



Higher Education Policy Institute

YouthSight

HEPI / YouthSight Student Poll: A Brexit Youthquake?

HEPI Policy Note 4

December 2017

Key points:

- Most students (62%) want a second referendum on the final Brexit deal
- Support for Labour among students has grown since the Election and now stands at 68%
- Most Labour-supporting students (55%) think the Labour Party backs Remain
- Most Labour-supporting students (58%) think Jeremy Corbyn backs Remain
- If Labour overtly backed Brexit, 21% of their student supporters would be less likely to vote at all
- If Labour overtly backed Brexit, 42% of their student supporters would be less likely to vote Labour

Introduction

The General Election in 2017 was hit by a youthquake. Young people voted in greater numbers than at any point for 25 years; the proportion of registered 18 to 24-year olds voting rocketed from 43% in 2015 to 64% in 2017.¹ Among full-time undergraduate students, 69% said they were likely to vote soon before the 2015 General Election but the figure jumped to 80% prior to the General Election of 2017.²

A key driver was Brexit. The vote to leave the EU was perceived as a blow by the student population. Prior to the 2017 Election, students said the EU and the NHS were the two issues they cared most about.³ Our new survey reveals that, on referendum day, 81% of students who turned out to vote backed Remain.

Most full-time undergraduates at the time of the referendum, which took place during the 2015/16 academic year, are no longer undergraduates in 2017/18. But today's students are similarly opposed to Brexit. This new HEPI / YouthSight poll shows 62% support a second referendum on the final Brexit deal.

Labour support among students

In the absence of another referendum, the General Election of 2017 gave students a chance to express an opinion on how the Government was handling Brexit.

They overwhelmingly backed Labour and support has strengthened since. Before the Election, 55% of students who said they were likely to vote backed Labour. Now, two-thirds (68%) do so.

Labour's policies, such as abolishing tuition fees and bringing back maintenance grants, are designed to appeal to students. However, their position on Brexit could be a major obstacle in retaining the support of students.

Our poll asked Labour-voting students to say where they think the Labour Party, and also Jeremy Corbyn, stand on Brexit.⁴

- 55% said they thought Labour's position is for the UK to remain in the EU; and
- 58% thought Jeremy Corbyn wants the UK to remain in the EU.

What do you think is [Labour/Jeremy Corbyn's] position on Brexit?

	Labour	Jeremy Corbyn
To remain a member of the EU	55%	58%
To leave the EU and retain access to the single market and customs union	32%	24%
To leave the EU without access to the single market and customs union	1%	3%
Don't know	11%	15%

HEPI / YouthSight November 2017. Base: 457 (students that would vote Labour in a General Election tomorrow)

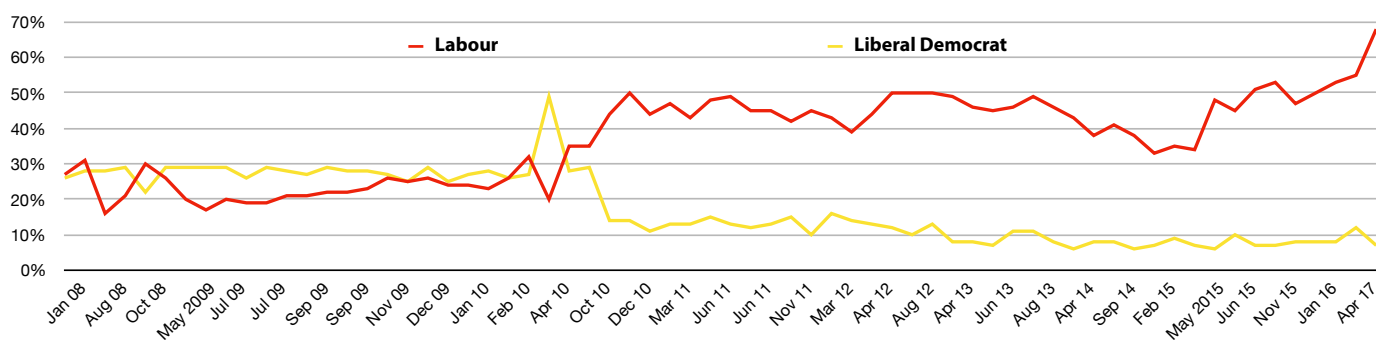
Labour and Brexit

In fact, the Labour Party's stated position is to accept the referendum result. They have made no pledges on staying in the EU, the single market and customs union or holding a second referendum. Instead, they want a 'jobs first Brexit'⁵

If students perceive there to be a large gap between their views on EU membership and the Labour Party's position, their overwhelming

support for Labour could decline fast. The Liberal Democrats have still not been forgiven by students for breaking their tuition fee pledge. Leading up to the General Election in 2010, student support for the Lib Dems rose to 49%. After entering government, Lib Dem support returned to its historically low levels but, after they abandoned their pledge on tuition fees, it fell further and has not recovered, with support now standing at about 7%.

How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?



YouthSight Student Vote: <https://www.youthsight.com/student-voting-intentions-interactive-graph/>

When asked how they would act if Labour adopted more overt support for Brexit:

- 21% of Labour-supporting students said they would be less likely to vote for any party; and
- 42% of Labour-supporting students said they would be less likely to vote Labour.

Labour's Brexit position risks losing student support even though it might increase support from other voters.

If Labour introduced a policy to overtly support departure from the EU including the Single Market and the Customs Union, how would this impact your likelihood to vote in a future General Election?

Impact on vote overall	
More likely to vote (for any party)	13%
Just as likely to vote	67%
Less likely to vote (for any party)	21%

Impact on vote for Labour	
More likely to vote Labour	13%
Just as likely to vote Labour	45%
Less likely to vote Labour	42%

HEPI-YouthSight November 2017. Base: 457 (students that would vote Labour in a General Election tomorrow)

Jane Mackey, YouthSight Research Manager, and Nick Hillman, HEPI Director

Methodology

- Wave 4 of the HEPI / YouthSight Monitor was conducted between 23 and 29 November 2017. It follows Wave 1 on students' perceptions of the UK's membership of the EU (2015), Wave 2 on free-speech issues (2016) and Wave 3 on how students were likely to vote in the 2017 General Election (2017).
- The survey was conducted using YouthSight's Student Omnibus survey, which is the UK's largest panel of young people.⁶ There were 1,018 full-time undergraduate respondents.
- Quotas were set on gender, university type and year of study. Weights were applied to ensure a balanced sample. Respondents received a £1 Amazon gift voucher for answering these questions and others on a different topic.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2015> ; <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2017-election>
- 2 <https://www.youthsight.com/student-voting-intentions-interactive-graph/>
- 3 <https://www.youthsight.com/ys-in-the-news-students-support-labour-jeremy-corbryn-but-dont-trust-them-on-student-fees-according-to-a-major-hepi-youthsight-pre-election-poll/>
- 4 Labour voting students are defined as those who answer 8-10 on a 1-10 scale of their likelihood to vote in a General Election tomorrow and answer that they would vote Labour in a General Election tomorrow.
- 5 <https://labour.org.uk/manifesto/negotiating-brexit/>
- 6 <https://www.youthsight.com/expertise/youth-research-insight/omnibus-surveys/>