

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

“Young people can determine the outcome of these European elections if they exercise their right to vote.”

During the EU elections, HOPE not hate is publishing occasional ‘State of the Race’ memos, looking at the possible gains or losses for right-wing populism and the far right; how voters are reacting to the Brexit debate; and what is motivating people as they consider their vote. This memo, prepared with the support of the National Education Union, looks at the views of young people.

Britain is deeply divided. Voters are more polarised than even following the 2016 referendum. This is largely down to the failure of Theresa May’s government to seek, and find, consensus amongst voters following the referendum. The debate has largely degenerated into a zero-sum battle, with voters left to wonder how a way forward can be reached.

Most voters have now given up on the chances of a consensus. Populist politicians like Nigel Farage and those on the far right are now seeking to capitalise on people’s anger. Ultimately, the European elections will be decided by who turns up to vote. The more people who vote, the lower the chance that ‘Tommy Robinson’ (real name: Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) or other far-right figures will get elected – it’s as simple as that.

If you don’t want the likes of Tommy Robinson or UKIP’s Carl Benjamin to become MEPs, then you have to vote for another candidate. Staying home helps Tommy and other candidates who will take the country down a darker and more divisive path.

A State of the Race Memo will be an occasional bulletin produced by HOPE not hate during the course of the European Election campaign

OVERVIEW

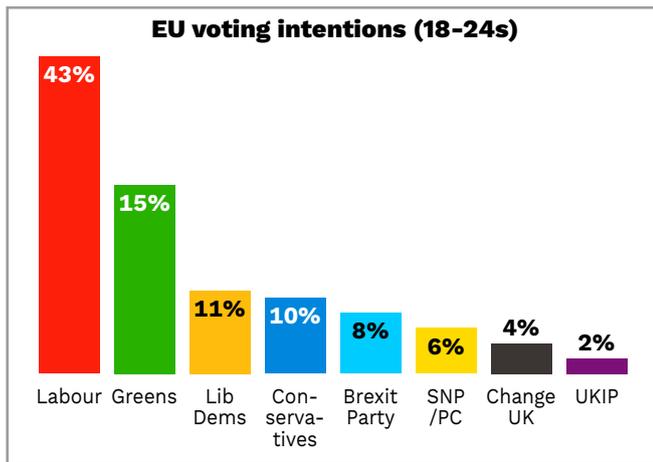
The fieldwork for this briefing derives from two recent YouGov/HOPE not hate polls. The first was of 5,420 voters, undertaken between 23–26 April and a second poll undertaken between 26 April and 1 May 2019. The total sample size of the second poll was of 567 young people. The figures for both polls were weighted and are representative of GB adults (aged 18-24). The surveys were carried out online.

The key findings of this polling are:

- Only 41% of young people say they are certain to vote in the European Parliamentary elections of any group. The Electoral Commission has recently stated that a third of all young people are not registered to vote.
- The youth vote could make a difference between which candidates get elected in each region. In the North West, for example, the youth vote will be decisive in deciding whether or not ‘Tommy Robinson’ is elected. Based on current polling, 2% or less separates parties for the final seat available in 9 of the 12 regions. In the North East, for example, youth turnout could decide if Labour or Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party get the final seat.
- Young voters cite Brexit (43%), the environment (36%) and health (28%) as the top three issues facing themselves and their families.
- Young voters have a very low opinion of ‘Tommy Robinson’. Just 7% of voters aged 18-24 say they view him favourably or very favourably, compared to 45% who say they have an unfavourable or very unfavourable view of him. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of young voters have an unfavourable or very unfavourable view of Nigel Farage, compared to 19% who view him favourably or very favourably.

THE HORSE RACE

While HOPE not hate and the NEU are both politically neutral in these elections, it is worth looking at the current state of the race when it comes to young people’s voting intentions. If the election were held tomorrow, our poll suggests the results would break down in the following way:



Polling is one thing, but the outcome of these European Elections will be determined by which voters are motivated to come out and actually cast their votes. Early indications, when looking at voters as a whole (not just young people), are that the supporters of the two main parties are less likely to vote than other voters. Turnout in recent European elections has been poor and well below that of General Elections or the EU referendum.

In 2004 turnout was 38.4%, in 2009 34.5% and by 2014 38.4% In a recent poll HOPE not hate poll, 17% said that they were “certain NOT to vote”, with a further 10% saying that they were unlikely to vote. The true figure will obviously be considerably higher, but the polling gives an indication as to which groups are more likely not to vote.

Turnout will be crucial in this election. Based on a new poll of more than 5,400 people, HOPE not hate analysis suggests that a handful of votes will decide some MEP spots in some of the regions and nations:

- In the North East, there is 1% difference between Brexit Party and Labour for the last seat
- In Yorkshire and Humberside, only 1.7% divides the Brexit Party, Labour and the Greens for the last seat
- In the East Midlands, there is only 0.3% between the Brexit Party, Labour, Greens and Change UK
- In the West Mids, 0.5% between Tories and Brexit Party

- In East Mids, 1% splits Labour, Brexit Party, Greens and Tories for the last vote
- In London, 0.5% separates the Brexit Party, Labour and Change UK for the final seat
- In the South East, 0.1% splits the Conservative Party and UKIP for the last seat
- In Scotland, 0.3% separates Tories and SNP for the last seat

WHAT IS DRIVING YOUNG VOTERS?

The HOPE not hate / NEU poll tried to understand how Brexit and other issues are impacting on the decision young voters are taking. By a significant distance, the issue of Brexit is dominating, with 43% listing it as one of their three key issues.

The environment is also a hugely important issue, with 36% of young voters naming it as one of their top three issues. One the same topic, when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “We must all be prepared to make some sacrifices to our lifestyles in order to stop global warming”, a whopping 83% if young voters said that they agreed. Only 5% disagreed.

Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing you and your family at this time? Please tick your top three

Britain leaving the EU	43%
Environment	36%
Health	28%
Education	22%
Economy	21%
Housing	18%
Tax	11%
Crime	10%

We must all be prepared to make some sacrifices to our lifestyles in order to stop global warming

Agree	83
Disagree	13
Neither agree or disagree	5

When it comes to the Brexit outcome young people want to see, the poll is unambiguous.

- 51% of young voters want to reverse Brexit and stay in the EU, while only 12% want to leave with no deal. Only small proportions of young voters want to leave with Theresa May’s deal (10%) or with the sort of deal touted by the Labour leadership (9%).
- Young voters think that the economy as a whole will be better off if the UK stays in

the EU rather than leaving (57% vs 13%), that economic prospects for “you and your family” will be better in the EU than outside (47% vs 10%) and better for “children growing up today” inside the EU than outside (56% vs 12%).

- It is clear from these numbers that young people are basing their decisions on Brexit on economic factors as well as other issues.

Which of these Brexit outcomes would you most support?

Reversing Brexit and staying in the EU	51%
Leaving the EU without a deal	12%
Leaving the EU on the terms negotiated by the government	10%
Leaving the EU, but staying inside the Customs Union and Single Market	9%
Don't know	17%
Housing	18%
Tax	11%
Crime	10%

Do you think that each of the following will be better if the UK remains in the EU, or if the UK leaves the EU, or do you think it doesn't make much difference either way?

...The British economy as a whole

Better if the UK remains in the EU	57%
Better if the UK leaves the EU	13%
It doesn't make much difference	12%
Don't know	19%

...Economic prospects for you and your family

Better if the UK remains in the EU	47%
Better if the UK leaves the EU	10%
It doesn't make much difference	21%
Don't know	22%

...Opportunities for children growing up today

Better if the UK remains in the EU	56%
Better if the UK leaves the EU	12%
It doesn't make much difference	12%
Don't know	20%

- Young people were also asked whether they thought Brexit has had an impact on racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Again, there were clear results. By a margin of 56% to 16% young voters agreed rather than disagreed that Brexit had legitimised prejudice towards migrants and ethnic minorities.

- Young people also expressed the view that a sharp decrease in immigration would have a negative impact on the British economy after Brexit.

Brexit has enabled and legitimised prejudice towards migrants and ethnic minorities

Agree	56%
Disagree	16%
Neither agree or disagree	26%

A sharp reduction in immigration after the UK leaves the EU will have an adverse effect on the British economy

Agree	48%
Disagree	17%
Neither agree or disagree	36%

HOPE not hate has looked at how Brexit is impacting on how young voters are deciding how to vote in this election. A big proportion of young voters - 43% - said the parties' policies on Brexit was one of their two important factors in their voting decision. By contrast, 24% cited the broad values of the parties, and 22% pointed to the parties policies on other issues.

Whether or not you are currently planning on voting, which, if any, of the following is important to you in deciding how to vote at the European Parliament elections? Please tick up to two

The parties policies on Brexit	43%
The broad values of the parties	24%
The parties policies on other issues	22%
The candidates that are standing	15%
Whether I support/oppose what parties are doing at Westminster	7%
If I think it will help stop a party I don't like	6%
My views on the leaders of the parties	5%
Something else	3%
Don't know	28%

YOUNG VOTERS ATTITUDES TO THE PARTIES

We asked young voters whether they had warm or cold feelings towards each of the political parties. The results are sobering. Only the Labour Party and the Greens had a net-warm set of numbers, perhaps unsurprisingly given the fact that Labour has a massive lead when it comes to voting intention amongst young people. However, even here, despite the fact that 43% of those polled plan to vote Labour, the party only has a +12% warm rating. Other parties fare much more poorly. 61% of those polled expressed cold feelings towards Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party, with even more people - 70% - saying the same about UKIP.

Do you feel warm or cold towards the following political parties?

	Warm	Cold	DK
Conservatives	30%	60%	10%
Labour	47%	35%	18%
Lib Dems	33%	44%	24%
Greens	45%	32%	22%
Brexit Party	15%	61%	25%
Change UK	20%	32%	48%
SNP	19%	45%	37%
PC	10%	40%	50%
UKIP	12%	70%	19%

Young voters have a very low opinion of ‘Tommy Robinson’. Just 7% of voters aged 18-24 say they view him favourably or very favourably, compared to 45% who say they have an unfavourable or very unfavourable view of him.

Sixty-nine percent (69%) of young voters have an unfavourable or very unfavourable view of Nigel Farage, compared to 19% who view him favourably or very favourably. The difference between the favourability/unfavourability between the two men is because many more people have heard of Farage and so have an opinion on him. The number of ‘Don’t Knows’ (which includes do not know him) for ‘Tommy Robinson’ is 42%, while for Farage it is just 11%.

What is your opinion of Nigel Farage?

Very favourable	15%
Favourable	4%
Slightly favourable	3%
Slightly unfavourable	6%
Unfavourable	12%
Very unfavourable	57%
Don’t know	11%

What is your opinion of Tommy Robinson?

Very favourable	3%
Favourable	4%
Slightly favourable	2%
Slightly unfavourable	4%
Unfavourable	8%
Very unfavourable	37%
Don’t know	42%

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Which, if any, of the following actions have you taken over the past 12 months?

Signed an online petition	55%
Donated to a charitable cause	36%
Done voluntary work	21%
Donated to a political cause	6%
Been to a political or community meeting	6%
Been on a demonstration	8%
Been a member of a political party	6%
None of these	19%
Don’t know	12%