

Post-Brexit public policy

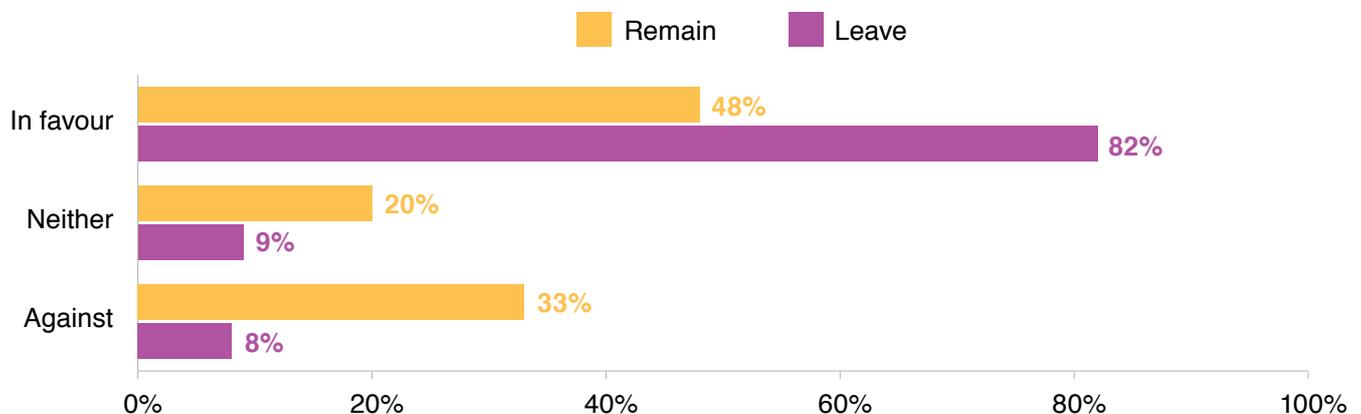
How should Britain use its newly acquired sovereignty? Public attitudes towards post-Brexit public policy

Once the UK has left the EU single market and customs union the UK government will acquire responsibility for a range of policy areas that have until now been subject to collective EU decisions. This chapter looks at attitudes towards some of the key decisions that the UK will now make in some of these areas – immigration policy, food and farming regulation, and the regulation of consumer goods and services. It both assesses attitudes among the public as a whole and examines to what extent ‘Leavers’ hold different views from ‘Remainers’.

Spotlight

Remain voters are less likely than Leave supporters to say that EU citizens should have to apply in the same way as non-EU migrants if they wish to come to live in the UK. But even among those who would have preferred the UK to stay in the EU there is limited enthusiasm for the EU’s free movement rules.

Support for requiring prospective EU migrants who want to come to live here to apply in the same way as people from outside the EU, by EU referendum vote



Overview

There is widespread support for ending freedom of movement with the EU

Since the EU referendum the public has consistently been in favour of requiring potential migrants from the EU to apply to do so in the same way as people from outside the EU.

- 62% of people are currently in favour of requiring potential migrants from the EU to apply to do so.
 - 65% are in favour of requiring people from Britain who want to live and work in an EU country to apply to do so in the same way as anybody else from outside the EU has to do.
 - People are more likely to think that it should be relatively easy for someone from Australia (35%) to migrate to the UK than they are someone from France (28%) or Poland (23%).
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Opinions on occupation and income of migrants

Voters do not necessarily think priority should be given to highly skilled, high income migrants.

- Although as many as 80% think doctors who wish to come to the UK should be given relative priority, only 18% say the same about bankers. In contrast, as many as 60% believe that care workers should have priority.
 - More than half (55%) believe that potential migrants should not have to earn more than £15,000 to be eligible for admission to the UK.
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The public are not seeking a less strongly regulated economy

There is no consistent evidence of a wish to roll back EU regulations.

- As many as four in five (80%) think British airlines should continue to follow EU rules on flight compensation, while over two in three (69%) want to keep the EU rules that limit the cost of calls made abroad.
 - Nearly nine in ten (88%) say that the UK should not allow hormone treated beef, three-quarters (75%) say the same about chlorinated chicken, while over half (59%) wish to maintain the ban on GM crops.
 - As many as two in three (66%) are in favour of a ban on the sale of 'light bulbs that come on more quickly but use more electricity'. However, over half (53%) are opposed to a ban on the sale of powerful vacuum cleaners.
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Introduction

When the withdrawal of the UK from the EU is finally brought to a complete conclusion – an outcome that is scheduled to be achieved at the end of this year – the UK government will acquire responsibility for a range of policy areas that hitherto have been subject to collective EU decisions. Instead of negotiating with others, Britain will now be able to make its own policy choices within these areas. True, its freedom of manoeuvre may in practice be constrained by the terms of any agreement the UK reaches with the EU on their future relationship, and indeed by the conditions attached to any future trade deals the UK makes with other countries, including the USA. Nevertheless, Brexit does represent a shift of decision-making powers from Brussels to London (and in some instances, to the devolved institutions in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh).

Nowhere is this more obviously the case than immigration. Hitherto, the freedom of movement provisions of the European Union have given citizens of other EU countries the right to come to the UK to live and work if they so wished. The resulting apparent inability of the UK to ‘control’ immigration became a key issue in the 2016 referendum (Clarke et al., 2017; Curtice, 2017) as it had been in the general election preceding it in 2015 (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020). It was thus unsurprising that from the beginning of the Brexit negotiations (May, 2017), the UK signalled that, on leaving the EU, it no longer wished to adhere to these provisions, a stance that, in turn, ruled out continued UK membership of the EU single market. Instead, the UK proposes to apply to prospective migrants from the EU much the same kind of rules and regulations that apply to those coming to the UK from outside the EU (HM Government, 2018; Katwala et al., 2020).

However, the EU has also hitherto regulated activities that have a more direct impact on the everyday life of British citizens. One of the EU’s earliest initiatives was the development of a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) designed to provide stability and protection to EU food producers – and thus protect food supply. Although the structure of the regime established by the CAP has changed over time, at its heart throughout has been a system whereby farming and food production within the EU have been subsidised while food imported into the EU is subjected to tariffs. At the same time, in developing the single market the EU has also implemented a system of regulation that, among other things, has both influenced what food can be grown under what conditions and set minimum standards and requirements for producers of consumer goods and services more generally. Food regulations have, for example, severely constrained the growth and sale of GM (genetically modified) food while consumer regulations have, for example, limited the size of the motors used in vacuum cleaners.

In appealing to voters in the EU referendum, Leave campaigners urged voters ‘to take back control’ and enable governments in the UK to make decisions appropriate to Britain’s particular needs,

circumstances and preferences (Shipman, 2016). This raises the question of the use to which voters would like the UK's newly acquired 'control' or sovereignty to be put. In this chapter, we assess what kind of immigration policy voters would like to see pursued and where voters stand on some of the issues involved in the regulation of food and farming in particular and consumer goods and services more generally. Our evidence comes from three waves of interviewing on the NatCen mixed mode random probability panel conducted in the spring and autumn of 2019, and then again in early 2020. The NatCen panel consists of people who have responded to a recent British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey and agreed to answer further occasional short surveys either online or over the phone (Jessop, 2018). In March 2019, a total of 3,428 members of the panel answered our questions, as did 3,346 people the following September. Included among these two sets of participants were 3,096 people who answered both surveys. Meanwhile, an entirely separate sample of 2,411 panel members was interviewed in February 2020. Armed with these surveys, we can assess how stable attitudes towards our topics proved to be during 2019, when the UK was fiercely debating the terms and conditions of departure from the EU (see the Political consequences of Brexit chapter by Curtice and Montagu) and whether there is any evidence of attitudes changing in the immediate wake of the UK's actual withdrawal from the organisation in January 2020. In some instances, we are also able to report on a longer time series of readings taken throughout the course of the Brexit process.¹

There is, of course, no guarantee that the public will speak with one voice on these issues. After all, Brexit has often appeared to be a deeply divisive and intensely felt subject (Curtice 2018; Curtice and Montagu, 2019; Holbort et al., in press). Given it was one of the key issues in the debate, we may expect those who voted Remain and those who supported Leave to hold very different views about whether and how immigration should be regulated, with 'Remainers' backing a more liberal policy stance than 'Leavers'. At the same time, critics of the EU have often portrayed it as too interventionist in its regulation of economic activity. Such critics have argued Britain would benefit economically from adopting a less restrictive regime (Alesina and Giavazzi, 2006; Worstall, 2019). That said, it has not always been clear that Leave voters have necessarily been particularly inclined to take a more laissez-faire approach to business activity (Swales, 2016). There is therefore some uncertainty about the extent and direction of differences of outlook between Remain and Leave voters on this subject.

We begin by looking at attitudes towards some of the key decisions that the UK is now making on immigration policy. Thereafter, we examine some of the controversial issues regarding food and farming regulation, together with some of the everyday questions

¹ All the figures reported here are calculated on the basis of data that have been weighted so that the sample reflects known population parameters.

that arise from EU single market regulation of consumer goods and services. In both instances as well as looking at attitudes among the public as a whole, we also examine to what extent those who back the UK's withdrawal from the EU hold different views from those who voted to stay.

Immigration

Having decided to end freedom of movement for EU citizens, the UK government has had to grapple with the question of what rules and regulations it should adopt to replace this system. The government has proposed that EU citizens should be treated in much the same way as their non-EU counterparts, and that the criteria for admission should not be dissimilar to those currently applied in determining who is admitted to the UK from outside the EU (HM Government 2018; Migration Advisory Committee, 2020). This means that priority will be given to those in highly skilled jobs – as evidenced by levels of pay and educational qualifications – together with those working in occupations where there is thought to be a labour shortage in the UK. Such criteria will not only apply to those with no previous connection with the UK, but also those residents (including British citizens) who wish to bring family members into the country. However, some of the criteria would be less strict than those that presently apply to non-EU citizens, and thus for them the new regime may well prove more liberal. At the same time, no attempt is to be made to identify a target maximum number of people who should be admitted in any one year, a consequence perhaps of previous governments' persistent failure to meet the target they set themselves of reducing net migration to less than 100,000 a year (Sumption and Vargas-Silva, 2019).

There is widespread and consistent public support for ending freedom of movement. This is clear from the responses given on a number of occasions during the last four years when members of the NatCen panel were asked whether they would like the following proposition to form part of the agreement between the UK and the EU on its future relationship:

Requiring people from the EU who want to come to live here to apply to do so in the same way as people from outside the EU?

This, of course, does not refer directly to freedom of movement – a technical term which many voters may misunderstand – but the sentiment is one that is directly antithetical to its provisions. Some four years after the EU referendum, around three-fifths of all voters are in favour of requiring potential migrants to the UK from the EU to apply to come, just as those from outside the EU already have to do. True, that figure appears to have fallen somewhat since the period immediately after the EU referendum, when around three-quarters backed the idea. However, over the last two years the proportion has held relatively steady. On this evidence, there seems little doubt that ending freedom of movement accords with the wishes of a substantial majority of the British public.

Table 1 Attitudes towards requiring prospective EU migrants to apply like non-EU, 2016-2020

Require EU migrants to apply like non-EU	Sep 2016	Feb 2017	July 2017	Oct 2017	June 2018
	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	74	68	68	64	59
Neither	12	16	14	15	20
Against	13	15	17	20	20
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1391	2322	2184	2168	2090
	Feb 2019	Mar 2019	Sep 2019	Dec 2019	Feb 2020
	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	59	62	63	58	62
Neither	20	17	18	18	17
Against	20	21	18	22	20
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2654	3429	3346	2429	2411

Source: NatCen panel surveys

Of course, the EU's freedom of movement provisions not only give citizens of other EU countries the right to come to the UK to live and work, but also give British citizens the freedom to move to another EU country, including areas around the Mediterranean where the climate might be thought more congenial than in Britain. We might wonder whether voters are as keen to lose that right as they are to deny EU citizens the right to come to the UK. In practice, however, it seems they are. We have on a number of occasions asked respondents whether the following proposition should form part of the future relationship between the UK and the EU:

Requiring people from Britain who want to live and work in an EU country to apply to do so in the same way as anybody else from outside the EU has to do.

In practice, the level of support for this step is at least as high as it is for ending the automatic right of EU citizens to come to the UK. Consistently, around two-thirds have said that they are in favour, including 65% in our most recent survey in February 2020.

As well as pointing to the end of freedom of movement, implicit in the proposition we have just been examining is that EU migrants to Britain should no longer enjoy any kind of advantage over their non-EU counterparts in applying for admission to the UK. But, of course, once the UK has left the single market it can decide for itself whether to advantage people from some countries over others. In the immediate post-war period, preference was given to citizens from the British Commonwealth, and for some critics of the most recent immigration regime one of its disadvantages was that it advantaged EU citizens over those of Commonwealth countries, despite the latter's stronger historical and cultural ties to Britain (Balasubramanyam, 2018).

In order to examine a little further where voters stand on this issue, we asked respondents to the NatCen panel whether it should be ‘relatively easy’, ‘relatively difficult’ or ‘neither easier nor more difficult’ for people from four different countries to come to the UK ‘to live and work’. Two of these countries, Australia and Pakistan, are members of the Commonwealth, while the other two, France and Poland, are EU members. At the same time, however, Australia – unlike Pakistan – has a predominantly ‘white’ population, while France is both geographically closer to the UK and been a member of the EU for much longer than Poland. Perhaps these considerations matter more to voters than the formal distinctions between EU and non-EU or between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries?

Table 2 Attitudes towards how easy or difficult it should be for migrants from different countries to come to Britain, 2019-2020

	March 19	Sept 19	Feb 20
Australia	%	%	%
Relatively easy	34	34	35
Neither easy nor difficult	54	55	53
Relatively difficult	11	11	12
France	%	%	%
Relatively easy	28	27	28
Neither easy nor difficult	59	59	58
Relatively difficult	12	14	13
Poland	%	%	%
Relatively easy	24	24	23
Neither easy nor difficult	58	59	58
Relatively difficult	17	16	18
Pakistan	%	%	%
Relatively easy	16	13	15
Neither easy nor difficult	55	58	55
Relatively difficult	28	28	29
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3429	3346	2411

Source: NatCen panel surveys

Table 2 suggests that to some degree at least this is the case. In each of our three surveys voters have been most likely to favour relatively easy entry for migrants from Australia – but have been least likely to favour relatively easy entry for migrants from Pakistan. Around one in three say that it should be relatively easy for someone to come from Australia, whereas only around 15% say the same about Pakistan. Evidently migrants from some parts of the Commonwealth are regarded more favourably than others, and, as a result, are more popular than those from parts of the EU. However, people are only a little more likely to say that it should be relatively easy for migrants to come to the UK from France than to express that view of those coming from Poland. Meanwhile, we should note that in each case by far the most popular response is that it should be neither easier nor more difficult for people to come to Britain from any of these countries, and to that extent it would appear that a policy that applies the same criteria to all potential migrants, irrespective of their country of origin, would be consistent with the majority view (see also Ford and Mellon, 2020).

But if voters are for the most part not seeking to discriminate between migrants from different countries, what criteria do they think should be used to determine who is allowed into the UK and who is refused entry? The UK government has indicated that it believes that Britain should focus on attracting the ‘the brightest and the best’, that is, those engaged in highly skilled occupations that typically attract relatively high salaries, while severely limiting the entry of those engaged in less skilled occupations, including many jobs such as hotel cleaners and restaurant staff that have hitherto attracted a relatively large pool of migrants.

Indeed, there is plenty of polling that suggests voters are much warmer towards high-skill migration than they are to low-skilled (Blinder and Richards, 2020; Ford et al., 2012). However, there is a risk that any description of potential migrants that refers to ‘high skill’ and ‘low skill’ is almost bound to evince a more favourable reaction to the former than to the latter. People will nearly always prefer more of a desirable quality such as skill over less. This approach also presumes that ‘skill’ is indeed the principal criterion in people’s minds in determining the kinds of jobs they would prefer to be open to migrants. In order to avoid these presumptions, we simply asked whether people in certain specific occupations should have a high or a low priority in determining whether ‘they should be allowed to come to Britain to live and work’. These comprised two occupations, doctors and bankers, that would be regarded under the government’s proposed new immigration rules as ‘highly skilled’ and two, care workers and hotel cleaners, that would not.

Table 3 Attitudes towards how much priority migrants in specific occupations should have, 2019-2020

	March 19	Sept 19	Feb 20
Doctors	%	%	%
High priority	79	81	80
Neither	18	17	17
Low priority	3	2	2
Care workers	%	%	%
High priority	55	56	60
Neither	32	31	29
Low priority	13	12	11
Hotel cleaners	%	%	%
High priority	20	19	19
Neither	46	49	49
Low priority	33	32	32
Bankers	%	%	%
High priority	16	16	18
Neither	48	48	48
Low priority	36	36	33
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3429	3346	2411

Source: NatCen panel surveys

Table 3 reveals that, so far as these four occupations at least are concerned, the public's priorities do not match the distinction between high and low skill. True, as we might anticipate, doctors are by far the group most likely to be regarded as high priority. Consistently around four in five express that view. However, a clear majority of voters – approaching three in five – also believe that care workers should be a high priority for admission. The relative popularity of both these groups stands in stark contrast to the unpopularity of both hotel cleaners and bankers, with no more than one in five or so saying either group should be a high priority and around a third believing each should be a low priority.

It would seem that voters are inclined to consider the perceived 'social worth' of an occupation as well as the skills it requires when considering who should be admitted into the UK. The reputation of the banking profession took a severe knock in the wake of the 2008-9 financial crash, and perhaps we should not be surprised that this is one highly skilled occupation voters do not feel a need to enlarge with migrant labour (Park et al., 2013). Meanwhile, our surveys indicate that even before the coronavirus pandemic hit the care sector hard and underlined the importance of the work undertaken by carers who look after older people, voters were inclined to believe

that admitting care workers – an occupation that has been heavily reliant on migrant labour (Skills for Care, nd) – was a relatively high priority. The fact that so far at least the government is not proposing to regard care work as a shortage occupation that is given some priority in the immigration queue would therefore appear to put it at odds with majority public opinion.

Table 4 Attitudes towards how much someone should have to earn to be admitted into the UK, 2019-2020

Migrants should earn at least ...	March 19	Sept 19	Feb 20
	%	%	%
£40k	5	4	3
£30k	11	11	12
£20k	25	26	28
£15k	22	23	19
No minimum requirement	36	34	36
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3429	3346	2411

Source: NatCen panel surveys

As we have already noted, income is a key selection criterion in the government's new immigration policy proposals. Hitherto non-EU citizens who wish to come to the UK have usually been expected to have the offer of a job that would pay at least £30,000 a year. It is now proposed that this figure should be lowered to £25,600 and apply to all immigrants – EU and non-EU – while in some instances someone earning as little as £20,480 might be eligible for admission if they score highly on other criteria. However, here too the detail of the government's proposals does not seem entirely in line with public opinion. For as Table 4 reveals, just over one in three respondents consistently oppose any minimum income requirement at all, while another fifth or so say the minimum should be no more than £15,000 a year. Only around 15% believe that the minimum income should be £30,000 or higher. Much the same pattern is uncovered when people are asked about the analogous issue of how much a spouse or partner of someone already resident in the UK (including British citizens) should have to earn before they can come to the UK. For example, in our most recent survey, just over half (55%) said that either that there should not be any minimum threshold at all or that it should no more than £15,000. It would seem that voters are rather less concerned than the government about the need for migrants to enjoy a relatively high income.

There seems to be little doubt that a majority of voters are supportive of the decision to end freedom of movement, and that there is widespread backing for taking little or no notice of country of origin in deciding which migrants to admit. To that extent, the government's

broad immigration strategy appears to reflect a public mood that has proven remarkably stable over time. However, the government's emphasis in implementing that strategy on skilled migration as evidenced by income does not wholly match the contours of public opinion. Only a minority believe that migrants should necessarily be expected to be earning a high income, while those engaged in some low skilled, but high social worth, occupations may be considered a higher priority than those who occupy some highly skilled but less well regarded occupations.

Food and farming

In contrast to immigration, relatively little attention was paid during the EU referendum campaign to the potential impact of leaving the EU on either agriculture or the regulation of consumer goods and services. Yet, as we have already noted, the EU plays a major role in determining the financial support that is made available to farmers via its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and regulates both the production of food in particular and the provision of consumer goods and services in general. Perhaps, given the lower level of attention paid to these aspects of EU membership we might find that voters are not necessarily as keen on departing from the approach adopted by the EU as we have seen they are in respect of immigration?

Under the CAP as it has operated most recently, all farmers receive payments based on the amount of land that they farm, so long as they satisfy certain environmental and animal welfare requirements. The devolved administrations are proposing, in the short term at least, to continue to pay subsidies to their farmers along much the same lines. However, in England, the UK government proposes that farmers should be paid in future for the 'public goods' that they produce, such as improving the environment, rather than the amount of land that they farm (DEFRA, 2018). All of the governments in the UK propose that the overall level of subsidy should remain as at present – none have indicated any wish to take up the option of reducing, let alone ending farm payments entirely, as, for example, was done in the 1980s in New Zealand.

For the most part, there appears to be broad if not necessarily enthusiastic public support for farm subsidies. Respondents were told that:

Some people say the government should make regular payments to farmers because this will ensure they continue to grow the food we need even if there is a sudden fall in prices. Other people say that making regular payments to farmers makes them less competitive and pushes food prices up.

They were then asked:

Do you think the government should or should not make regular payments to farmers?

As Table 5 shows, by far the most popular response – given by between 45% and 50% – is that the government should ‘probably’ make such payments. However, given that another one in five or so say that such payments should ‘definitely’ be made, this means that around two-thirds of voters are broadly in favour of the principle of farm subsidies while only around one in three are opposed. It seems that there is relatively little demand for a departure from the principle that domestic agriculture should be subsidised.

Table 5 Attitudes towards the government making regular payments to farmers, 2019-2020

Do you think the government should or should not make regular payments to farmers?	March 19	Sept 19	Feb 20
	%	%	%
Definitely should	19	19	20
Probably should	47	50	45
Probably should not	25	23	24
Definitely should not	8	6	9
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3429	3346	2411

Source: NatCen panel surveys

More contentious, however, are some of the issues that have arisen in respect of what food should be produced and sold in the UK. Two areas that have given rise to considerable debate are whether to allow live animals to be exported outside the UK and whether to permit the growing for human consumption of genetically modified crops. Some people concerned about animal rights argue that it is unacceptable to transport live animals over long distances, and at least one former agriculture minister has expressed some sympathy for that view (Topping, 2018). However, the rules of the single market bar countries from banning live animal export within the EU. Meanwhile, there is a lively debate about the merits and demerits of genetically modified crops, one in which, in contrast for example to the US, the EU has adopted a cautious approach – and to date no such crops have been grown commercially in the UK.

Table 6 Attitudes towards aspects of food regulation

Should the UK allow ...		Definitely should	Probably should	Probably should not	Definitely should not	Unweighted base
Live animal exports	%	5	15	32	46	2411
GM crops	%	11	29	31	28	2411
Chlorinated chicken	%	6	18	27	48	2411
Hormone treated beef	%	3	8	27	61	2411

Source: NatCen panel February 2020

In the first two rows of Table 6 we show the results from our most recent survey on these issues – they are very similar to the findings of our previous surveys in 2019. They suggest widespread dislike of the export of live animals, with nearly four in five feeling this practice should definitely or probably not be allowed (as it is at present). In contrast, it appears that on balance voters would like to keep the ban on the growing of GM crops, with around three people in favour of preventing GM cultivation for every two that are in favour of allowing it.

As a result of the decision to leave the EU, the UK will also be able to negotiate its own trade deals with other countries rather than have to work with whatever deals are struck on behalf of all member states by the EU. The UK government appears especially keen on negotiating a trade deal with the USA, and indeed negotiations between the two countries have already begun (BBC News, 2020). Some of the regulations in the USA on what foods may be sold are different from those in force in the EU. Two differences in particular have become the subject of significant debate: (i) the sale of chickens that have been washed in chlorine to ensure that they are safe for human consumption, and (ii) the sale of beef from cattle that have been fattened with the help of growth hormones. Both practices are permitted in the USA but are not allowed in the EU. The bottom two rows of Table 6 suggest that people in Britain would be reluctant to see the UK swap the EU's stance for that of the USA. Around three in four would definitely or probably oppose the sale of chlorinated chicken, while nearly nine in ten are opposed to hormone treated beef. It seems the UK government would have plenty of persuading to do if, as part of any future trade deal, it were to decide to allow such products into the UK.

In all four instances of food regulation we have examined here there is a common theme. The public seem reluctant to embrace a more liberal regulatory regime for food production and sale. There is little sign here at least of a public appetite for the less restrictive regulatory regime favoured by some of those who campaigned for Britain's exit from the EU. But how far is this mood reflected in attitudes towards some of the other regulatory issues that the UK will now have to address?

Goods and services

Two areas where decisions made by the EU have had a direct impact on the everyday lives of anyone travelling in the EU are the payment of compensation to passengers in respect of delayed or cancelled flights and the regulation of the charges applied when someone is using their mobile phone outside their own country. EU rules entitle citizens whose flights are badly delayed or cancelled to financial compensation and, where relevant, refreshment and accommodation. Meanwhile, so-called ‘roaming charges’ for calls made or received while abroad in another EU country have been abolished, thereby ensuring that the cost of using a mobile phone anywhere in the EU is the same as in the user’s own country. To date, the UK government has indicated that it proposes to retain the existing rules on flight compensation but to leave it to mobile phone companies to decide whether or not they wish to reintroduce charges for using a British mobile phone within the EU.

Tables 7 and 8 suggest that there is strong and consistent support for keeping both these measures in place after the UK has left the EU. Consistently around seven in ten say that British phone companies should continue to be required to follow EU rules that limit the cost of calls made abroad, while support for requiring British airlines to compensate those whose flight has been seriously delayed has increased from around two-thirds in 2017 to around four in five more recently. It seems that there are some EU rules that the British public are minded to want to keep even after the UK has left the EU.

Table 7 Attitudes towards requiring British phone companies to follow EU rules that limit the cost of calls made abroad, 2017-2020

	Feb 17	Oct 17	March 19	Sept 19	Feb 20
	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	71	74	73	72	69
Neither	19	17	17	20	19
Against	9	8	9	7	11
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2322	2168	3429	3346	2411

Source: NatCen panel surveys

Table 8 Attitudes towards requiring British airlines to follow EU rules on flight compensation, 2017-2020

	Feb 17	March 19	Sept 19	Feb 20
	%	%	%	%
In favour	68	80	78	80
Neither	22	14	18	14
Against	8	5	4	6
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2322	3429	3346	2411

Source: NatCen panel surveys

Yet in its approach to the talks with the EU over the UK's future relationship with the EU the UK government has signalled a marked reluctance to be required to continue to adhere to the regulations of the single market (HM Government, 2020). It believes that as a 'sovereign' state outside the EU it should determine its own rules for providing goods and services, and that the UK and the EU should wherever possible regard their respective rules as 'equivalent' to each other. These rules can have a direct impact on the everyday lives of people at home as well as when they are abroad. Two such examples where the EU has taken action to regulate consumer goods have been a ban on the manufacture and import of incandescent light bulbs and banning the sale of mains electric vacuum cleaners powered by more than a 900w motor. Both decisions were made as part of efforts to protect the environment by reducing power consumption, but both have been portrayed as intrusive and unnecessary restrictions (Millar, 2017; Randall, 2009).

However, there is no consistent evidence – in respect of these items at least – of a general wish among British respondents to roll back these regulations. A ban on the sale of 'light bulbs that come on more quickly but use more electricity' appears to be backed by around two to one (see Table 9). On the other hand, although the idea seems to have become rather more popular during the course of the last year, opponents of a ban on the sale of powerful vacuum cleaners still, at 53%, outnumber supporters of such a ban.

Table 9 Attitudes towards banning the sale of powerful vacuum cleaners and incandescent light bulbs, 2019-2020

% saying should ban sale of ...	March 19	Sept 19	Feb 20
Powerful vacuum cleaners	%	%	%
Definitely	8	12	13
Probably	29	35	33
Probably not	42	37	37
Definitely not	20	16	16
Bulbs that come on more quickly	%	%	%
Definitely	17	23	26
Probably	41	43	40
Probably not	29	23	24
Definitely not	12	9	9
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>3429</i>	<i>3346</i>	<i>2411</i>

Source: NatCen panel surveys

Meanwhile, other findings in our surveys also fail to sustain any claim that the public are necessarily seeking a less strongly regulated economy. As many as 84% would definitely or probably ban single

use plastic cups, while over three-quarters (77%) take the same view of the tighter regulation of the use of weedkillers, both subjects where the EU has actually or been minded to intervene. On this evidence, the public appears more convinced by the environmental benefits of regulation than by the economic benefits of a more liberal market.

Do ‘Remainers’ and ‘Leavers’ have different preferences?

So far, we have looked at the views of the electorate as a whole. But as we noted earlier those who voted Remain and those who supported Leave may well take different views about how the UK should use the greater freedom to make its own decisions afforded by departure from the EU. In particular, given the prominence of the debate about immigration in the 2016 referendum, we might anticipate that those who voted Remain would prefer a more liberal immigration policy than those who backed Leave.

Table 10 Attitudes towards requiring prospective EU migrants to apply in same way as non-EU migrants, by 2016 EU referendum vote, 2016-2020

	Sept 2016		Mar 2019		Sept 2019		Feb 2020	
	Remain	Leave	Remain	Leave	Remain	Leave	Remain	Leave
Requiring people from the EU who want to come to live here to apply to do so in the same way as people from outside the EU	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
In favour	62	89	50	78	48	81	48	82
Neither	14	8	18	14	20	12	20	9
Against	24	3	32	8	32	6	33	8
<i>Unweighted base</i>	635	605	1610	1372	1576	1338	1051	897

Source: NatCen panel surveys

Remain voters are certainly less likely than Leave supporters to say that EU citizens should have to apply in the same way as non-EU migrants if they wish to come to the UK in order to live and work. That much is evident from Table 10, which suggests that around four in five of those who voted Leave believe that they should have to do so, compared with only around a half of those who supported Remain. Even so, we should note that as many as half of Remain voters express support for a proposition that is incompatible with freedom of movement, suggesting that even among those who would have preferred for the UK to stay in the EU there is limited enthusiasm for the EU’s free movement rules. True, the modest decline in support

for requiring potential migrants from the EU to apply for admission that we observed in Table 1 has been rather more marked among Remain voters (among whom it stood as high as 62% in September 2016) than it has among Leave supporters, but even so it might well be argued that the principle of ending freedom of movement has consistently enjoyed widespread support across the Brexit divide.

This picture of modest rather than stark differences between Remain and Leave supporters is also in evidence when we examine attitudes towards some of the more specific aspects of immigration policy. Remain voters are markedly more likely than Leave supporters to say that it should be relatively easy for people from France and Poland to migrate to the UK. In our most recent survey 40% of Remain voters take that view in respect of people from France, and 34% for Polish migrants, whereas the equivalent figures for those who supported Leave are just 16% and 13% respectively. However, both groups are relatively enthusiastic about admitting people from Australia (37% of Remain voters and 35% of Leave supporters think it should be relatively easy for them to come to the UK), while both groups are least likely to support the relatively easy admission of people from Pakistan (23% of Remain voters and only 8% of Leave supporters back such a policy). What is striking, however, about attitudes towards prospective migrants from all four countries is that in all cases at least half of both Remain voters and Leave supporters – and sometimes as many as three-fifths – say that it should be neither easier nor more difficult for them to come to the UK. Thus, the UK government's stance that future immigration policy should be indifferent to a prospective migrant's country of origin also seems to enjoy considerable support on both sides of the Brexit debate.

Remain voters and Leave supporters are also largely in agreement when asked about which occupations should and should not be prioritised when deciding who to admit into the UK. Both groups strongly support giving priority to doctors and are equally disinclined to give any priority to bankers. Neither set of voters demonstrates much support for prioritising hotel cleaners, though whereas as many as 40% of Leave voters say that they should be a low priority, only 21% of Remain voters hold that view. The two sets of voters are also somewhat divided on the admission of care workers, who as many as 72% of Remain voters consider to be a priority. However, even among Leave supporters around a half (49%) believe they should be given priority. It would seem that even many a Leave voter would not be unhappy if the UK government were to make it easier for care workers to come to the UK than seems likely so far.

Leave voters are also markedly more likely than Remain supporters to believe that potential migrants should be earning a minimum income. Just 23% of Leave voters in our most recent survey said that there should not be any minimum income level that migrants should meet, whereas as many as 45% of Remain supporters held that view. Even so, as many as three-quarters of Leave voters said that the minimum should be £20,000 or less. So here too the detail of the government's

proposed policy appears to be somewhat more restrictive than those who voted to Leave the EU appear to have in mind.

We found earlier that voters do not necessarily reject keeping some of the regulations of the single market. Both the EU rules on flight compensation and those on the cost of mobile phone calls made while in other EU countries appear to be relatively popular. In practice, they are marginally less popular with those who voted Leave. So, while as many as 89% of Remain voters are in favour of retaining the rules on flight compensation, and 80% those on mobile phone costs, the equivalent figures among Leave supporters are 74% and 66% respectively. Even so, it is clear that even those who were in favour of Brexit mostly value these aspects of consumer protection that have been provided by the EU.

Table 11 Attitudes towards food and consumer regulation, by 2016 EU referendum vote

	Remain	Leave
% saying definitely or probably should not allow	%	%
Live animal exports	79	80
GM crops	52	60
Chlorinated chicken	82	72
Hormone treated beef	92	86
% saying definitely or probably should ban		
Powerful vacuum cleaners	52	43
Bulbs that come on quickly	72	62
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1051</i>	<i>897</i>

Source: NatCen Panel February 2020

There are only relatively small differences between Remain and Leave voters in their attitudes towards the regulation of food and consumer goods more generally. For example, as Table 11 shows, Leave voters are a little less likely than Remain voters to say that the sale of chlorinated chicken and hormone treated beef should not be allowed, and they are somewhat less likely to back the banning of powerful vacuum cleaners and bulbs that come on quickly but use more energy. But the differences are typically only around ten points or so – while Leave voters appear to be slightly more cautious than Remain supporters about growing GM crops. There is relatively little sign here of a marked and consistent wish among Leave voters for a less regulated economy.

Conclusion

Brexit has often appeared to be a deeply divisive issue in the UK, with 'Remainers' and 'Leavers' having very different perspectives on what the UK's relationship with the EU should be. However, while there are some differences of view between the two groups about the policies that the UK government should now adopt as it recovers decision making powers from the EU after Brexit, what is more remarkable is that the balance of opinion is often in a similar direction. There is widespread support for ending freedom of movement and not discriminating between migrants on the basis of their country of origin, and this mood is to be found among many a Remain voter as well as being common among Leave supporters. Meanwhile, the two groups have largely similar views about the future shape of food and consumer regulation.

As a result, the broad strategy being pursued by the UK government in respect of Post-Brexit public policy largely appears to match voters' preferences. This is most importantly and obviously so in respect of immigration policy. However, this does not mean that the government is seemingly always on course to match the public mood. Voters – on both sides of the Brexit divide – do not necessarily regard skill or income as important a determinant as to who should be allowed into the UK as current government proposals do. Meanwhile, the government's stance in the negotiations with the EU over the future relationship that the UK should no longer be obligated to follow any of the rules of the EU single market is perhaps less nuanced than the outlook of many voters. There certainly seems to be little public enthusiasm for a significant reduction in the degree of business regulation. But then perhaps we should not be surprised that a public that wishes to see more control of immigration is not necessarily minded to lessen the control to which business activity is put.

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