

Britain and Europe

Are we all Eurosceptics now?

The rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) during this parliament has seen the Conservatives promise a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU if the party wins the 2015 election. This paper examines trends in attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU since British Social Attitudes started in 1983, and assesses whether Britain really is more Eurosceptic now than ever before.

Widespread Euroscepticism

Although not at record levels, Euroscepticism has been widespread in recent years.

- Faced with the simple choice between staying or withdrawing, 35% now say they want Britain to withdraw from the EU, more than at any time since 1985.
 - When presented with a wider range of options, voters' most popular choice, backed by 38%, is to stay in the EU but to try and reduce its powers.
 - Even 43% of those who feel European now say they want the EU's powers reduced.
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Not everything European is unpopular

EU rules that give rights and protections to British workers are relatively popular.

- Sixty nine per cent feel it is 'very' or 'quite' important that people in Britain are free to get jobs in other European countries.
 - The proportion who oppose giving British workers the same protection as other EU workers against working long hours has fallen from 46% in 1997 to 38% now.
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Immigration matters

Opposition to membership of the EU is particularly high among those who are concerned about immigration.

- Around half of those who think immigration is bad for the economy want to leave the EU compared with around one in ten of those who think it has been good for Britain's economic fortunes.
 - Support for leaving the EU varied similarly between those who think immigration undermines vs. enriches Britain's cultural life.
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Authors

John Curtice, Research Consultant, NatCen Social Research, and Professor of Politics, University of Strathclyde.

Geoffrey Evans, Official Fellow in Politics, Nuffield College, University of Oxford

Introduction

When the coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats was first formed in May 2010, one of the questions asked by observers was whether and how the two parties would manage their differences on Europe (d'Ancona, 2010). After all, the Liberal Democrats had long been the most Europhile of Britain's established political parties. In contrast, the Conservatives had become increasingly sceptical about Europe, and some of the party's MPs at least clearly wished to leave the institution. However, given the electoral rebuff that more than one European government had suffered a few years earlier when they had asked voters to give their verdict on a proposed new EU constitution, and given too the EU's preoccupation with sorting out the risks to the future of the euro created by the 2008 financial crisis, it looked as though Britain - and thus the Coalition - would not be faced with too many hard questions about possible changes to the country's relationship with the EU.¹

How wrong that presumption proved to be – not because of developments abroad but rather because of pressures much closer to home. For one of the most remarkable features of the last five years has been the rise of a party, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), that is committed to holding a referendum on Britain's relationship with the EU with a view to securing Britain's withdrawal from the institution.² In May 2010, UKIP had won just over 3% of the vote – the party's best performance yet, but still a very modest tally. However, by the end of the 2010-15 parliament it had not only come first in the 2014 European elections but it had also persuaded two former Conservative MPs to resign from the Commons and successfully defend their seats as UKIP standard bearers. It also enjoyed unprecedented success in local government elections (Curtice, 2013; 2014).

Concerned not least by the evidence of opinion polls that UKIP was gaining support disproportionately from those who voted Conservative in 2010, in January 2013 the Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, attempted to stem what by that stage was already a substantial advance in UKIP support. He did this by promising that, if the party secured a majority in 2015, the Conservatives would 'renegotiate' Britain's relationship with the EU with a view to reducing the EU's power and by the end of 2017 hold a referendum on whether Britain should stay in the EU (on the renegotiated terms) or leave (Cameron, 2013). This pronouncement was not, however, backed by the Liberal Democrats and as a result Mr Cameron has not been able to enshrine his promise in legislation. At the same time, the promise did very little to reverse UKIP's electoral advance.

We might presume from this litany of events that Britain must have become a more Eurosceptic country in the last five years. An insurgent anti-European party has performed remarkably well

1. The coalition did in fact agree to pass legislation that will require a government to hold a referendum in the event of any proposal in the future for significant transfer of powers to the EU, and this eventually took the form of the European Union Act 2011 (Cabinet Office, 2010).

2. For more information about the characteristics of UKIP support, see Curtice's British Social Attitudes 32 paper on this topic. <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/>

both in the polls and in the ballot box, while one of the established parties has felt it necessary to promise to put the question of Britain's relationship to a vote. But it is always unwise to assume that public opinion on any given issue can be ascertained from the performance and popularity of the political parties. UKIP may have simply captured the support of voters that have long been sceptical about Europe. In any event, voters' willingness or otherwise to back a party is influenced by a multitude of considerations, of which a party's policy stance is but only one. We should also bear in mind that, remarkably successful though they have been, UKIP have still only secured the support of a (relatively small) minority of the British electorate.

In this paper we therefore look to see what people themselves say about Europe and consider some of the reasons why people say they hold the views that they do. While the reason for our interest lies in developments during the last five years, the data British Social Attitudes has collected ever since it began in 1983 enable us to assess not just whether Britain has become more Eurosceptic during the last five years, but also whether it is more disenchanted with the EU now than it has been at any point during the last 30 years - and, if so, how might we account for any rise in Euroscepticism.

Are we more Eurosceptic now?

During the course of the last thirty years, British Social Attitudes has asked two different questions designed to tap the public's overall view about Britain's relationship with the EU. The first, which was asked on a regular basis during the first ten years of the survey, simply reads as follows:³

Do you think Britain should continue to be a member of the European Union or should it withdraw?

However, while this question gives us an indication of the degree to which the public embraces the UK's membership of the EU, it is a rather crude measure of people's attitudes towards the institution. It takes little account of the stance taken by the current Prime Minister in 2013, or indeed the Conservatives' long stated position that we should be 'in Europe but not run by Europe'. Thus, since the early 1990s, British Social Attitudes has in most, though not in all years adopted the following more subtle line of questioning:

***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?***

3. The term used to refer to the EU has changed over time in accordance with changes to the nomenclature of the institution itself. Up to and including 1989 the question referred to 'the EEC - the Common Market'. In 1990 reference was made to 'EC - the Common Market', while in 1991 and 1992 the wording used was, 'the European Community'. 'European Union' was used in 1997 and 2014.

Both questions were included in our most recent survey – for the first time since 1997. As a result we are well placed to assess how the balance of public opinion on attitudes towards Europe compares with the position during the course of the last thirty years.

First of all we examine in Table 1 the pattern of responses to the question we first asked in 1983 about whether Britain should remain in the EU or should withdraw. As we can see, there was considerable support in the early 1980s for leaving the EU; indeed, in 1984 those who wanted to withdraw (45%) almost equaled those who wished to stay (48%). But in the summer of 1984 the then Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, secured a ‘rebate’ on Britain’s contribution to the EU Budget and thereafter attitudes shifted quite dramatically in favour of EU membership such that by 1991 those who wished to remain a member (77%) outnumbered those who wanted to leave (17%) by more than four to one. However, opinion then swung back quite quickly in the opposite direction such that by the time that John Major’s Conservative administration had left office in 1997, supporters of Britain’s EU membership (54%) only outnumbered opponents (28%) by around two to one.

Table 1. Attitudes towards Britain’s continuing membership of the EU, 1983-2014

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1992	1997	2014
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Continue	53	48	56	61	63	68	76	77	72	54	57
Withdraw	42	45	38	33	32	26	19	17	22	28	35
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1761	1675	1804	3100	2847	3029	2797	1445	2855	1355	971

Source: 1992: British Election Study

Support for withdrawing from the EU is at its highest level since 1985.

Our latest survey suggests that Britain’s mood is even more Eurosceptic now than it was in 1997. As many as 35% now want to withdraw, while 57% wish to remain. However, not only does that suggest that a majority would prefer to remain in the EU, but also that that majority is still somewhat bigger than it was in 1983 or 1984. It appears that despite UKIP’s electoral success, we should not assume that Britain is necessarily more intent on leaving the EU than it has been at any time in the past. However, that does not necessarily mean that there is widespread enthusiasm for the European Union, at least as it is currently constituted. This becomes clear from the responses to our second, more nuanced question, which suggests that nowadays most people either want Britain to leave the EU (24%) or at least would like to see an attempt made to reduce its powers (38%). Indeed, in each of the last three years when the coalition has been in power, more people have chosen one or other of those two options (and in particular the option of leaving the EU) than had done so at any point up to and including 2008.

Table 2. Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 1992-2014

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	10	11	11	14	19	17	14	13	17	14
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	30	27	25	23	39	29	36	43	38	38
Leave things as are	16	22	20	20	19	18	23	20	19	21
Stay in EU and increase its powers	28	22	28	28	8	16	9	11	10	10
Work for single European government	10	9	8	8	6	7	8	6	7	7
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2855	1461	1165	1227	1180	1355	1035	1060	2293	1099
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2008	2012	2013	2014	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Leave the EU	15	15	18	16	15	20	30	26	24	
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	35	32	38	36	36	35	37	39	38	
Leave things as are	23	27	23	24	27	24	16	19	18	
Stay in EU and increase its powers	12	11	7	10	9	9	9	6	10	
Work for single European government	7	6	5	4	4	3	2	3	4	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3435	2293	3199	4268	1077	1128	1103	2147	971	

Source: 1992: British Election Study

That said, Euroscepticism (defined as support for either leaving the EU or reducing its powers) has been the mood of a majority of the public for nearly two decades. Until 1996, no more than four in ten adopted a Eurosceptic stance while around one in three actually wanted the EU to be more powerful. But a decision by the EU to ban the export of British beef after UK ministers admitted in March 1996 that there was a link between eating meat from cows suffering from Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE or 'mad cow disease') and the incidence of a new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans, appears to have triggered a dramatic and what proved to be a long-term change in attitudes towards the EU. Suddenly over half of the public were Eurosceptic, while only around one in six wanted a stronger EU. Apart from temporary dips in 1997 and 2003, this then, more or less, remained the position in every year up to and including 2008, the last time we asked the question when Labour were still in power. At that point 55% backed a Eurosceptic stance while only 13% wanted a more powerful EU.

So the strongly Eurosceptic mood that has been in evidence during the lifetime of the coalition is but a more intense version of a climate of opinion that has been in evidence since the mid-1990s. Moreover, given that we did not ask the question between 2009 and 2011, we should bear in mind that we cannot be sure that this intensification did not in fact occur during the final two years of the last Labour

administration.⁴ In any event, what is clear is that it has not intensified any further during the period (which began in 2012) in which UKIP has been riding high in the polls. In fact since 2012 the proportion adopting a Eurosceptic stance has eased slightly from 67% to 63%.

The years of the Coalition have therefore witnessed the existence of a strongly Eurosceptic mood among the British public, albeit one that was not unprecedented and which simply represented an intensification of a mood that had already been in evidence for more than ten years. But how might we best account for this intensification? It is to that question that we now turn.

Why is Britain so doubtful about Europe?

Previous research on attitudes towards Europe – not just in the UK but across the EU more generally – has focused on two main explanations as to why people support or oppose European integration. The first suggests that people's attitudes are a consequence of their evaluations of the instrumental benefits of membership, while the second suggests they are rooted in their sense of identity. Studies that emphasise the former consideration suggest that support for the European Union is higher among those engaged in (primarily professional and managerial) occupations that benefit most from EU membership, among those living in countries that profit most from EU trade and/or at times when the economy is performing relatively well – all circumstances that seemingly help convince people that the EU's free trade provisions bring material advantages (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1996; Anderson and Reichart, 1996; Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2004). Studies with the latter focus suggest that opposition to the EU is higher among those with a strong sense of national (rather than European) identity who consequently question the legitimacy of rule from Brussels and who may also be concerned about the cultural consequences of migration that is fostered by the Union's freedom of movement provisions (Deflem and Pampel, 1996; Ash, 2002; Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2002; Sides and Citrin, 2007).

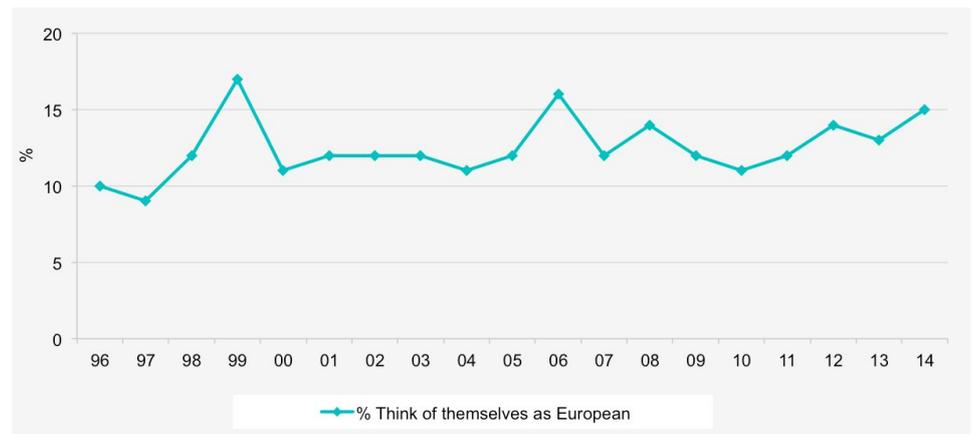
Distinguishing between these explanations is not necessarily easy. Those with a strong sense of national identity who consequently question the legitimacy of the EU may well also be reluctant to acknowledge that the EU brings any economic benefit. Concerns about the economic and cultural consequences of immigration may well go hand in hand in the minds of many voters. Nevertheless, our most recent survey contained questions designed to tap perceptions of both aspects of Britain's relationship with the EU, and these enable us to see whether or not there is any clear evidence that either has helped contribute to the strongly Eurosceptic mood that is now apparently in place.

4. Survey research conducted by the European Union itself as part of its Eurobarometer series suggests that both possibilities may have occurred. The proportion who said that Britain's membership of the EU was a good thing fell from 32% in Autumn 2008 to 28% in Spring 2009, but then fell further to 26% in Spring 2011. (Figures obtained from the Eurobarometer interactive search system are available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/index_en.cfm.)

A question of identity?

Since 1996 British Social Attitudes has presented its respondents with a list of national identities associated with Britain and/or Ireland and asked them which ones describe the way they think of themselves. They can choose as many or as few from the list as they want. Among those included on the list is 'European'. Figure 1 shows that the proportion who have said they think of themselves as European at all, either solely or in combination with one or more other identities, has been relatively low – typically at around one in eight or so – and has shown no sign of increasing in any consistent fashion over time. While a little higher than one in eight, the current proportion (15%) is no higher than the 17% recorded in 1999 or the 16% obtained in 2006.

Figure 1. Trends in 'free choice' European identity, 1996-2014



See Table A1 in the Appendix for exact figures and bases

The persistently low level of identification with Europe certainly creates conditions in which it is more likely that Euroscepticism will prosper. As Table 3 shows, only 7-8% (depending on which question is asked) of those who say that they are 'European' want Britain to leave the European Union. In contrast, support for leaving among those who do not think of themselves as European is as high as 40% when respondents are faced with the straight choice between Britain continuing as a member or withdrawing. Moreover, irrespective of the measure used, most of the increase in support for leaving (since both 2008 shortly before the Coalition came to power, and over the longer-term since 1997) has occurred among those who do not regard themselves as European. There seems little doubt that Britain would be a rather more enthusiastic member of the EU if more people felt a sense of European identity.

Table 3. Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU by European identity, 1997, 2008 and 2014

	Should Britain continue or withdraw?				Britain should ...			Unweighted base
		Continue	Withdraw		Leave EU	Reduce EU powers		
2014								
European	%	92	8	%	7	43		117
Not European	%	51	40	%	27	38		847
2008								
European	%	n/a	n/a	%	7	33		147
Not European	%	n/a	n/a	%	27	35		978
1997								
European	%	91	6	%	4	25		116
Not European	%	51	30	%	19	29		1,227

43% who feel European want the EU's powers reduced.

However, while nearly everyone who feels European wishes to remain in the EU, this does not necessarily mean that they endorse the current relationship that Britain has with the institution. As Table 3 shows, as many as 43% of those who say they are European think that Britain should try to reduce the powers of the EU. Indeed, support for this standpoint has grown more (both since 2008 and 1997) among those who consider themselves to be European than it has among those who do not. It appears that even among those who might be expected to be the most enthusiastic supporters of the EU, the view that the institution is perhaps too powerful and requires some measure of reform is now quite widespread.

As well as asking people about their sense of identity, our most recent survey also included a question that taps directly into the question of whether people feel that the EU should have the right to get involved in Britain's affairs. One of the particular complaints that some have made about the EU is that it has become too involved in regulation of the labour market through such measures as the European Working Time Directive, a measure that sets limits on the length of time that employees can be expected to work. Given the controversy about this provision, we asked our respondents:

Which of these statements comes closer to your views?
Workers in Britain should have the same protection as other EU workers against being made to work very long hours
The EU has no business deciding how many hours a week workers in Britain should work

Although still a subject about which the public are divided, in fact the balance of opinion has tilted slightly in favour of the idea that workers in Britain should have the same protections as others. In our 2014 survey 46% backed this view, rather more than the 38% who said that the issue was none of the EU's business. When we previously

asked this question back in 1997, the 42% who then supported equal protection were, in contrast, slightly outnumbered by the 46% who reckoned it was not a legitimate issue for the EU to address.

As we might anticipate, attitudes towards this issue are related to people's views about the EU as a whole. For example, only 19% of those who support equal protection want Britain to withdraw from the EU compared with 53% of those who feel the EU should not be involved in regulating employment hours. But given that public opinion has become rather more favourable to the EU on this issue, it is evidently not a trend that helps us understand why Britain's mood is now more strongly Eurosceptic than it was then.

Do we feel we benefit?

There are evidently some limitations to our ability to account for the growth in Euroscepticism by looking at questions of identity and legitimacy. But can we improve our understanding if we look at people's perceptions of the economic consequences of Britain's relationship with Europe? During the 1990s, we regularly asked:

***Would closer links with the European Union make Britain...
...stronger economically,
weaker economically,
or, would it make no difference?***

The question was repeated for the first time in a while in our 2014 survey. We should note that, strictly speaking, it asks people to state what they think the economic consequences of 'closer links with the European Union' would be rather than what they consider to be the consequences of the status quo, but we can probably reasonably anticipate that the two sets of perceptions tend to go hand in hand. Table 4 reveals that people are certainly somewhat less likely to regard closer ties with the EU as economically beneficial (and more likely to regard them as disadvantageous) than they were at the beginning of the 1990s, when overall support for Britain's membership was at its height. However, at 35% the proportion who think that such ties would make Britain stronger economically is only eight percentage points lower than it was in 1990 or 1991, a much smaller change than we might anticipate from the sharp drop in support for Britain's membership of the EU that has been in evidence since then. Indeed, twice as many people (35%) now think that closer ties would make Britain stronger as think they would make the country weaker (17%). As a result, the balance of opinion is in fact more favourable now to closer ties than it was back in 1997. All in all it seems that once again there is no simple explanation for the development of Britain's more Eurosceptic mood.

Twice as many think closer ties with the EU make Britain economically stronger (35%) than think it makes the country weaker (17%).

Table 4. Perceptions of the economic consequences of stronger links with the EU, 1990-97 and 2014

	1990	1991	1993	1994	1995	1997	2014
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Stronger economically	43	43	33	40	32	33	35
Make no difference	37	31	32	29	39	32	42
Weaker economically	8	13	22	20	20	20	17
Don't know	12	13	13	10	9	15	6
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1397	1445	1461	1165	1227	1355	971

Yet if we look at the position at any one point in time, as we do for both 1997 and 2014 in Table 5, we find that people's perceptions of the economic consequences of closer links with the EU are strongly related to their overall attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the institution. Among those who think that closer links would make Britain stronger economically, no less than 88% want Britain to continue to be a member of the EU, while only 11% want to withdraw. In contrast the balance of opinion is very much in the opposite direction among those who think that closer ties would weaken Britain's economy. Among this group as many as 70% want to withdraw while less than a quarter (23%) want to remain.

Table 5. Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU by perceptions of the economic impact of closer links, 1997 and 2014

Closier ties with the EU would make Britain economically ...	Should Britain continue or withdraw?		Britain should ...		<i>Unweighted base</i>		
	Continue	Withdraw	Leave EU	Reduce EU powers			
2014							
Stronger	%	88	11	%	5	45	319
No difference	%	49	42	%	28	40	427
Weaker	%	23	70	%	57	27	165
1997							
Stronger	%	87	7	%	2	30	450
No difference	%	50	36	%	21	31	438
Weaker	%	27	61	%	46	30	247

Nevertheless, despite the strength of this relationship, support for the second strand of Euroscepticism – remaining in the EU but seeking to reduce its powers - has apparently grown most among those who think that Britain's economy would be strengthened by closer ties. Among this group support for this position is now 15 percentage points higher than it was in 1997 (45%, up from 30% in 1997), whereas it has not grown at all among those who think the economy would be weaker. It seems that, as we saw in the case of European identity, the wish to reduce the scope of the EU's activities and powers has grown most among those who might be expected to be

most supportive of the institution. While this section of society may not have followed their fellow citizens in being more likely to want to leave the EU, it seems they are more willing to acknowledge calls for 'reform'.

At the heart of the economic provisions of the EU is the creation of a free market in goods and services that is devoid of customs barriers. The value of this free trade provision is widely acknowledged by the British public, though maybe a little less so now than was the case in 1997. In 2014, 35% said that it was 'very important for people in Britain' that 'Britain is able to sell its goods anywhere else in the EU without paying customs duties', while only 12% stated that it was 'not very' or 'not at all important'. The equivalent figures in 1997 were 40% and 8% respectively. However, central though the issue may be to the *raison d'être* of the EU, the pattern of responses is not as closely linked to people's attitudes towards Britain's membership of the EU as is the wider question of the economic consequences of closer ties. Even among those who think that the absence of customs duties is 'very important' as many as 30% still want Britain to withdraw (while, conversely, support for leaving the EU is no higher than 46% among those who think their absence is 'not very' or 'not all important'). But perhaps this should not come as a surprise, since even UKIP want Britain to retain a free trade agreement with the rest of the EU following a decision to withdraw.

Apart from the economic consequences of Britain's membership of the EU, another instrumental issue that sometimes arises in the debate about Europe is whether Britain's role in the world would be diminished (or enhanced) if it were to leave. It is suggested, for example, that its role as a country that is able to influence the stance of the EU on trade and foreign affairs makes it a more useful and important ally in the eyes of the United States than would otherwise be the case (Simons, 2013). Thus, in much the same vein as asking about the economic consequences of a closer relationship with EU, we also asked this question that had previously been posed on a regular basis by British Social Attitudes during the 1990s:

Do you think that closer links with the European Union would give Britain...
...more influence in the world,
less influence in the world,
or, would it make no difference?

As Table 6 shows, the trend in the pattern of responses to this question is much the same as it was in respect of perceptions of the economic consequences of closer links with the EU. At 29% the proportion who think that closer links would strengthen Britain's influence in the world is a little lower than it was in 1990 (35%), but is much the same as it was in 1997 (30%). In fact, the most common view throughout (and one that appears to be particularly common at present) has been that closer links would make no difference. Evidently fewer voters believe that remaining in or leaving the EU would matter one way or the other for Britain's influence in the world than believe it could have some impact on the country's economic health.

Table 6. Perceptions of the consequences of closer ties with the EU on Britain's influence in the world, 1990-7 and 2014

	1990	1991	1993	1994	1995	1997	2014
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
More influence	35	32	27	32	27	30	29
Make no difference	47	47	47	46	51	44	56
Less influence	9	12	18	17	17	15	12
Don't know	8	8	7	6	5	11	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1397	1445	1461	1165	1227	1355	971

In any event, perceptions of the impact of closer ties on Britain's influence in the world are less closely related to people's views about Britain's relationship with the rest of the EU than are perceptions of their impact on the strength of Britain's economy. As Table 7 shows, one in three (33%) of those who think that closer links would reduce Britain's influence still want Britain to remain a member of the EU, whereas we saw earlier (Table 5) that only around a quarter (23%) of those who thought that closer links would have an adverse economic effect wanted to continue to be a member. That suggests we should not be surprised that changes in overall perceptions of the impact of closer links on Britain's influence on the world do not necessarily follow the trend in attitudes towards Britain's membership particularly closely.

Table 7. Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU by perceptions of the impact of closer links on Britain's influence in the world, 1997 and 2014

Closer ties with the EU would mean Britain had ...	Should Britain continue or withdraw?		Britain should ...		<i>Unweighted base</i>		
	Continue	Withdraw	Leave EU	Reduce EU powers			
2014							
More influence	%	86	10	%	7	40	262
No difference	%	49	44	%	29	41	562
Less influence	%	33	62	%	51	28	111
1997							
More influence	%	84	9	%	3	27	400
No difference	%	52	36	%	23	34	601
Less influence	%	32	56	%	36	34	195

That said, we should also notice one similarity between Table 7 and the equivalent analysis of the impact of perceptions of the economic consequences in Table 5. Although very few of those who think that closer links would increase Britain's influence in the world want Britain to leave the EU, no less than 40% of this group would like the EU's power to be reduced. The incidence of such views has also increased the most among this group. In other words, once again

we find that an apparent wish to clip the wings of the EU somewhat has become relatively common among those who would seem most favourably disposed towards the institution.

Immigration

One of the aspects of the EU about which UKIP in particular has been especially critical are the provisions for freedom of movement. These mean that citizens of EU member states who can find employment in the UK can come here to live and work. The party has argued that these provisions mean that EU membership is incompatible with the aim of limiting net migration to the UK, an aim that the Prime Minister had set before the 2010 general election, which appears to matter to many voters, but which has not been achieved (Conservative Party, 2010; Binder, 2014; Office for National Statistics, 2014).

Moreover, it has long been clear that voters are not keen on the EU having an influential role in immigration policy. In 1997, for example, only 14% thought that decisions about immigration should be made mostly by the EU, while as many as 57% felt they should mostly be made by individual governments. Not dissimilar results were obtained in 1994 and 1995. At the same time, such antipathy was also clearly linked with a reluctance to remain in the EU (Evans, 1998). For example, in 1997 as many as 37% of those who reckoned that immigration decisions should be made by national governments said that they wanted to leave the EU, compared with just 9% of those who were happy for the EU to be making such decisions.

Our 2014 survey did not ask people directly for their views about immigration, either from the European Union or from elsewhere. However, our 2013 survey did ask people extensively about their attitudes to immigration (Ford and Heath, 2014). In so doing it recognised that the debate about immigration is partly about what impact it has on the culture of the UK (and thus perhaps people's sense of identity) and partly about its impact on the nation's economy. People were asked:

On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is extremely bad and 10 is extremely good, would you say it is generally bad or good for Britain's economy that migrants come to Britain from other countries

and then

And on a scale of 0 to 10, would you say that Britain's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by migrants coming to live here from other countries?

People who think immigration is bad for Britain's economy and cultural life are much more likely to want to leave the EU.

As Table 8 shows, both those who think that immigration is bad for Britain's economy and those who think it undermines Britain's cultural life are much more likely to want Britain to leave the EU than are those who think its impact is good for the economy and enriches the country's culture. In both cases, around half of those who are most critical of the consequences of immigration (giving it a score of 0 or 1, constituting around one fifth of our sample in each case)

want to leave the EU compared with around one in ten of those (who represent just 6% of the sample in the case of culture and 3% in the case of the economy) who are most positive about the consequences of immigration, giving it a score of 9 or 10. Equally, in response to a further question about whether the benefits of migration from the EU outweigh the costs or vice versa, no less than 41% of those who said that the costs are much greater than the benefits indicated they wanted to leave the EU, compared with only 17% of those who either thought the benefits outweighed the costs or at least balanced them. Although we are unable to compare these patterns directly with those that pertained in earlier years, there would appear to be little doubt that concern about immigration - both cultural and economic - is one of the considerations that has been helping fuel Britain's Eurosceptic mood.

Table 8. Support for leaving the EU by attitudes to immigration, 2013

	Perceived impact of immigration on ...			
	Economy	Unweighted base	Culture	Unweighted base
% Say Britain should leave the EU				
0 – bad/undermine	48	264	54	240
1	49	145	51	157
2	37	190	34	206
3	31	263	23	226
4	27	175	22	152
5	21	456	25	445
6	17	183	19	159
7	7	239	13	236
8	7	136	8	173
9	11	32	11	52
10 – good/enrich	16	40	6	72

69% think it is important British people are free to work in other European countries.

The freedom of movement provisions of the EU are, of course, reciprocal; British citizens also have the right to live and work in the EU. This aspect of EU membership appears to be relatively popular. In our most recent survey, no less than 25% said that it was 'very important' for people in Britain 'that they are free to get jobs in any other EU countries', while another 44% said it was 'fairly important'. Only just over one in five (21%) stated that it was 'not very' or 'not at all important'. Moreover, this right is just as popular now as it was back in 1997, when 23% said it was 'very important' and again another 44% stated that it was 'fairly important'.

Table 9. Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU by attitudes towards freedom of movement, 2014

Freedom to get jobs in any other EU countries is ...	Should Britain continue or withdraw?		Britain should ...			Unweighted base	
	Continue	Withdraw	Leave EU	Reduce EU powers			
2014							
Very important	%	76	20	%	13	37	197
Fairly important	%	61	32	%	20	47	355
Not very/not at all imp.	%	39	53	%	43	30	161
1997							
Very important	%	67	22	%	16	26	249
Fairly important	%	61	22	%	13	34	463
Not very/not at all imp.	%	43	49	%	30	33	238

Relatively popular though the right to live and work in the EU might be, it remains the case that attitudes are also clearly linked to people's overall views on Britain's relationship with the EU. As Table 9 shows, only one in five (20%) of those who think it is 'very important' that people in Britain are free to live and work in the EU believe that the UK should withdraw from the EU, compared with a little over half (53%) of those who say that it is 'not very' or 'not at all important'. Equally, only 13% of the former group say that they want to leave the EU in response to our more nuanced question, compared with 43% of those who say that it is 'not very' or 'not at all important'. Meanwhile, there are some signs that the link between the two sets of attitudes has strengthened somewhat since 1997; in particular, whereas among those who feel the freedom of movement provisions are 'very important' there has not been any significant change in the proportion who want to leave the EU, among those who feel those provisions are 'not very' or 'not all important' the proportion who want to leave has increased from 30% to 43%. This, of course, is just what we would expect to be the case if the debate about freedom of movement and immigration has come to play a more important role in shaping people's attitudes towards the EU.

Follow the party?

So far we have assumed that people's attitudes towards the EU are shaped by their sense of identity and/or whether they feel that Britain benefits or not from its membership of the EU. But this perhaps is to presume that people feel they know enough about what might be thought to be a rather remote institution for them to have clear views about its merits. Perhaps in these circumstances voters take their cues about what to think from trusted sources such as the party they support (Flickinger, 1994; Anderson, 1998; Evans and Butt, 2005; 2007; Curtice, 2012)? Meanwhile, we certainly might wonder what impact the rise of UKIP together with David Cameron's promise to renegotiate Britain's relationship with Europe has had on the link

between the party that people support and their attitudes towards the EU.

In fact that link appears to have changed rather less than we might have anticipated. True, as Table 10 shows, there is no doubt that UKIP has drawn to itself a very Eurosceptic body of supporters. More than four in five UKIP identifiers (81%) say that they wish to withdraw from the EU. However, even though the rise in UKIP support during this parliament has occurred disproportionately among Eurosceptic former Conservative voters (Evans and Mellon, forthcoming), this appears not to have disturbed the degree to which the views of those who support each of the three main parties in the current House of Commons are distinct from each other. Conservative supporters are less keen on remaining in the EU than Labour or (especially) Liberal Democrat supporters, but this does not appear to be any more the case now than it was in 2008, before the Coalition came to power. Meanwhile, although Conservative identifiers are also more likely than Labour or Liberal Democrats supporters to want to see the EU's powers reduced, this is also no more the case now than it was in 2008 – or indeed as long ago as 1997. The Prime Minister's promise to renegotiate Britain's terms of membership seems to have reflected a long standing Eurosceptic mood among supporters of his party (and indeed as we saw earlier among the public more generally) rather than helped to open up a new fault line between them and Labour and Liberal Democrat identifiers.

Table 10. Attitudes towards Britain's membership of the EU by party identification, 1997, 2008 and 2014

Party identification	Should Britain continue or withdraw?			Britain should ...			Unweighted base
	Continue	Withdraw		Leave EU	Reduce EU powers		
2014							
Conservative	%	52	44	%	30	49	271
Labour	%	62	31	%	18	36	260
Liberal Democrat	%	78	14	%	4	40	48
UKIP	%	17	81	%	65	27	85
None	%	60	24	%	19	29	158
2008							
Conservative	%	n/a	n/a	%	26	45	372
Labour	%	n/a	n/a	%	13	33	316
Liberal Democrat	%	n/a	n/a	%	10	37	95
None	%	n/a	n/a	%	21	25	191
1997							
Conservative	%	54	35	%	20	42	378
Labour	%	59	23	%	14	24	560
Liberal Democrat	%	62	28	%	21	28	129
None	%	33	33	%	24	17	141

Note: There were too few UKIP identifiers in 2008 and 1997 on which to base any estimate of their views.

This is not to deny that over the longer term changes in the stances adopted by the parties towards Europe have been reflected in changes in the views of their supporters. Back in 1983, when Labour were in favour of leaving the EU, as many as 58% of Labour identifiers wished to withdraw, compared with just 29% of Conservative supporters. By 1991, by which time Labour had reversed its stance on Europe and before Euroscepticism became widespread within the Conservative party, the proportion backing withdrawal stood at just 16% among both sets of supporters. Indeed, the fact all three of the main parties at Westminster were at this stage supportive of Britain's membership helps explain why the overall level of support was so high at that time (see Table 1). But a relative lack of enthusiasm for Europe was already well in evidence among Conservative supporters before the Coalition came to power, and that position has simply been confirmed during the past five years.

Conclusions

Britain has undoubtedly been in a relatively Eurosceptic mood during the last five years. Indeed, as a result the proportion who think the country will leave the EU within the next ten years has increased from 13% in 1997 to 26% now. However, that mood is but an intensification of a climate of opinion that has been in evidence since the mid-1990s, that is ever since the EU banned British beef (and 'beef' is often portrayed as quintessentially 'British') and Euroscepticism started to become common place inside the Conservative party. Moreover, despite the electoral success of UKIP since 2012, support for leaving the EU has not increased further during the last two or three years, and is still not as high as it was in the early 1980s, when Labour were opposed to Britain's membership. Rather than helping to create a new mood of Euroscepticism, UKIP have been expressing a mood that has long been in place.

Indeed, not all aspects of the EU's role and activities have become less popular. Support for giving British workers the same employment rights as their European counterparts has actually increased somewhat, while the right of British workers to find employment in the rest of the EU is looked upon no less favourably than it was in the late 1990s. At the same time many appear to accept that a close relationship with Europe is beneficial for Britain's economy.

Yet few of us feel a sense of European identity, and as a result the European Union is perhaps always having to justify itself in the eyes of British voters. And on that score we are not as convinced of the practical benefits of membership as we were in the 1990s, while more recently opposition to the EU has become closely intertwined with concern about levels of immigration, a subject that many voters have long felt should primarily be a matter for national governments. Between them these considerations appear to have helped intensify Britain's Eurosceptic mood.

But perhaps the most remarkable feature of the current mood is that even those who we might expect to be favourably disposed towards the EU, such as those who acknowledge having a European identity

and those who think that closer EU links are beneficial for Britain's economy, are now more inclined to feel that Britain should attempt to reduce the EU's powers. It appears that even many an apparent Europhile now wants to be 'in Europe but not run by Europe'. Even if Mr Cameron does not get an opportunity to renegotiate Britain's relationship with Europe, it seems that Britain is likely to remain a relatively unenthusiastic member of the European project for the foreseeable future.

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Appendix

Table A1. Trends in 'free choice' European identity, 1996-2014 (see also Figure 1)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
% European	10	9	12	17	11	12	12	12	11	12
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1180	1355	3146	3143	3246	3287	3435	4432	3199	4268
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
% European	16	12	14	12	11	12	14	13	15	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	4290	4124	4486	3421	3297	3311	3248	3244	971	