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The United Kingdom Referendum on European Union Membership: The Voting of Conservative Parliamentarians

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The United Kingdom Referendum on European Union Membership: The Voting of Conservative Parliamentarians

Abstract:

This paper considers the attitudes of members of the parliamentary Conservative Party (PCP) during the European Union (EU) membership referendum held in the United Kingdom (UK) on the 23rd June 2016. First, the paper identifies the voting positions - remain or leave - of each Conservative parliamentarian in order to assess the strength of opinion within the PCP and place it within its historical context. Second, the paper uses multivariate analysis to test a series of hypotheses about the voting of Conservative parliamentarians. Through this we will aim to identify whether any associations existed between advocates and opponents of Brexit and social variables such as age, schooling, university, occupation and gender; political variables such as constituency marginality, and whether they were a minister, an ex-minister or a permanent backbencher; and the ideological variable of morality – i.e. support for or opposition to same sex marriage.

Introduction

This paper makes a distinctive contribution to the academic debates on Brexit and the referendum on UK's continued membership of the EU that occurred in June 2016. The focus of our paper is on the attitudes of Conservative parliamentarians. We have chosen this as our focus for the following reasons. First, the fact that a referendum took place at all was largely a consequence of the demand from within the PCP and their hard Eurosceptic wing (out of fear of the rise of UKIP) who had pressurised Cameron into this (Hardman, 2013). Second, knowing that the PCP was divided, Cameron decided not to impose an official party position for the referendum campaign (Watt, 2016). Third, during the course of the campaigning period, with government ministers freed from the traditional burden of collective responsibility, the full scale of Conservative divisions over Europe were exposed. Conservatives berated fellow Conservatives across a wide range of policy issues, and both sides accused each other of lying, hypocrisy and scaremongering (Siesage, 2016).

Our paper aims to identify, where possible, how each individual Conservative parliamentarian voted in the referendum. We then consider what correlations existed (or did not exist) between those Conservative parliamentarians advocating or rejecting Brexit and 1) social variables such as their age, education – both school and university if applicable - occupation and gender; 2) political variables such as their constituency marginality and whether they were a minister, an ex-minister or a permanent backbencher; and 3) the ideological variable of morality as encapsulated by the disagreement between social liberals and conservatives over same sex marriage.

Our rationale for asking these questions about social and political background determinants is as follows. First, to see whether the PCP is broadly similar to the electorate as a whole¹. For example, polling suggested that older voters were more inclined to vote leave, and younger voters are more inclined to vote remain (64% of those 65 and older estimated to have voted for Brexit, with these figures depreciating to 60% for the 50-64 age bracket, and then down to 46% for 25 to 49 year olds, and then only 29% for the under 24s, Moore, 2016). We also know that the higher the level of educational qualification the greater the likelihood to vote to remain (only 32% of those with a degree estimated to have voted for Brexit, Moore, 2016). Although the PCP as a whole has a higher level of educational attainment than the electorate, can we identify any relationship between educational background status and remain or leave? We also know that a small gap existed with male voters 47% remain to 53% leave, and female voters 49% remain to 51% leave (Moore, 2016). Was there also evidence that female Conservative parliamentarians were slightly less Brexit inclined than their male counterparts?

Our second reason ties into the fact that we want to embrace and extend the work of Kitlinger (1973) on attitudes within the PCP at the time when the UK joined the then EEC in the Heath era, and Berrington and Hague (1998) who did a similar analysis at the time of the Maastricht rebellions in the Major era. Both Kitlinger and Berrington and Hague examined the inter-relationship between attitudes within the PCP and social background variables. What is interesting about their research is the differences that existed across the Heath and Major eras. Kitlinger identified no discernible trends between Conservatives who were pro-entry and those who were anti in terms of age, university education, constituency majority and ministerial position (Kitlinger,

¹ For pre referendum evaluations of public opinion on continued EU membership see Vasilopoulou, 2016.

1973, pp. 401-5). Berrington and Hague did, however, identify some generational differences, with older Conservative MPs who had been in Parliament for longer (i.e. pre-1979) being more pro-European, and younger Conservatives more likely to be Eurosceptic. Berrington and Hague also identified a correlation between educational background and European attitudes, with those educated at elite private schools and Oxbridge far more likely to be pro-European (Berrington and Hague, 1998, p. 49).

Kitzinger concentrated solely on social and political background variables but Berrington and Hague added in an ideological variable. They identified a clear association between Euroscepticism and advocating the restoration of the death penalty and conversely an association between pro-Europeanism and rejection of the death penalty (Berrington and Hague, 1998, p. 56). We wanted to see if that association between traditionalism and hostility towards Europe still applied. We would not be able to acquire contemporary data on attitudes towards the death penalty – a traditional indicator of social conservatism - so we focused more generally on opposition to the socially liberal aspect of Cameronite Conservatism. This will enable us to see whether socially conservative members of the PCP – those who had opposed Cameron on same sex marriage – also opposed his renegotiated settlement for remaining within the EU.

In structural terms the paper will be broken down into the following sections. The first section will position our paper within the existing body of academic literature on the historical divisions within the PCP and their European policy problem. In doing so it will identify how academics have explained attitudes within the PCP towards European policy over time. We offer this contextual evaluation as a way of understanding the factors that contributed to Cameron being pushed into renegotiating terms of membership and holding an in/out referendum. In section two we construct a set of hypotheses to test in relation to our social, political and ideological variables, and we explain how our dataset on the PCP was constructed. In section three we outline our research findings and then we offer in the final section and analyse their significance.

Strands and Strength of European Opinion within the PCP from Macmillan to Cameron

Our first aim within the paper is to identify the strength of opinion within the PCP vis-à-vis the EU – i.e. how many advocated remain and how many leave. However, before we do so it is important to situate those strands of opinion – i.e. the reforming but remain strand and the rejectionist Brexit strand – within their historical context. By doing so we recognise that the crystallisation of these strands of opinion is part of a complex and evolving process. That is because engagement within Europe has been a fluid rather than a static process and the strategic questions raised have changed over time. For example, whether to join the Common Market in the 1960s and whether they should exit in the 1975 referendum; whether to join the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in the 1980s and 1990s, and ultimately through to the repatriation, renegotiation and referendum debates of the Cameron era. As the questions have changed so attitudes have hardened, and the Conservatives' approach has evolved from 'pragmatic pro-Europeanism' to 'pragmatic Euroscepticism'² (Smith, 2015, p. 371).

Strands of European Opinion 1961-2005

The labels for Conservative MPs as pro-European or Eurosceptic - which dominated discussions in the Major era - are not the only distinctions used to capture the divisions within the party over time. Those with doubts were labelled as anti-Marketeers in the 1960s and 1970s (as opposed to pro-Europeans or pro Marketeers), before the label of Euroscepticism gained traction in the late 1980s (as opposed to Europhiles), whilst Euroscepticism, (i.e. opposition to European institutional authority and their objective of Euro-federalism), has been subdivided in soft and hard variants in the last decade (Lynch, 2015). There is some continuity in the underlying assumptions explaining pro-Europeanism or Euroscepticism across the decades. For those of a pro-European persuasion it was clear that a con-federalist position of advocating inter-governmental co-operation to accrue economic benefits and to secure greater power and influence was pragmatic and sensible politics

² The evidence substantiating a shift from pro-Europeanism to Euroscepticism is confirmed through the research of Stevens. Using Comparative Manifesto Data, he identified that relative to the scepticism of the Labour Party, the Conservative Party had demonstrated broad enthusiasm towards Europe in the 1960s to mid-1980s. Having scored a positive manifesto ranking from their General Manifestos between 1964 and 1983, their ranking has been negative in all but one since (Stevens, 2012).

(indeed, a small minority of ardent pro-Europeanist Heathite Conservatives could even endorse a Euro-federalist vision) (Crowson, 2007, pp. 105-26). Pro-European Conservatives concluded that such gains would be the logical consequence of pooling sovereignty within a more integrated Europe. Those of an anti-European, anti-Common Market, and ultimately Eurosceptic persuasion held reservations about the implications about economic integration and political multilateralism. Such Conservatives held a global rather than a European view retaining a strong allegiance to the Commonwealth and/or the Atlantic alliance (Fontana and Parsons, 2015, p. 90). Moreover, the sceptical wing held doubts about the wisdom of surrendering sovereignty to a supranational body of which they would have no control (Garry, 1995, p. 172). What would complicate the European divide further was whether Conservative parliamentarians saw European integration through an economic lens or a sovereignty lens. If one viewed it through an economic lens then the promotion and extension of the single market, as secured through the Single European Act of 1986, could be seen as advancing Conservative free market thinking. However, if one came to view further European integration through a sovereignty lens, or a national identity lens, then the integrationist agenda emanating from Europe would threaten parliamentary sovereignty, limiting domestic executive autonomy and ultimately undermining British nationhood (Lynch, 1999).

The initial trigger for the growth of Euroscepticism within the PCP was the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986 and Thatcher's response to it³. She assumed that it represented Thatcherism on a pan-European scale by entrenching free-market thinking. She had, however, underestimated the expansionist momentum within the SEA and its use to those pursuing a Euro-federalist agenda. Her infamous Bruges Speech of 1988 served as confirmation of her conversion to Euroscepticism. Her closing years were shaped by her belief that the spill-over effects of the SEA into social, fiscal, economic and monetary policy were unacceptable, thus fuelling her conviction that parliamentary sovereignty was under threat. Her conversion legitimised and promoted Euroscepticism (Fontana and Parsons, 2015, pp. 89-105). This was hugely significant as prior to this Euroscepticism had traditionally been the preserve of the backbenchers of the PCP and those willing to rebel (Crowson, 2007, p. 153). Pragmatic engagement tended to be the preserve of the frontbench.

³ Over time, Thatcherite Eurosceptics became irked by a) the extension of Qualified Majority Voting and the consequences of this – i.e. the diminution of the national veto and all that this implied vis-à-vis sovereignty; and b) the parallel social dimension promoting a framework for employment rights and protection for workers against the negative consequences of economic liberalisation (see Fontana and Parsons 2015).

Indeed through her signing of the SEA she had acquiesced to the integrationist process. The integrationist path was continued by the decision to join the ERM in 1990 (which resulted in a humiliating withdrawal in 1992) and the ratification of the Treaty of European Union in the Major era⁴ (notwithstanding the opt-out that Major secured on the single currency).

Strength of European Opinion 1961-2005

The Thatcher era coincided with the end of the 'heyday' of pro-Europeanism (Crowson, 2007, p. 109). Those opposing entry under Macmillan were said to amount to only 40 of a 365 strong PCP (and supported by the organisational infrastructure of the 'Anti-Common Market League' in 1961 and renamed 'Get Britain Out' in 2007) (Crowson, 2007, p. 165). A decade later 40 Conservatives rebelled in Parliament, and an estimated further 75 who were said to have reservations, whilst the pro-European 'Conservative Group for Europe' was said to have the backing of approximately 200 Conservative parliamentarians from a 330 strong PCP (Crowson, 2007, p. 124, 164). By the onset of the Thatcher era (1975 to 1990) the con-federalist position – i.e. pragmatic pro-Europeanism - was the mainstream position within the PCP (Crowson, 2007, pp. 40-45). A small minority of PCP members could consider embracing a federalist agenda, and at the other extreme there was small grouping of implacable anti-Marketeters, whom Ashford described as 'irrelevant' in terms of their influence within the PCP, in part due to the outcome of the 1975 Referendum (Ashford, 1980, p. 110-12).

Euroscepticism would grow as a force within the PCP between 1992 and 2005. This was largely attributable to the negative impact of their humiliating expulsion from the ERM in September

⁴ The Heath and Major governments would be defined by legislature trench warfare over respectively the European Communities Act of 1972 and the Treaty of European Union of 1993. Norton would chart the surge in parliamentary rebellion rates during the Heath Government of 1970 to 1974 (hitting an 18.5% rebellion rate as compared to the 1.4 rebellion rate in the 1951 to 1955 Parliament) as nearly forty Conservative backbenchers defied the whip (Norton, 1978; see also Lord, 1994). When the Major government sought parliamentary consent during the passage of the Treaty of European Union in 1992-3, a total of fifty Conservative MPs rebelled (15% of the PCP), (see Cowley and Norton, 1999), which was part of a protracted period of confrontation between the Conservative Whips' Office and Eurosceptic Conservative backbenchers (see also Alderman, 1996; Baker, Gamble and Ludlam, 1993, 1994, Ludlam, 1996).

1992 which undermined the Europhile argument and legitimised Euroscepticism (Gifford, 2008, p. 123). Major found managing the feuding between the respective factions on the European policy divide virtually impossible, and he was left humiliated in the General Election campaign in 1997, when over 200 candidates defied his position of negotiate and decide on EMU (McAllister and Studlar, 2000, p. 361). Evans concludes that by the time of their removal from office the Conservatives' had lost the ability to secure issue ownership on Europe because of their divisions. This was ironic as they were unable to exploit the fact that public opinion at the time was closer to their position than that of the more pro-European New Labour (Evans, 1998; see also Evans and Butt 2007; Clements, 2010; and Stevens, 2012).

The Parliaments from 1992 onwards witnessed a significant spike in terms of Eurosceptic opinion and a drop in Europhile influence. This is confirmed by attitudinal mapping by Heppell, whose research confirmed that Europhilia fell from 98 of a 336 strong PCP in 1992 (29.6%) to 14 of a 165 strong PCP in 1997 (8.5%), whilst support was in single figures in each of the following three Parliaments: 8 members or 4.8% of the 166 strong 2001 Parliament; and 7 members or 3.5% of the 198 strong 2005 Parliament. In the same period Eurosceptic opinion rose in percentage terms from 192 (or 58%) in the 1992 Parliament, to 84.8% of the 1997 cohort (139 out of 165); 89.8% in the 2001 cohort (149 out of 166); and then 91.4% in the 2005 cohort (181 out of 198) (data taken from Heppell, 2002 and 2013)⁵.

Strands and Strength of European Opinion: 2005-

When Cameron assumed the party leadership he felt that the Conservatives obsession with Europe was counter-productive. His modernising plans involved downplaying Europe as an issue. In a clear attempt to transcend Thatcherism, Cameron used his early years in opposition to emphasise the themes of environmentalism, feminisation, international aid, poverty and social justice, as opposed to known Conservative themes such as taxation, immigration and Europe (Bale, 2010, pp. 283-362).

⁵ Figures do not add up to 100% due to a small number of Conservative MPs who provide insufficient evidence to position them.

However, his strategy of lowering the saliency of Europe and avoiding conflict with his backbenchers and confrontation within the EU would unravel once he became Prime Minister. Scepticism within the PCP escalated as the perceived threats associated with EU membership intensified. Threat one was the ‘sovereignty’ threat caused the integrationist and expansionist mentality of the EU. This threat was longstanding but the three emerging threats explained the growth of Euroscepticism within the PCP. Threat two – the ‘economic’ threat – would flow from the perceived failings of the EU as evidenced by the Eurozone crisis, which acted as vindication in the minds of sceptics and justified their decade plus long argument about the folly of joining the single currency (Lynch, 2015). Threat three – the ‘identity threat’ – emerged as a consequence of the rising salience of immigration in terms of voter concern. This was aligned to concerns about economic security as East European workers became readily blamed both for the unemployment and low wages of British workers, and for the over-burdening of already over-stretched public services in an era of spending cuts (for a critique of these assumptions, see Lemos and Portes, 2013). This became inextricably to threat four – the ‘electoral’ threat from UKIP as a populist party representing ‘the people’ against the EU (Gifford, 2014). That rise included a surge in UKIP membership and strong performances in opinion polls, local elections, and the 2014 European elections and in the 2015 General Election (see Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Goodwin and Milazzo, 2015)

The ability of Cameron to manage how the PCP reacted to these threats was compromised by the fact that he was not entirely trusted by many of the Thatcherite Eurosceptic wing of the party. That distrust was fuelled by three factors. First, because Cameron reneged (in 2009) on his prior pledge to hold a referendum on the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and thereby convinced of the need to constantly pressurise Cameron vis-à-vis policy towards the EU (see Lynch and Whittaker, 2013). Second, their doubts about Cameron’s willingness for policy compromise were intensified by the formation of a coalition with the pro-European Liberal Democrats (see Quinn, Bara and Bartle, 2011). Finally, these hard Eurosceptics had never been convinced of the case for downplaying of immigration and Euroscepticism, and Cameron’s failure to win the General Election of 2010 outright, solidified *their* belief that much of the UKIP vote was from disaffected Conservatives⁶ (Dorey, 2010, p. 432).

⁶ These factors contributed to a growth in Conservative rebellion rates in the 2010 to 2015 Parliament. In October 2011, 81 Conservative MPs (around 27 of the PCP) defied the whip to support a backbench motion (tabled by David Nuttall) that would require the government to hold

That distrust reflected the Eurosceptic concern that Cameron was too relaxed about the increasing threats associated with membership of an unreformed EU. The consequence was that Euroscepticism was to become more embedded under Cameron's leadership than before, and would morph into harder and softer variants of scepticism (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008, pp. 247-8). Indeed, even by the time the Conservatives re-entered government in 2010 it was clear that evaluating the European cleavage within British Conservatism via the labels of Europhilia and Euroscepticism was no longer credible (Cowley and Stuart, 2010, p. 141). This was in part due to the erosion of pro-European sentiment within the PCP – estimated at only seven members (or 2.3%) of the 306 strong PCP of 2010-15 (Heppell, 2013, p. 350). However, the main reason why it was no longer credible was because the label Eurosceptic had ceased to capture the pragmatic form of Euroscepticism advanced by Cameron and the more dogmatic Euroscepticism being expressed on the backbenchers (Heppell, 2013, p. 344). The soft variant accepted the principle of continued membership but opposed any further integrationist objectives. Soft Euroscepticism captured the Cameron 'revisionist' mind-set which implied renegotiated terms would justify continued membership, whereas hard Eurosceptics were developing a 'rejectionist' mind-set (Flood, 2009). Within the 2010 to 2015 Parliament it has been calculated that 81 or (26.5%) from 306 held hard Eurosceptic views, and a further 154 or (50.3%) held soft Eurosceptic views (Heppell, 2013, p. 347).

Faced with a significantly more Eurosceptic PCP than had previously been the case, Cameron sought to placate backbench sentiment, and nullify the threat from UKIP, by announcing in 2013 that a future Conservative Government would renegotiate a new settlement within the EU, and that this would lead to an in-out referendum (Copsey and Haughton, 2014). That Cameron was pressurised into seeking a renegotiation and then a referendum that would dominate and disfigure political debate was somewhat ironic, after all his strategy upon becoming Conservative Party leader had been to reduce the saliency of Europe. During the General Election campaign of 2015 the Conservatives ran on a European policy platform of reform, renegotiation and referendum, arguing that Labour and the Liberal Democrats would deny voters this option, and that only they

a referendum on whether the UK should remain in the EU as currently configured, or renegotiate, or withdraw (Lynch and Whittaker, 2013, pp. 317-9; see also Cowley and Stuart, 2012). During the course of the 2010 to 2015 Parliament a total of 103 Conservative parliamentarians out of 306 rebelled at least once on a parliamentary division about Europe (covering a total of 49 different divisions) (Lynch, 2015, p. 193).

and not UKIP could deliver on this (Conservative Party, 2015, pp. 72-3). Thereafter, running parallel to the parliamentary passage of the European Union Referendum Act the process of negotiation between the British Government and the EU culminated in a package of reforms that would take effect once a vote for remain was confirmed in the forthcoming referendum (Grice, 2015). Cameron announced on February 20th that the Referendum would take place on June 23rd, and confirmed that although the position of the Government was to remain, he would suspend collective ministerial responsibility thus allowing ministers to campaign to leave the EU (Quinn and Phipps, 2016). In a bitter and unpleasant campaign the Conservative parliamentarians displayed a level of mutual antipathy reminiscent of the Major years.

Hypotheses and Data Collection

We constructed our hypotheses around two considerations. First, as was mentioned in our introduction (page two) we wanted to see whether social variables of age, education, occupation and gender were the same within the PCP and they were within the electorate as a whole. Second, we also wanted to replicate, if possible, assumptions that had been made in the earlier studies of Kitzinger (1973) and Hague and Berrington (1998), to see whether their findings still applied a generation later. We therefore constructed the following eight hypotheses:

[H1] Older Conservative parliamentarians will show a stronger likelihood to vote for Brexit than younger Conservative parliamentarians.

[H2] Privately educated Conservative parliamentarians will show a stronger likelihood to vote for remain than those who did not have a private education.

[H3] Conservative parliamentarians with the most elitist University background will be more likely to vote for remain than those with less elitist University status or no University background.

[H4] Female Conservative parliamentarians will show a slightly stronger likelihood to vote for remain than male Conservative parliamentarians.

[H5] Conservative parliamentarians from a corporate and financial occupational backgrounds will show a greater likelihood to vote remain than Conservative from other occupational backgrounds.

[H6] Conservative parliamentarians with narrow majorities will show an increased likelihood to vote for Brexit than those Conservative parliamentarians with larger majorities⁷

[H7] Conservative ministers – both current and former – as political insiders will show an increased likelihood of voting to remain than Conservative backbenchers.⁸

[H8] Conservative parliamentarians who are socially conservative (and opponents of same sex marriage) will show a stronger likelihood to vote for Brexit.⁹

Our ability to test these assumptions requires that we construct a reliable dataset on the PCP. Explaining the methods by which we constructed the dataset is therefore essential. One of our background social variables – that of gender – was straightforward, but the other background social variables, plus the political and ideological variables require elaboration. With respect to the background social variables of age, school, University education, and occupation plus the background political variables of constituency marginality, and whether they had held ministerial office or not, were all acquired from, first, the UK Parliament website section profiling each individual MP (see <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>); and, second, individual constituency websites of each Conservative.

⁷ We thought that constituency marginality could be an influence upon the attitudes of Conservative parliamentarians due to the threat from UKIP. They increased their vote share from 3.1 to 12.6 % between the General Elections of 2010 and 2015. Although the peculiarities of the first past the post voting system meant that this translated into only one seat, UKIP increased the number of second place finishes from zero to 120 constituencies, and 74 of these were Conservative constituencies (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2015). Thus, we assumed that the threat from UKIP might act as an incentive for Conservatives holding the more marginal constituencies to advocate Brexit to nullify the appeal of UKIP.

⁸ We assumed that a correlation might exist between being an incumbent minister and voting remain (this would explain why Cameron selected them for ministerial office); and that ex-ministers and backbenchers would show a greater propensity towards Brexit (see Heppell, 2013).

⁹ We assumed that a Brexit advocates would be more likely to be social conservatives (i.e. opponents of same sex marriage and the social liberalism of Cameron) (on the socially liberal-socially conservative divide within the PCP, see Heppell, 2002 and 2013). We made this assumption because Berrington and Hague (1998) had identified a correlation between social conservatism and Euroscepticism in the Major era, and we wanted to see whether socially conservative members of the PCP – those who had opposed Cameron on same sex marriage – also opposed his renegotiated settlement for remaining within the EU.

Our coding of these variables was as follows. For age we differentiated via decades in terms of date of birth – i.e. <1959; 1960-69; 1970-79; and 1980-89. For education in terms of schooling our coding was based on the following distinctions – private, grammar or home. In terms of undergraduate University education we coded according to the following distinctions – not attending University at all; attending a private University; attending a post-1992 University; attending a pre-1992 University; attending of pre-1992 University belonging to the supposedly elite Russell Group; and then those who attended Oxford or Cambridge. For occupation we differentiated according to the following: business/finance; military; education; journalism; legal; political insider (special advisor, parliamentary aide, party worker); and other non-professionals.

Our coding in terms of background political variables worked in the following ways. In terms of marginality from the 2015 General Election we differentiated members via the following: <1,001; 1,001 to 5,000; 5,001 to 10,000; 10,001 to 20,000; and then 20,001+. For the ministerial variable, we coded by three distinctions: first, being a minister at the time of the referendum; second, having been a minister in the past; and, third, never having been a minister at all. On issues to do with social morality we coded by updating the findings of Heppell from the 2010 to 2015 PCP – based on noting the moral attitudes of each Conservative MPs from their voting behaviour and statements in Hansard (predominantly on the same sex marriage legislation); their signatories to morality based EDM's; their statements on their constituency webpages; and by examining public comments via radio and television interviews (Heppell, 2013: 344-5).

Research Findings

Our research objectives were two fold – first, to identify the strands (remain or leave) and the numeric strength of opinion within the PCP and to locate those findings within the recent historical development of the PCP; and second, to relate that opinion to our social, political and ideological assumptions.

Research Aim One: Identifying Strands and Strength of Opinion within the PCP 2016

Our findings in relation to the balance of opinion within the PCP vis-à-vis remain or leave are presented in table one. This identifies how 43.9% of the PCP (145 members) defied the recommendation of Cameron as their party leader. Having entered the leadership of the Conservative Party with the aim of transcending division over Europe by adopting a soft

Eurosceptic position, Cameron (a soft Euro-sceptic realist) was unable to stem the move towards a hard Eurosceptic rejectionist mind set within his own PCP.

That growth in Euro-rejectionist sentiment within the PCP can be linked to the steady growth of Euroscepticism within the PCP in recent decades. As table two demonstrates research on the attitudes of Conservative parliamentarians towards the EU since 1992 had demonstrated remarkably high level of scepticism towards further integration within the EU. However, the fracturing of the Eurosceptics, between the soft strand advocating remaining within a reformed EU, and the hard strand which had developed a rejectionist mindset, has developed significantly whilst Cameron has been leader of the Conservative Party. In the 2010 to 2015 Parliament it was estimated that 26.5% or 81 members of a 306 strong PCP were hard Eurosceptics who would be inclined towards arguing the case for Brexit. The referendum revealed that growth in Brexit sentiment within the 2015- PCP with 43.9% (i.e. 145 members of a 330 strong PCP) publically campaigning to leave.

Table One

Referendum Vote: Strands and Strength of Opinion within the PCP 2016

Leave	Remain	Undeclared	Total
145 (43.9%)	174 (52.7%)	11 (3.4%)	330 (100%)

Table Two**Strands and Strength of Opinion within the PCP 1992-2016**

Parliament	Agnostic	Europhile	Eurosceptic	
			(Soft)	(Hard)
1992 (n=331)	41 (12.4%)	98 (29.6%)	192 (58.0%)	
1997 (n=164)	11 (6.7%)	14 (8.5%)	139 (84.8%)	
2001 (n=166)	9 (5.4%)	8 (4.8%)	149 (89.8%)	
2005 (n=198)	10 (5.1%)	7 (3.5%)	181 (91.4%)	
2010 (n=306)	64 (20.9%)	7 (2.3%)	235 (76.8%)	
			154 (50.3%)	81 (26.5%)
		Remain/ Euro-Realists	Brexit/ Euro-Rejectionists	
2015 (n=330)	11 (3.4%)	174 (52.7%)	145 (43.9%)	

Sources: updated from Heppell, 2002, 2013.

Research Aim 2: Identifying Social, Political and Ideological Determinants of Referendum Positioning within the PCP

In table three we provide the data from the 2015- PCP with regard to our social variables – i.e. position on the referendum in relation to age, school, University, occupation and gender; our political variables – i.e. position on the Referendum in relation to constituency marginality, and whether they were a minister, an ex-minister or a permanent backbencher; and our ideological variable on attitudes towards morality or more specifically same sex marriage. In table four we present our outputs for the multivariate logistic regression model, which shows the effect of our independent variables on support for voting in the referendum.

Table Three**The PCP and the EU Referendum: Social, Political and Ideological Determinants**

Referendum Vote of Conservative MPs				
Variable	Leave	Remain	Undeclared	Total
	144 (43.6%)	172 (52.1%)	14 (4.2%)	330 (100%)
Social				
Age (Date of Birth)				
<1959	46 (49.5%)	41 (44.1%)	6 (6.5%)	93 (100%)
1960-1969	53 (43.4%)	66 (54.1%)	3 (2.5%)	122 (100%)
1970-1979	37 (39.4%)	53 (56.4%)	4 (4.3%)	94 (100%)
1980-1989	8 (38.1%)	12 (57.1%)	1 (4.8%)	21 (100%)
School				
Private	61 (40.9%)	81 (54.4%)	7 (4.7%)	149 (100%)
Grammar	44 (45.8%)	48 (50.0%)	4 (4.2%)	96 (100%)
State	30 (46.4%)	42 (50.0%)	3 (6%)	84 (100%)
Home	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
University				
Oxbridge	29 (29.0%)	67 (67.0%)	4 (4.0%)	100 (100%)
Russell Group	45 (43.3%)	55 (52.9%)	4 (3.9%)	104 (100%)
Pre-1992	34 (50.8%)	30 (44.8%)	3 (4.5%)	67 (100%)
Post-1992	12 (66.7%)	5 (27.8%)	1 (5.6%)	18 (100%)
Private	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	6 (100%)
None	22 (62.9%)	11 (32.4%)	2 (5.7%)	35 (100%)
Gender				
Male	118 (45.0%)	138 (52.7%)	6 (2.3%)	262 (100%)
Female	26 (38.2%)	34 (50.0%)	8 (11.8%)	68 (100%)
Occupation				
Business/Finance	57 (43.9%)	70 (53.9%)	3 (2.3%)	130 (100%)
Military	20 (60.6%)	11 (33.3%)	2 (6.1%)	33 (100%)

Education	7 (43.8%)	6 (37.5%)	3 (18.8%)	16 (100%)
Journalism	8 (42.1%)	10 (52.6%)	1 (5.3%)	19 (100%)
Legal	19 (37.3%)	31 (60.8%)	1 (2.0%)	51 (100%)
Political Insider	6 (23.1%)	20 (76.9%)	0 (0%)	26 (100%)
Non-professional	7 (58.3%)	5 (41.7%)	0 (0%)	12 (100%)
Other	20 (46.5%)	19 (44.2%)	4 (9.3%)	43 (100%)

Political

Marginality (Majority)

<1001	10 (47.6%)	9 (42.9%)	2 (9.5%)	21 (100%)
1001-5000	29 (38.2%)	45 (59.2%)	2 (2.6%)	76 (100%)
5001-10000	41 (50.0%)	36 (43.9%)	5 (6.1%)	82 (100%)
10001-20000	56 (42.1%)	73 (54.9%)	4 (3.0%)	133 (100%)
20001+	8 (44.4%)	9 (50.0%)	1 (5.6%)	18 (100%)

Minister

Current	22 (24.2%)	66 (72.5%)	3 (3.3%)	91 (100%)
Never	105 (52.0%)	86 (42.6%)	11 (5.5%)	202 (100%)
Former	17 (46.0%)	20 (54.1%)	0 (0%)	37 (100%)

Ideological

Moral Issues

Liberal	48 (32.4%)	96 (64.9%)	4 (2.7%)	148 (100%)
Abstain	22 (34.9%)	36 (57.1%)	5 (7.9%)	63 (100%)
Conservative	74 (62.2%)	40 (33.6%)	5 (4.2%)	119 (100%)

*For MPs first elected via by-elections we aligned them to the parliament that they had entered – e.g. if elected by a by-election in 1999 they were aligned to the 1997 parliamentary cohort. For MPs who have been elected, defeated and re-elected we calculate them from their first entry into Parliament.

Table Four

Multivariate Logistic Regression Outputs for Referendum Voting

	N	
	315	
Prob > chi2	0	
Pseudo r2	0.17	

	Odds Ratio	Standard Error
Date of Birth (relative to those born before 1960)		
1960-1969	1.15	0.39
1970-1979	1.10	0.40
1980-1989	1.22	0.74
School (relative to those who attended a private school)		
Grammar	0.99	0.32
State	0.93	0.32
Home	(empty)	(empty)
University (relative to those who attended Oxbridge)		
Russell Group	0.56	0.20
Pre-1992	0.48	0.19
Post-1992	0.21 *	0.13
Private	0.73	0.76
None	0.28 *	0.15
Female (relative to male)	0.84	0.29
Career (relative to those with a corporate background)		
Military	0.36 *	0.17
Education	0.84	0.55
Journalism	0.88	0.51
Legal	1.38	0.56
Political Insider	2.02	1.13
Non-professional	1.16	0.81
Other	0.93	0.39
Majority (relative to those with a majority less than 1001)		
1001-5000	1.66	1.00
5001-10000	1.06	0.64

10001-20000	0.96	0.57
20000+	1.00	0.77
Minister (relative to those who are in the government)		
No	0.36 **	0.12
Former Minister	0.73	0.35
Same Sex Marriage (relative to those who voted for)		
Abstain	1.11	0.42
Against	0.28 ***	0.09
Constant	13.56 **	13.47

*** $p=0.000$ ** $0.001 \leq p \leq 0.01$ * $0.01 < p \leq 0.05$

We constructed five hypotheses based on the social background variables of age, school, University, occupation and gender. With regard to our age hypotheses [H1] our findings demonstrate that relative to the oldest group of Conservative parliamentarians – i.e. those born before 1960 – there is no statistically significant relationship between age and referendum position. With regard to gender [H4] our findings showcase that within the PCP there was no statistically significant relationship with voting patterns in the referendum. Our findings vis-à-vis schooling [H2] showed no statistical correlation and thus we disproved our hypotheses that privately educated Conservative parliamentarians would show a greater propensity for remain. However, our hypotheses with regard to University education [H3] was confirmed. Relative to those who attended Oxbridge universities, those who attended post-1992 Universities had 0.21 times the odds (i.e. one fifth of the odds) of voting remain. Furthermore, those who did not attend University had 0.28 times the odds of supporting remain.

Our assumption with regard to occupation [H5] was that Conservative parliamentarians from a corporate and financial occupational background would show a greater propensity towards voting for remain than those Conservative parliamentarians from other occupational backgrounds. Our results show that this is the case only for those from a military background, with those in this category having 0.36 times the odds for voting remain. If we change the base category for the occupation variable to those with a military background (not presented here), we see that relative to these Conservative parliamentarians there is a statistically significant relationship for those with

a background in business, finance and law and political insiders, all of whom have greater odds of voting to remain.

We constructed two hypotheses based on the political variables of constituency marginality [H6] and ministerial status [H7]. In terms of marginality, our findings demonstrate no evidence that those with narrow majorities were more or less likely to vote to remain, thus disapproving our hypotheses. It is interesting to note that of the 74 constituencies in the General Election of 2015 in which the Conservatives finished first and UKIP finished second, the split between those Conservative parliamentarians was virtually the same: 37 voted remain, 34 voted to leave, 3 we could not identify. However, when we look at our findings vis-à-vis ministerial experience, we can see that relative to those who are in government, those who are not - and never have been - have 0.36 times the odds of voting to remain in the European Union. However, there is no statistically significant relationship for former ministers.

Our ideological variable produced the most illuminating insight into the PCP in the Cameron era. Cameronite modernisation had been promoted as transcending Thatcherism because although it embraced Thatcherite economic liberalism (and pragmatic Euroscepticism) it repudiated Thatcherite social conservatism. This was evident, for example, by distancing Conservatism from Thatcherite interventions in the social sphere (such as Section 28). However, Cameron created considerable disquiet amongst social conservatives by his promotion of a socially liberal agenda, and specifically his advocacy of same sex marriage (see Clements, 2014). Our ideological variable measuring social conservatism relative to social liberal sentiment within the PCP [H8] did identify a statistically significant relationship vis-à-vis referendum position. Indeed, this is the only relationship which is significant at the $p=0.000$ level - between how one voted on same sex marriage and how one voted in the referendum. Relative to those who voted for same sex marriage, those who voted against have 0.28 times the odds of voting leave. This confirms our final hypothesis.

Analysis and Conclusions

Our paper makes an original and distinctive contribution to the academic literature on the European Referendum of June 2016 by addressing the two research aims that we set ourselves – i.e. first, to determine the exact strength of opinion within the PCP in the referendum; and second,

to identify whether any associations could be identified in terms of attitudes within the PCP and a range of social, political and ideological variables.

On the first research aim our findings help us to see how closely aligned thinking within the PCP was to the electorate as whole. Voting patterns within the PCP deviated from the electorate at large in the sense that the majority of the PCP wanted to remain within the EU – 174 (52.7%) PCP members voted remain, as opposed to 145 (43.9%) voted to leave, with a small number of Conservative parliamentarians (11 or 3.4%) not declaring publicly how they voted. The PCP was more out of kilter with known Conservative voters – 61% of 2015 Conservative voters voted for Brexit and only 39% for remain (Moore, 2016).

On our second research aim the social variables that we focused in on have enabled us to confirm that there was some similarity between the PCP and the electorate. For example, with regard to educational background status and attainment, notably in terms of University education, Oxbridge graduating Conservative parliamentarians showed a trend towards remain, whereas non undergraduate Conservative parliamentarians showed a slant towards Brexit. However, this association has to be qualified by acknowledging that only 32% of graduates voted for Brexit. The fact that gender did not distinguish Brexit Conservatives from remain Conservatives was also replicated within the electorate as a whole. However, whereas these relationships were not as pronounced within the PCP as they were within the electorate – e.g. 64% of over 65s voted Brexit, whereas Brexit amongst male voters was 53% but it was slightly lower at 51% amongst female voters (Moore, 2016).

Our second research aim also allowed us to consider a range of political variables and from these our findings revealed the following. On constituency marginality no significant pattern could be identified, yet ministerial status did have a skewing effect upon attitudes towards Brexit. The reluctance of ministers to advocate Brexit could be attributed to either a genuine conviction about the dangers of Brexit; or that Cameron deliberately avoided selecting as ministers too many hard Eurosceptics. Or it might suggest some degree of career management by incumbent ministers – i.e. advocating Brexit when their current leader was advocating remain might smack of disloyalty (even without the whip being applied), or that they expected remain to win the referendum and they feared advocating Brexit might result in ministerial dismissal in a post-ministerial reshuffle.

Our findings did indicate that there was a wider ideological dimension within the PCP to advocating Brexit in that social conservatives were more likely to advocate Brexit than social liberals. In an earlier academic assessment of the ideological disposition of the PCP in the 2010-15 Parliament, Heppell had identified that 50 members (16%) were *both* hard Eurosceptics and social conservatives. These were the so-called ‘implacable critics of Cameron’ who found him too pragmatic on European matters and an anathema to them due to his advocacy of same sex marriage (Heppell, 2013, p. 346-50). That grouping, who had also largely been overlooked in terms of ministerial preferment, formed the base of anti-Cameronite sentiment within the PCP. Our research confirms that this anti-Cameronite socially conservative *and* Euro-rejectionist grouping had increased from 50 or 16% of the 2010 to 2015 PCP, to 82 or 25% in the 2015- PCP.

These research findings make a significant and distinctive contribution to academic debates on Brexit and the referendum. Those findings are useful in terms of our understanding of the Conservative Party and their European policy problem. Not only do they help scholars to understand how the strands of opinion have been reconfigured in the last few decades, but they chart the numeric strength of opinion within the PCP – from Eurosceptic, to hard Eurosceptic, to Euro rejectionist – from the Major era to the Cameron era. They are also useful in a historical comparative sense. That is because around the time of UK entry into the Common Market, Kitzinger conducted research on the PCP in an attempt to identify variables that may explain being anti and pro Common Market. From this Kitzinger identified no discernible trends between Conservatives who were pro-entry and those who were anti in terms of age, university education, constituency majority and ministerial position (Kitzinger, 1973, pp. 401-5). At the time of deciding to exit the EU, our findings showed that education did matter (lower status Universities or none were more inclined to towards Brexit) and that backbenchers were more inclined towards Brexit. In this sense our findings contradict some of Kitzinger social and political background findings from the time of entry into the Common Market. Our ideological finding can also be aligned to prior academic work on the PCP as Berrington and Hague (1998, p. 56) identified a clear association between Euroscepticism and social conservatism in the Major era. Our findings reaffirmed that association: 82 out of 330 of the PCP being both social conservative opponents of same sex marriage *and* membership of the EU.

Choosing the option of a referendum showcased how traditional methods of party management used by previous Conservative party leaders – trying to buy off potential rebels with ministerial office, hard line discipline or permitting low level dissent, policy compromise or deferring

decisions – had not solved their European policy conundrum (Lynch and Whittaker, 2013). That left Cameron with only two other party management options according to Lynch and Whittaker: option one - reduce the saliency of Europe, or option two – circumvent internal dissenters by securing an endorsement for the leadership position from the electorate via a referendum. Cameron was willing (reluctantly) to take the second option of a referendum because attempting to reduce the saliency of the EU could not work due to the pressure of UKIP and critics on his own backbenchers, and because he was a risk taking politician – think, for example, of coalition formation and the AV Referendum, and the Scottish Referendum (Alexandre-Collier, 2015). Cameron underestimated the extent of Brexit sentiment that existed within the electorate as a whole and the credibility of the ‘remain’ campaign was undermined by the strength of Brexit advocates within the PCP.

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