



Values and Brexit – where now?

2018

COMMON CAUSE
FOUNDATION

Last year, CCF surveyed over a thousand people across all ten boroughs of Greater Manchester about their values and how they voted in the EU referendum. 53% of people in Greater Manchester voted to leave the EU in last year's referendum – a figure comparable to the national vote to leave. Our analysis of the results of this survey shed light on some possible reasons for the success of the Leave campaign. They are also relevant moving forward, in thinking about the values that underpin the current debate about Brexit.

The values of people living in Greater Manchester

Adopting a widely used survey tool, we asked Opinium to survey the value priorities of a representative sample of nearly 1200 people living across Greater Manchester. This model of values defines ten value groups (see Figure 1).

The diagram on page 3 (Figure 2) shows the relative importance that citizens of Greater Manchester place on each of these ten value groups.

The three value groups to which the people of Greater Manchester attach greatest importance are:
1st – Benevolence; 2nd – Universalism; 3rd – Security.

How people voted in the EU Referendum

We then analysed how people's prioritisation of different values predicted the way that they voted in the EU Referendum in June 2016.

People for whom the value groups Universalism and Stimulation were particularly important were more likely to vote Remain.



Figure 1

Ten value groups (after Schwartz, 1992).

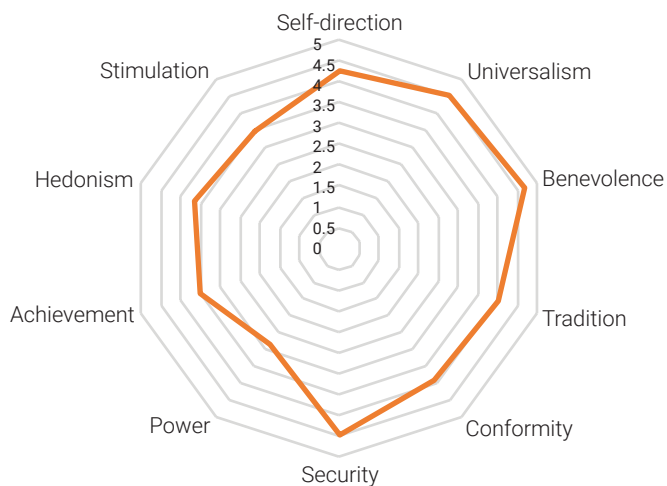


Figure 2

Values of 1184 citizens of Greater Manchester, demographically representative for age, gender and borough.

Conversely, people for whom Security, Tradition and Conformity values were most important were particularly likely to vote Leave.

This suggests that two distinct groups of values were associated with the direction in which people voted (see Figure 3).

- Values in the 'north' of the values map (coloured blue). People who attached particular importance to these values were more likely to have voted Remain.
- Values in the 'south' and 'east' of the values map (coloured green). People who attached particular importance to these values were more likely to have voted Leave.

This analysis points to several factors that could have contributed importantly to the Leave campaign winning the Referendum.

Here are three.

1. The values group which most strongly predicted a Remain vote was largely ignored by Remain campaigners.

This is the Universalism group – and it is one in which arguments to remain in the EU could have been easily advanced.

Such arguments might have connected with values within the Universalism group such as 'broadmindedness' ("tolerance of different ideas and belief"), 'a world at peace', and 'protection of the environment'. Yet these arguments didn't figure prominently in Remain campaigning, which led on the economic arguments for Remaining in the EU.

Why might the Remain campaign have overlooked the importance of arguments connecting with Universalism values?

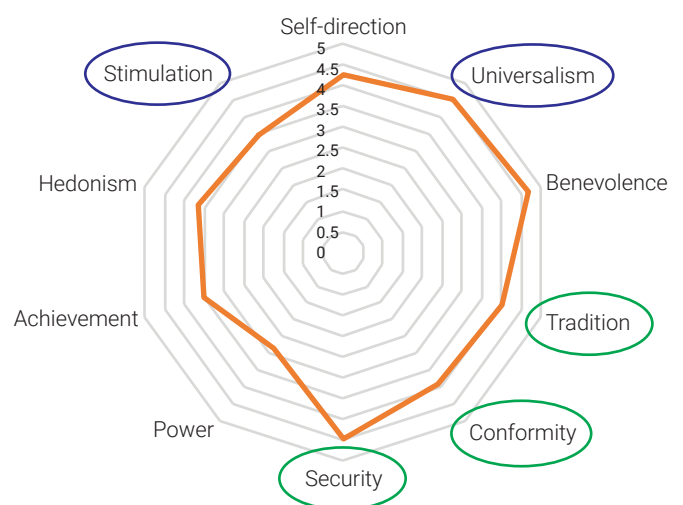


Figure 3

Values groups positively associated with a Leave vote (green) or a Remain vote (blue) in Greater Manchester.

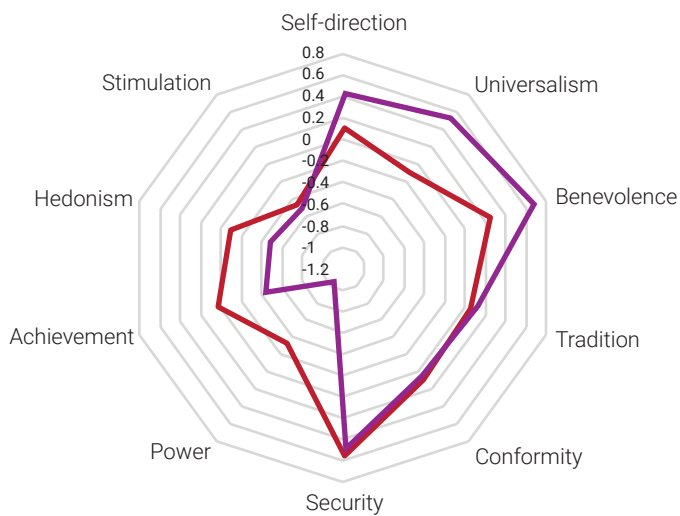


Figure 4

Values of a thousand UK citizens in 2015, demographically representative for age, gender and country/region. Purple line shows respondent's own values, red line shows respondents' perceptions of a "typical British person's values". On average, people most underestimate the importance that a typical fellow citizen places on Universalism values, and most overestimate the importance that a typical citizen places on Power values.

Other work that we have conducted (Common Cause Foundation, 2016) – both in Greater Manchester and nationally – shows that of all the ten Schwartz value groups, people were most likely to underestimate the importance of Universalism values to their fellow citizens (see Figure 4). It seems that strategists in the Remain campaign may have fallen into exactly this trap – of underestimating the importance of Universalism values to most people.

Conversely, of course, the Leave campaign did not overlook the importance of those values which most clearly predict a Leave vote – Conformity, Tradition and – especially – Security. Three items in these

value groups in particular – ‘respect for tradition’, a ‘sense of belonging’ and ‘social order’ (in relation to immigration) – were clearly concerns with which the Leave campaign connected.

2. The Remain campaign appealed relentlessly to Power values

The Remain campaign repeatedly argued that leaving the EU would have negative economic impacts, eroding national wealth and people's own income. According to analysis by the Reuters Institute (Levy *et al.*, 2016), 54% of Remain arguments focused on the economy – as opposed to 36% in the case of Leave arguments.

Of all ten groups of values, Power values (which include the value item “wealth”) are found to be the least important (both to people across Greater Manchester and, as [our earlier survey](#) shows, across the UK as a whole).

But we also find that Power values have the weakest association of any values group with the way people voted in the Referendum. Perhaps carefully marshalled arguments about the projected negative economic impacts of leaving the EU were largely a waste of breath?

Why might the Remain campaign have invested such effort in advancing arguments appealing to Power values (especially wealth creation)? Our surveys show that most people (in both Greater Manchester, and across the UK) tend to overestimate the importance of Power values to other people: more so than any other value group (see Figure 4). It seems that strategists in the Remain campaign may have fallen foul of this widespread misperception.

3. The Leave campaign successfully appealed to a value group that could have been Remain territory

Look again at Figure 3. Note that Self-direction values (defined as “independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring”) are an exception to the ‘north’/‘south-east’ split across the values map.

This is unexpected. Many studies find that attitudes and behaviours associated with one group of values are also positively associated with neighbouring groups. This is called ‘spill-over’. We would have expected that if people holding Universalism and Stimulation values to be important were more likely to vote Remain, then this would also be true of people holding neighbouring Self-direction values to be important.

But we didn’t find this. We didn’t find any significant relationship between the importance that a person places on Self-direction values and the direction in which he or she voted.

Why might this be?

Self-direction values were particularly prominent in campaigning running up to the Referendum. The Leave campaign sought to take ownership of Self-direction values – for example, through the overall theme “Take back control”.

Could it be that the Leave campaign was successful in partially ‘capturing’ Self-direction values in support of its aims, and that as a result they persuaded many

people, who may otherwise have been inclined to vote Remain, to vote Leave?

These would be people for whom Security, Conformity and Tradition values would be relatively unimportant (predicting a Remain vote), and for whom Universalism and Stimulation values were relatively important (also predicting a vote for Remain), but who were swayed to vote Leave because the Leave campaign successfully associated Self-direction values with leaving the EU.

In other words, perhaps the failure to find a clear relationship between Self-direction values and the direction in which people voted arises because of two factors pulling in opposite directions: On the one hand, an underlying tendency for people who attach particular importance to Stimulation, Self-direction and Universalism values to vote Remain. On the other hand, the success with which the Leave campaign may have conveyed to people that the best way to pursue a commitment to Self-direction values in the context of the referendum was to vote Leave.

We tested this hypothesis and found that there were indeed two groups of Leave voters.

One group of Leave voters had high Security values and low Self-direction values. The other group of Leave voters had high Self-direction values and low Security values (values, in other words, that we would have expected to be associated with support for *remaining* in the EU).

People high in Self-direction values (i.e. who attach greater than median importance to these values) were

moderately more likely to vote Leave (1.15x more likely) than people low in Self-direction values.

How might the Remain campaign have mitigated this association between Self-direction values and support for leaving the EU?

We suggest two ways:

One way would have been to have emphasised the alignment of support for membership of the EU with neighbouring values of Stimulation and Universalism. This could have been done by highlighting, for example, the contribution that EU law arguably makes to environmental protection or social justice, or by arguing that the EU contributes to maintaining peace.

Because of the 'spill-over' effects outlined above, strengthening the association between membership of the EU and Universalism values in this way would, we'd predict, have helped to strengthen inclination to vote Remain among people who attach high importance to Self-direction values.

The Remain campaign could also have sought to emphasise areas of alignment between Self-direction values and membership of the EU.

Self-direction values were not initially the 'natural' territory of the Leave campaign, though the campaign worked to make this the case.

In fact, though, this alignment of Self-direction values with leaving the EU was forged in just one area – that is, in relation to the argument that the

EU presents a barrier to national sovereignty in making policy.

But this is to deploy just one, narrow, construal of self-direction. Self-direction may be pursued at many levels, of which national policy-making is just one. What about the self-direction of citizens, communities, or the devolved nations of the UK? For example, what of the freedom that UK membership of the EU guarantees citizens to live, work and study in other Member States, and to explore other national cultures?

Some implications for today's debate

In the light of these findings, we'd highlight some possible implications for the effectiveness of different arguments in swaying public opinion about Brexit today.

We'd suggest that those campaigning for the UK to remain in the EU, or campaigning for a 'softer' Brexit, would do well to frame their arguments in terms of Universalism and Self-direction values, and to abandon arguments rooted in Power values.

On the other hand, we'd suggest that those campaigning for a 'hard' Brexit should continue to frame their arguments by connecting with Self-direction values, and by placing less importance on Power values – as they did in the run up to the referendum.

Authors

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Greater Manchester Values Survey

The online survey (comprising responses from 1184 participants) was conducted across Greater Manchester for Common Cause Foundation by Opinium.

Data analysis was conducted by Dr. Paul Hanel (Department of Psychology, University of Bath) and Dr Lukas Wolf (School of Psychology, Cardiff University). Infographics were produced by Creative Concern.

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