (vs 26% who do not)
- 44% think that Britain will be a more divided society as a result of Brexit (vs 29% who do not)

Within this, there are some significant differences between the segments:

	Significantly more likely to agree...	Significantly less likely to agree
Die-hards (Leave supporters)	86% agree: ‘As a result of Brexit, Britain will be more in	73% disagree: ‘As a result of Brexit, Britain will be

	control of its sovereignty in 3 years' time than it is now'	economically worse off in 3 years' time than it is now'
Cautious optimists (Leave supporters)	66% agree: 'As a result of Brexit, Britain will be more in control of its sovereignty in 3 years' time than it is now'	38% disagree: 'As a result of Brexit, Britain will be a more a divided society in 3 years' time than it is now'
Accepting pragmatists (Remain supporters)	55% agree: 'As a result of Brexit, Britain will be more in control of its sovereignty in 3 years' time than it is now'	30% disagree: 'As a result of Brexit, Britain will be a more a divided society in 3 years' time than it is now'
Devastated pessimists (Remain supporters)	83% agree: 'As a result of Brexit, Britain will be economically worse off in 3 years' time than it is now'	56% disagree: 'As a result of Brexit, Britain will be more in control of its sovereignty in 3 years' time than it is now'

3. KEY FINDING 3: About half of the public say that they are concerned about a no-deal Brexit – consistent with June 2018.

Approximately half of the public are concerned about a no-deal Brexit, with 56% agreeing that they are worried about the consequences of there being no deal between the EU and the UK on Brexit compared to 57% in June.

The level of concern about a no deal Brexit varies between the segments:

	June 2018 - % agreeing	December 2018 - % agreeing
General public	57%	56% [-1]
Die-hards	18%	20% [+2]
Cautious optimists	71%	64% [-7]
Accepting pragmatists	75%	68% [-7]
Devastated pessimists	89%	85% [-4]

4. KEY FINDING 4: Views are negative toward the Government's performance in Brexit negotiations and are slightly more negative when the deal is referred to as 'Theresa May's'.

Views of the Government's performance on Brexit are negative, with 19% agreeing that it has done a good job on the Brexit negotiations with the EU. 44% agree that the Government's

deal represents the ‘worst of all worlds’ – increasing to 46% when it’s referred to as Theresa May’s deal.

“She has betrayed Northern Ireland with the backstop and has agreed to have a country within the UK treated differently to the mainland countries. She has also bowed to pressure from the EU as we will not be 100% out. This is what happens when a Remainer is in charge of Brexit.” – Die-hard

“It may well have been the best it could have been at that stage given the lack of overall conviction of the UK wishing to leave and the EU wishing us to leave. It seems no one wanted the full exit and that is how the deal presents: half in/half out with no clear path covering future relations. The difficulty stems, in part, from how successful so many areas of the union have been.” – Devastated pessimist

5. KEY FINDING 5: Support for a public vote on the deal has dropped slightly relative to June 2018.

Support for a public vote is only lukewarm, with 49% agreeing that the public should have a vote on the final Brexit deal between the UK and the EU. This is a decrease of 4 percentage points since June 2018, when 53% agreed with this statement.

Support for a potential ‘People’s Vote’ differs hugely across the segments:

	June 2018 - % agreeing the public should have a vote on the final Brexit deal between the UK and the EU	December 2018 - % agreeing the public should have a vote on the final Brexit deal between the UK and the EU
General public	53%	49% [-4]
Die-hards	29%	18% [-11]
Cautious optimists	53%	46% [-7]
Accepting pragmatists	50%	51% [+1]
Devastated pessimists	80%	79% [-1]

“I did vote to leave but think there was inadequate information. The deal feels like the worst of all worlds. Being in Europe still with no say. Think another vote would be democratic. I think it is too simplistic to say that people voted to leave no matter what.” – Cautious optimist

Comment

Tom Clarkson, Research Director at BritainThinks: *“This new research shows that Britain is still as divided as ever on Brexit. Our four Brexit tribes still have fundamentally divergent outlooks on whether Brexit will be a success or not. As a country, the only Brexit issue on which we are united is how badly the Government has handled negotiations.”*

Methodology summary

- Nationally representative online survey of 2,092 GB adults aged 18+, carried out between 7th and 9th December 2018.
- Qualitative diary project with 26 adults aged 18+, who have previously taken part in Brexit Diaries Research with BritainThinks.

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