

THE POPULIST AND FAR RIGHT THREAT IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

A STATE OF THE RACE MEMO #1

Following the close of nominations in the EU elections, HOPE not hate is today publishing our first state of the race memo, 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.

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 between the two sides, 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 the far right are now seeking to capitalise on the anger.

Ultimately, the euro 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 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

HOPE NOT HATE AND BREXIT

HOPE not hate exists to oppose racism and fascism, including at the ballot box. We want to promote inclusion, community and ultimately, hope. The euro elections are a key moment in our work – they provide an opportunity for the far right, and populists like Nigel Farage's Brexit Party. And this is a big moment in the battle over Brexit. HOPE not hate has been arguing that a hard Brexit, where Britain is outside the single market and customs union, would be disastrous for already struggling areas of the country, and create the terrain for the far right to thrive.

OVERVIEW

The fieldwork for the first poll was undertaken between 10th – 11th April 2019. The survey was carried out online. Total sample size was 1,843 adults. The fieldwork for the second poll was undertaken between 23th – 26th April 2019 and the sample size was 5,412 people. The figures for both polls were weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). The surveys were carried out online.

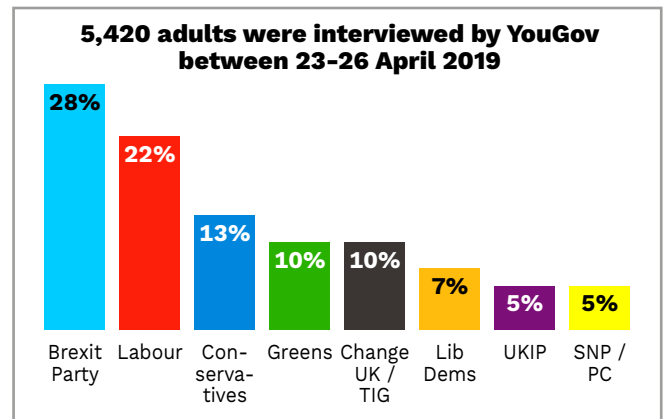
The key findings of the polling are:

- 9% of voters across the country have a favourable or very favourable view of Tommy Robinson. 46% of people view him very unfavourably. The rest either don't have a view either way or have not heard of him.
- The radical right 'Brexit Party' has surged up to 28% in our European Election poll, predominantly on the back of a Tory collapse with May's party down to 13% but also from UKIP who have slumped to 5%. Labour is currently in second place with 22%. If this polling were borne out on election day, UKIP would not get a single MEP elected.

- The election is dominated by the issue of Brexit: 51% say that a party's policy on Brexit is the most important factor in deciding who to vote for, with only 17% of voters say they will be swayed by a party's policies on subjects other than Brexit.
- The majority of the British public place both UKIP and Nigel Farage on the right wing of British politics, bordering on far right. Despite his attempts to detoxify his image over the past year, the public put Nigel Farage slightly further to the right than UKIP. 2017 Labour voters, young people and those who voted Remain in the 2016 EU referendum all put Farage in the far right category.
- UKIP's adoption of strident anti-Muslim policies appear to have gone unnoticed by much of the electorate, who still overwhelmingly believe it remains a pro-Brexit and anti-immigration party.

THE HORSERACE

While HOPE not hate supports no political party and solely wants far right parties to fail to win seats in this election, it is worth looking at the state of the race across the board. If the election were held tomorrow, our 5,412 sample poll suggests the results would break down in the following way:



European Parliament Voting Intention by region

[Weighted by likelihood to vote, excluding those who would not vote, don't know or refused]

		Government Region											
		Total	North East	North West	Yorkshire & the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East of England	London	South East	South West	Wales	Scotland
Weighted Sample		5412	269	609	442	448	445	525	649	767	515	276	465
Unweighted Sample		5412	256	626	446	451	459	556	608	802	520	285	403
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	16-17 Apr	23-24 Apr											
Conservative	17	13	7	9	10	13	18	17	11	16	12	10	10
Labour	22	22	34	36	28	22	21	19	28	13	14	31	11
Liberal Democrat	9	7	4	5	8	4	4	7	10	10	11	6	4
Scottish National Party (SNP) / Plaid Cymru	5	5	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	11	42
Green	10	10	6	10	9	11	8	9	10	12	12	7	8
UK Independence Party (UKIP)	6	5	5	6	5	6	5	5	3	4	8	6	4
Brexit Party	23	28	34	27	31	33	34	32	19	32	33	24	16
Change UK – The Independent Group	8	10	9	7	8	11	8	10	17	13	9	6	5
Some other party	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1

Sample Size: 5412 GB Adults. Fieldwork: 23rd – 26th April 2019

HOPE not hate analysis of the numbers suggests that these votes would break down in the regions to deliver the following MEP results:

Brexit Party:	29 seats
Labour:	18 seats
Conservatives:	10 seats
Greens:	4 seats
Change UK / TIG:	3 seats
Lib Dems:	2 seats
UKIP:	0 seats
SNP	4 seats

The Brexit party's surge is coming at the expense of Tory and UKIP votes but will result in them taking seats off all parties. If this polling holds, then it would see the Brexit Party win two of the three available seats in the northeast, and it would see Labour reduced to two seats in London. Under these numbers, only the Brexit Party and Labour will win at least one seat in every region of Great Britain.

Looking deeper at the data, there are some points of interest:

- Brexit Party is gaining primarily at expense of Tories and UKIP. 53% of those people who voted Conservative in the 2017 General Election now say that they will vote for the Brexit Party in the European Elections. This includes 68% of those Tories who voted Leave in the EU Referendum. This compares to just 9% of all 2017 Labour voters and 5% of Lib Dem voters. Three-quarters of all those who voted UKIP in 2015 now say that they will vote for the Brexit Party.

- The Conservative vote appears to in free-fall, having dropped from 17% to 13% in just one week.
- UKIP is likely – on this poll – to lose every one of their seats. The closest it will come to winning is in the South East, where our poll puts UKIP on 7.9% and 8% is enough to win the final seat.
- Change UK – The Independent Group, the party set up by The Independent Group of former Labour and Tory MPs is moving up. It is mostly gaining at the expense of the Liberal Democrats, attracting a bigger share of their 2017 vote (28%), than either Labour (12%) or the Conservatives (7%).
- The Green Party is gaining 14% of the 2017 Labour voter, and a similar share of the Liberal Democrat vote, though of course this is a much smaller number.
- Labour is losing votes to the clear-cut Remain and Leave parties:
 - Only half of those voters who voted Labour in the 2017 General Election and Remain in the 2016 EU Referendum now say that they will not vote for the Labour Party in the forthcoming European Elections. 17% would vote Green and 15% for Change UK.
 - Meanwhile, only a third of Labour Leave voters intend to vote Labour, with 33% backing the Brexit Party and a further 10% UKIP.
 - While the proportion of Labour Leave voters defecting in this election is higher than Remainers, it is important to remember that the raw number of Labour remain voters is significantly larger than the pool of Labour leave voters.

European Parliament Voting Intention by seat (excluding Northern Ireland)

	North East	North West	Yorkshire & the Humber	East Mids	West Mids	East of England	London	South East	South West	Wales	Scotland	TOTAL
Conservative	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	10
Labour	1	3	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	18
Liberal Democrat	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
SNP / Plaid Cymru	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Green	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	4
UKIP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brexit Party	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	3	2	1	29
Change UK – The Independence Party	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
TOTAL	3	8	6	5	7	7	8	10	6	4	6	70

TURNOUT

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 and the early indications are the supporters of the two main parties are less likely to vote than other voters.

Turnout in recent European Elections have been poor and well below that of General Elections or the EU referendum.

2004	38.4%
2009	34.5%
2014	38.4%

In our 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. Amongst the main parties, Labour Leave voters and Conservative Remain voters say they are less likely to vote than Labour Remain and Conservative Leave voters.

However, in a further good sign for the Brexit Party, UKIP 2015 voters, who overwhelmingly will back Farage’s party now, seem quite motivated to vote.

It would seem that a low turnout would benefit right-wing populist and far right parties, as well as Stephen Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson), whose supporters are likely to be very motivated to vote.

‘TOMMY ROBINSON’

Stephen Lennon, or ‘Tommy Robinson’ as he is also known as, has confidently launched a campaign to be elected an MEP. He has a band of highly passionate supporters from his EDL days, and is able to tap into the finances needed to run a high profile campaign.

But Robinson starts the race with extraordinarily high negative ratings from the voters:

- Only 9% of voters across the country have a favourable or very favourable view of Tommy Robinson. 46% of people view him very unfavourably.
- Only 3% of Labour voters have a favourable or very favourable view of him, with 64% have a very unfavourable view.
- The North West, where he’s standing in the euro elections, also holds him in low standing: only 9% of NW voters have a favourable or very favourable view, with 47% having an unfavourable or very unfavourable view of him.

- A clear problem for Lennon is that many people who view him favourably will also like Nigel Farage and be tempted to vote for the Brexit Party. For Lennon to win, he will need to not only turn out the 4% of adults who view him in a very, very favourable light, but the additional 5% of voters who view him favourably or even quite favourably. With the ceiling of his support appearing to be just 9%, he will need those people to actually come out vote.

This level of negativity towards Lennon might not be the hurdle it sounds: our estimates suggest that Lennon needs only 8.9% of the vote to be elected in the last MEP slot in the region. He will only be stopped if those people who hold him in a very unfavourable light actually go out to vote.

In 2009 BNP leader Nick Griffin was elected as an MEP in the North West after receiving 132,000 votes – at an 8% share, while in 2014 the turnout was just 33.5%.

HOPE has estimated the approximate number of votes Lennon needs to win to get elected under different turnout rates:

Estimated North West electorate 5,260,000

33.5% turnout = 1,754,000 voting 140,000-155,000 votes
30% turnout = 1,578,000 voting 126,000-138,000 votes
27.5% turnout = 1,446,000 voting 115,000-125,000
25% turnout = 1,315,000 voting 105,000-115,000
22.5% turnout = 1,183,000 voting 94,500-102,000

Ultimately, whether Lennon gets elected will be decided by who turns up to vote. The more people who vote, the lower the chance that can sneak in. A key message throughout this campaign will be that by staying home voters could help Lennon sneak in.

UKIP

The polling appears to suggest that UKIP is heading for political disaster, as members and voters desert it for Nigel Farage's Brexit Party. While the shift to the far right under current leader Gerald Batten appears to have gone largely unnoticed, the combination of attacks by Farage, the slick launch and promotion of the Brexit Party, and extremist and quite obnoxious politics from some of its EU election candidates, has resulted in declining poll ratings and growing demoralisation amongst activists.

When thinking about the party's current position, a huge 41% of people think that UKIP is now a far-right party. Just 16% would disagree with this. Even one in six people who voted UKIP in 2015 now view UKIP as a far right party.

We can say that more people see UKIP as an anti-immigrant party than see it as anti-EU. Despite billing themselves as Eurosceptics, it is their xenophobia which is memorable: 25% say it is a racist party while 15% say it is a Eurosceptic party.

Media coverage of UKIP in these elections are a combination of Farage's attacks on the party becoming "extremist" and "far right" and negative coverage of Carl Benjamin, the party's number two candidate in the South West. His jokes about rape and repeated racist comments might have excited his core internet supporters but have proved to be a major embarrassment and distraction for the party, and only further confirmed Farage's claim that the party is now extreme. This is on top of Lennon's association with UKIP, which has also been damaging.

If UKIP fails to win a single MEP and scores badly in next week's local elections, where it is standing 1,400 candidates, we are likely to see another wave of defections to the Brexit Party.

Respondents were asked to chose the words they most associated to describe UKIP

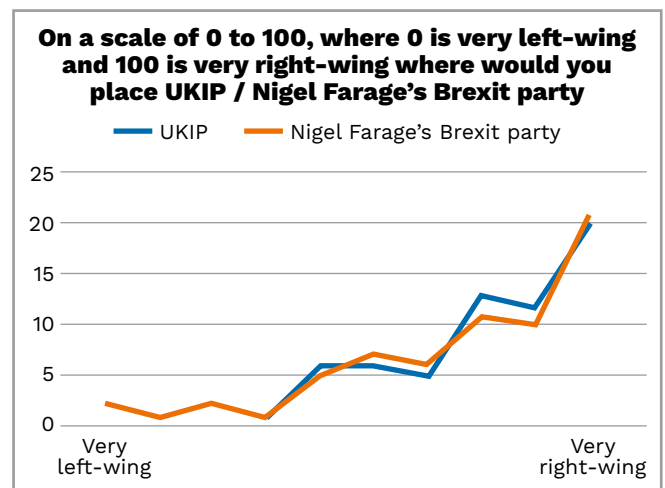
RIGHT-WING
DON'T KNOW
 MODERATE
EXTREME
EUROSCEPTIC
PRO-BREXIT
ANTI-MUSLIM
CENTRE-RIGHT
PATRIOTIC
RACIST
FAR-RIGHT
ANTI-EU
PRO-BRITAIN
NONE OF THE ABOVE

THE BREXIT PARTY

The Brexit Party's launch was slick and professional and that, coupled with the widespread anger at the failure to have left the EU, has catapulted the the party to the top of the polls.

However, the majority of the British public view Nigel Farage's new Bexit Party as right wing as UKIP, the party Farage once ran but now considers to be "far right" and "too extreme".

Research by HOPE not hate reveals the public view actually the Brexit Party as slightly more right wing than UKIP. Asked to position the Brexit Party on a scale of 0-100, where 0 is very left wing and 100 is very right wing, respondents put the party on 74.2, slightly above UKIP's 73.5.

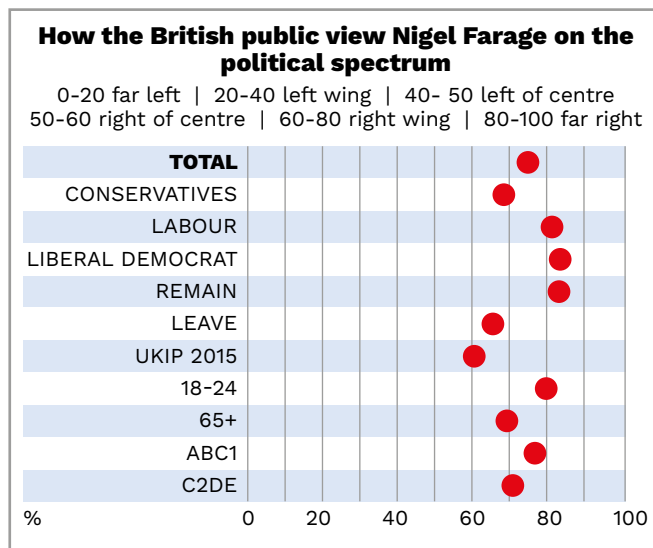


While these results will have little impact on the Brexit Party's chances in the forthcoming European Elections, as there is a considerable minority of voters who back him strongly, it does highlight that Farage's attempts to detoxify his image over the past six months has failed.

Labour voters put the Brexit Party at over 80 on our scale, which is in the "far right" category, than Conservative voters, who mark it as 67.9.

Unsurprisingly those people who voted UKIP in 2015 saw the Brexit Party in the most favourable light, marking it down at 60.3 – a little to the right of centre.

There were big differences depending on how one voted in the EU referendum, on class and age. Remain voters think the Brexit Party is far right while Leave voters mark it as centre-right.



While clearly the Brexit Party is gaining most support from its anti-EU position, what is getting overlooked by most observers is that Farage is successfully tapping into the anti-politics mood – which is strongest amongst those people with the most strident pro-Brexit views.

BREXIT

Brexit is dominating the euro elections, far above any of the other important issues facing the country. In line with previous HOPE not hate polling, the country is deeply, deeply divided:

- 40% of all voters want Brexit to be halted and UK to stay in EU
- 27% want to leave with no deal
- 11% want Theresa May’s deal but with the UK staying in the Customs Union
- 10% want Theresa May’s deal

Labour voters are now heavily for reversing Brexit (63%). Only 8% support the deal negotiated by Theresa May, while 11% support leaving the EU but remaining in the single market and customs union.

The poll shows that Brexit will dominate voters’ decision making on who to vote for.

- 51% of voters say that a party’s position on Brexit is *the* issue that will determine how they vote, while only 17% say they will be swayed by the party’s policies on subjects other than Brexit.
- 49% of all Labour voters say that a party’s position on Brexit is a key factor, while 32% of Labour voters say the broad values of the party is most important.
- 54% of Labour remainers say that Brexit is their deciding issue in this election, while 47% of Labour leave voters say the same.

A REALIGNMENT OF BRITISH POLITICS?

The Conservative Party and the Labour Party are braced for a political hiding in the European Elections, but are clearly hoping that these elections come and go and voters will return to their normal political homes before too long.

Of course, that might happen, but these elections could mark another step towards a more significant realignment of British politics. This realignment has been going on for some time but quickened and deepened after the EU referendum. Brexit is clearly the key issue of the day for voters and with both parties alienating large sections of their core support base it is perhaps unsurprising that political allegiances are beginning to shift.

A recent poll, undertaken by YouGov for HOPE not hate in early April, found that only 41% of voters said that they would vote for the two main parties if there was a General Election was held now. This compares to 82% who voted for the Conservative and Labour Parties in 2017. Obviously, our political system favours just two main parties, both of which then act as coalitions, but this might not always be the case in the future.

It would appear that the Conservative Party has most trouble, certainly in the short-term. Nigel Farage is clearly intent in making the Brexit Party a more long term project, promising to bring down the political order. For all his talk of attracting both Labour and Conservative voters, the reality is that the Brexit Party will hurt the Conservatives far more than it hurts Labour. Our polling suggests that for every one Labour voter it might attract, it will win over three Conservative voters.

This is not to say that Labour’s problems could not get worse – they really could. Over the next few days Labour is going to have to finally decide a position on Brexit and if there is no plan to halt and reverse Brexit (as two thirds of its 2017 voters want) or at least hold a confirmatory vote on any deal, then it’s share of the vote is likely to fall further. Asked how they would vote if Labour went into a snap General Election promising to implement a version of Brexit, support for the Labour Party dropped to just 15%.

Both major parties might soon find out that once a voter has begun to vote for another party, their allegiance to their original party begins to loosen.

CONCLUSION

a) Stephen Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) has an actual chance of winning in the North West. He needs to get 8.9% of the vote, but if turnout slumps, as a lot of people expect, that could end up being as little as 110,000-120,000 votes.

b) Nigel Farage's Brexit Party is on course for a massive win and take as many as 40% of the seats available. Only the Brexit Party and Labour are due to win one or more seat in every region, but this poll suggests Farage beating Labour in the North East and reducing Labour to two seats in London. Labour is losing its remain voters to the clear-cut remain parties, and its leave voters to Farage. The Conservative Party is hemorrhaging votes to the Brexit Party, while many of its Remain voters feel disinclined to vote.

c) The strategic response to both A and B for the mainstream parties is to increase turnout, which requires giving people clear and strong reasons to turnout, and running an energetic but targeted campaign. It also means having a clear policy on Brexit – as that is by far the most important factor in determining how people are going to vote.

Written by Matthew McGregor and Nick Lowles