Attitudes of younger Leave voters to regulation and deregulation

New findings on attitudes to regulation, deregulation and enforcement among younger Leave voters, from a poll by Ipsos MORI for Unchecked UK

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About Unchecked UK

Unchecked UK makes the case for common-sense protections which help keep people safe and allow businesses to thrive.

We’re building a network of diverse organisations who see sensible, properly-enforced protections as the framework for a decent society.

We carry out investigations to highlight the loss of protection for the UK public that results from the erosion of important rules and of the public bodies which enforce them.

Through public insights and communications research, we help to shape new positive narratives about our shared protections and the enforcement teams who work hard to keep us safe.

We run campaigns to show the importance of protections that we all take for granted; making sure the food we eat and the things we buy are safe, the natural environment is protected and our workplaces are safe and fair.

At Unchecked UK, we want to broaden political and public discussion around regulation, and to build momentum for strong protections which safeguard the things that matter to British people.

Find out more about our work: www.unchecked.uk
Executive summary

This public opinion research was carried out to test attitudes to regulation, deregulation and enforcement of regulations among young adults in Great Britain who voted to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum.

The survey finds that, overall, there is a high level of support for regulations among younger Leave voters1, with the majority of respondents expressing a preference for maintaining or increasing regulations across diverse areas of public life. There is strong support for keeping or strengthening EU-derived regulations - both among younger Leave voters who voted Conservative in December 2019, and those who voted Labour.

When asked about the most important issues facing the UK, respondents prioritised health, crime, and immigration and asylum. The amount and nature of regulation is not a high priority for younger Leave voters.

When they do consider the issue, a significant majority of respondents (78%) agree that regulation is necessary to ensure there is fair behaviour by people and businesses.

Respondents to the survey were asked whether they wanted more or less regulation with respect to 11 categories such as consumer protection, food safety, and the environment. Most younger Leave voters (66%) want to increase or keep regulation in all 11 categories. Immigration/asylum rules and environmental rules are seen as top priorities for increased regulation. Across all categories, on average 50% of respondents want more regulation, and 28% want no change to regulation.

When asked about EU-derived regulations, most younger Leave voters (70% or more) think the UK should increase or keep EU regulations and standards. On average, 45% of respondents wanted to keep the same level of regulation, and 34% wanted to increase the amount of regulation. No more than 5% would like to see specific EU regulations abolished.

Most younger Leave voters support keeping or strengthening specific EU rules such as bathing water standards, limits on the use of pesticides in agriculture, and wildlife protection rules. Two thirds want to see EU legal protections for wildlife increased (42%) or retained (22%). 60% would like to see current limits on the number of working hours unchanged or tightened.

At least two thirds of younger Leave voters who voted Conservative in December 2019 think that regulation should be maintained or increased within the majority of the categories in this survey, such as food safety regulations, tax regulations, health and safety regulations, and banking regulations. At least three quarters of respondents who voted Labour think these rules should be kept or increased. There is little support from younger Leave voters for less regulation in any of the categories considered.

Seven in ten younger Leave voters think that the government should regulate large businesses more, or that the current level of regulation is about right. Only 7% indicate that they want less regulation of large businesses. Respondents’ support for regulation is particularly strong when presented with real-world examples, rather than the concept of regulation in the abstract. This suggests that when younger Leave voters think about regulation in the context of everyday life, they strongly support having effective rules in place.

The results from this survey strongly suggest that younger Leave voters did not vote to leave the EU so that the UK could deregulate its economy and society. Indeed, making changes to regulation is not a high priority for them at all, relative to other issues confronting the government. When they do think about regulations and standards, younger Leave voters support existing rules and in many cases want to see them strengthened.

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1 By ‘younger Leave voters’ we are referring to our survey sample, which consisted of 1,099 respondents aged 48 or under, who voted to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum.
The research

Unchecked UK commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct interviews drawn from a representative sample of 4,000 adults aged 22 to 48 years (aged 18-44 in June 2016) in Great Britain, in order to identify 1,099 respondents who voted to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum. These respondents were also asked how they voted in the 2019 General Election.

Interviews were conducted online using panels owned by Ipsos MORI and other panel providers between 3rd and 12th March 2020. Quotas were set by age, gender, education, region and working status for the full sample of 4,000 and the results were weighted by these variables as well as by level of education to known population proportions.

In total, participants were surveyed on 13 questions, each relating to some aspect of regulation.

Our sample in context

Among the respondents for this poll, 54% of Leave voters who were under 44 at the time of the EU Referendum recalled voting Conservative in the 2019 General Election, with 18% voting Labour, 5% for the Brexit Party, 3% Liberal Democrat, 2% UKIP, 2% Green, 1% for the SNP, and 1% other. 10% did not vote, while 2% could not remember, and 2% preferred not to say.

How our sample voted in the 2019 General Election

* The fieldwork for this research took place just at the point when public awareness of Covid-19 started to increase significantly.
What the public ‘really wants’ from Brexit has been the subject of considerable debate and speculation, with the question of whether or not to deregulate the UK economy forming a central part of this conversation.

For some, Brexit provides an opportunity for the UK to diverge from EU regulations. Others fear that moving away from EU rules and standards will lead to a loss of important public safeguards.

As the UK embarks on the negotiation of trade agreements with countries around the world, this issue will touch more and more on people’s daily lives. Younger voters, in particular, will be living with the consequences of these decisions for decades to come.

Unchecked UK believes it is important that the views of these younger voters are taken into account, and we commissioned this research to better understand their concerns.

In 2018 Unchecked UK conducted focus groups with Conservative and UKIP supporting Leave voters. The discussions in these groups showed that cutting back regulations was not a high priority for these voters. Indeed, focus group participants accepted the need for well-enforced regulations in order to ensure fair play by both businesses and citizens.²

With this quantitative survey we wanted to explore whether opinions have changed since 2018, and to ask a much wider group of younger Leave voters a series of questions relating to regulation. Other surveys have asked similar questions but, to our knowledge, this is the first research to focus specifically on the views of younger Leave voters in relation to regulation.

Below, we outline some of our key findings. We hope that these will be useful as decisions are taken about the country’s future outside the EU.

In the coming months Unchecked UK plans to explore the extent to which the Covid-19 crisis has impacted the UK public’s views about the importance of well-enforced regulations.

² These previously unpublished findings can be found here.
Summary of findings

This section details some of the most notable findings from the survey. Please refer to the full data tables (via the link on p25) to view all questions and responses, as well as differences in responses across factors such as age, sex, region and 2019 General Election vote.
1. Regulation is not considered to be an important priority by younger Leave voters

The graph below is a composite of two questions.

Q: Which of the following, if any, would you say is the MOST important issue facing the United Kingdom today?

Q: Which of the following, if any, do you see as other important issues facing the United Kingdom today?

Just 14% of younger Leave voters consider the ‘amount and nature of regulation in the UK’ to be an important issue facing the UK, with this option ranked 19th out of 20.

Health is the issue identified as ‘important’ by the largest number of respondents (53%), followed by crime (52%) and immigration and asylum (51%).

Reforming regulation ranks last of seven options as a ‘very important’ goal for government, again showing that it is not a high priority for younger Leave voters.

Implementing stricter border controls that reduce immigration into the UK was the goal which attracted the greatest number of ‘very important to me’ responses (53%).

When the scores for ‘very important’ and ‘fairly important’ are combined, the goal of increasing the number of police officers attracts the most support, chosen by 90% of respondents.

Conservative-voting respondents find goals like increasing the number of police officers (93%) and stricter border controls (89%) more important than reforming regulation (73%).

Labour-voting respondents find goals like increasing the number of police officers (86%) and making it more difficult for companies to avoid paying tax (84%) more important than reforming regulation (66%).
2. Younger Leave voters strongly agree that regulation is needed in order to ensure fair behaviour by business and individuals

Q: To what extent, if at all, do you agree, or disagree, with the following statements?

- Regulation holds the economy back
- Regulation restricts business activity
- When I hear ‘regulations’ I think of the phrase ‘red tape’
- We need regulation in order to protect people like me
- We need regulation to ensure there is fair behaviour by people and business

78% of younger Leave voters agree that ‘we need regulation to ensure there is fair behaviour by people and business’. 79% of Conservative-voting respondents and 80% of Labour-voting respondents agree that ‘we need regulation to ensure there is fair behaviour by people and business’. 61% of Conservative voters and 64% of Labour voters agree that ‘we need regulation in order to protect people like me’.

Views of Conservative-voting respondents (percentage agreeing)

3. Across a wide range of categories, younger Leave voters want more regulation or no change to current levels of regulation

Q: Thinking about the following areas, do you feel there should be more regulation, less regulation, or no change to the current level of regulation?

- Immigration and asylum regulations
- Environmental regulations
- Welfare and benefits regulations
- Tax regulations
- Banking regulations
- Food safety regulations
- Employment regulations
- Family and childcare regulations
- Pensions regulations
- Driving regulations
- Health and safety regulations

There is little support from younger Leave voters for reducing regulations in any of the areas above.

87% of respondents want to increase (75%) or maintain (12%) the amount of immigration and asylum regulations. 84% support increasing (47%) or maintaining (37%) food safety regulations, and 81% support increasing (60%) or maintaining (21%) environmental regulations. Support for increased regulation is lowest in relation to health and safety regulations, but even here, 66% of younger Leave voters are in favour of increasing (31%) or maintaining (35%) regulations.
4. Younger Leave voters want to maintain or increase EU standards and rules, across a wide range of areas

Q: Now that the UK has left the European Union, it will have the ability to abolish, keep or change laws that EU members are required to have. In your opinion, what should happen to each of the following types of regulation and standards?

The majority of Younger Leave voters support increasing or keeping EU-derived regulations and standards – with more than 70% supporting this across all categories.

83% of respondents were in favour of increasing (52%) or keeping (31%) food safety and cleanliness standards. 82% were in favour of increasing (51%) or keeping (31%) measures to ensure the safety of toys and childcare products. 81% were in favour of increasing (43%) or keeping (38%) laws to protect privacy and security of personal data. And 79% were in favour of increasing (27%) or keeping (52%) consumer protection laws.

Across these nine diverse categories, support for abolishing an EU regulation never exceeds 5%.

The majority of Conservative-voting respondents support increasing or keeping EU-derived regulations and standards across all categories above.

84% of Conservative-voting respondents are supportive of increasing (31%) or keeping (53%) regulations on food safety and cleanliness. 84% are supportive of increasing (27%) or keeping (57%) measures to ensure the safety of toys and childcare products. And 81% are supportive of increasing (59%) or keeping (42%) laws to protect privacy and security of personal data.

Across these nine categories, only a very small minority (6% or less) of Conservative-voting respondents support abolishing an EU regulation.

83% of Labour-voting respondents support increasing (33%) or keeping (50%) regulations on food safety and cleanliness. 83% support increasing (54%) or keeping (49%) rules to prevent injuries and health damage to people at work.

Q: Now that the UK has left the European Union, it will have the ability to abolish, keep or change laws that EU members are required to have. In your opinion, what should happen to each of the following types of regulation and standards? Continued

Support for regulation among Conservative-voting respondents (percentage selecting ‘keep’ or ‘increase’)

The majority of Conservative-voting respondents support increasing or keeping EU-derived regulations and standards across all categories above.

84% of Conservative-voting respondents are supportive of increasing (31%) or keeping (53%) regulations on food safety and cleanliness. 84% are supportive of increasing (27%) or keeping (57%) measures to ensure the safety of toys and childcare products. And 81% are supportive of increasing (59%) or keeping (42%) laws to protect privacy and security of personal data.

Across these nine categories, only a very small minority (6% or less) of Conservative-voting respondents support abolishing an EU regulation.

83% of Labour-voting respondents support increasing (33%) or keeping (50%) regulations on food safety and cleanliness. 83% support increasing (54%) or keeping (49%) rules to prevent injuries and health damage to people at work.
5. Younger Leave voters want to retain or strengthen specific EU regulations

Q: According to working time regulations, the number of hours someone can currently be required to work is limited to an average of 48 hours per week, though some types of work are excluded from this and people can opt out and choose to work longer.

On balance, which of the following statements comes closest to how you feel about the current limit on the number of hours someone can currently be required to work?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of hours a worker can be required to work should remain unchanged</td>
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<tr>
<td>The limit should be tightened to reduce the number of hours a worker can be required to work</td>
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<tr>
<td>The limit should be relaxed to increase the number of hours a worker can be required to work</td>
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<tr>
<td>The number of hours a worker can be required to work should be removed altogether</td>
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<td>Don’t know</td>
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Six out of ten younger Leave voters want to retain or tighten regulations on the number of hours someone can be required to work.

This question asked respondents about regulations that limit working time, and which implement the European Working Time Directive. 60% of respondents want the current limit to be tightened (29%) or for there to be no change (31%). Just 11% think these limits should be removed altogether.

Both Conservative-voting and Labour-voting respondents share these views, with 63% (Conservative) and 58% (Labour) saying the current limits should remain unchanged or be tightened. Just 12% (Conservative) and 5% (Labour) think the limit should be removed altogether.

Q: Now that the UK has left the European Union, it has the ability to abolish or keep in place certain laws. How strongly do you support or oppose the UK keeping in place existing EU laws in the following areas?

A majority of younger Leave voters support retaining European Union legal standards for bathing water quality, along with limits on farm pesticide use.

This question asked respondents for their views on two areas of EU law: on the quality of bathing water and on pesticide use in agriculture.

69% of respondents support retaining EU legal standards on bathing water quality (‘strongly support’ plus ‘tend to support’), and 60% support retaining EU legal standards on pesticide usage.
Q: Many wild areas and wildlife species in the UK are currently protected under European Union laws. Now that the UK has left the European Union these laws will no longer apply, and Britain will have to set its own environmental and wildlife protection laws. Do you think Britain should pass laws providing a level of protection for wild areas and wildlife species which is...

Two thirds of younger Leave voters want to see European Union legal protections for wildlife increased or maintained.

This question asked respondents for their views on whether Britain should be strengthening, maintaining or reducing protection for wildlife, compared to current EU laws.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) think that Britain should be either strengthening (42%) or maintaining (22%) the wildlife protection provided by EU laws, while just 8% think the government should adopt lower levels of protection.

6. Seven out of ten younger Leave voters think that government regulation of large businesses should be maintained or increased

Q: Do you think that government should regulate ‘large business’ more, less, or is the current level of regulation about right?

Younger Leave voters strongly support increasing or maintaining regulation of large businesses.

43% of Conservative-voting respondents and 51% of Labour-voting respondents think that large businesses should be regulated more. 30% of Conservative-voting respondents and 27% of Labour-voting respondents think that the current level of regulation of large businesses is about right.

Just 8% of Conservative-voting respondents and 3% of Labour-voting respondents think that large businesses should be regulated less.
Conclusion

This research shows that younger Leave voters do not see reforming regulation as a high priority for government, indeed it is less of a priority compared with other issues that they think government should tackle. Furthermore, these voters are strongly supportive of regulations on a wide range of issues, including those derived from EU law. This suggests that deregulation was not an important motivating factor for younger Leave voters in the 2016 referendum. This holds true for younger Leave voters who voted Conservative in the December 2019 General Election, and also for those who voted for the Labour Party.

About the authors

Emma Rose is director of Unchecked UK.

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Accessing the data

The full tables are available online here.