

Brexit: Finding the best possible compromise

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When politicians fail to bring peace to their society ravaged by the forces of bloody conflict they always blame 'the people' saying they wanted a deal that would bring peace but that 'their people' could not accept it. Most of the time such claims are lies, people generally do want peace and all the benefits that flow from peace and the problem really is that the peace deal 'on the table' is not in the interests of the political elites and their allies charged with negotiating a peace agreement. And so goes the world (1), is Brexit any different?

This is an empirical question. What compromise on Brexit could the people of the United Kingdom accept given the political will of their leaderships to take them down that road? In my first Brexit pilot peace poll I tested the views of Leavers against Remainers using the conflict resolution techniques that worked so well in Northern Ireland (2). But in the UK it is not the Protestant/Unionists and Catholic/Republicans that have to make peace it is the Conservative and Labour Party supporters. So in my second Brexit pilot peace poll I asked what political party the informant generally supported in addition to their preference to leave or remain in the European Union. Table 1 (in attached pdf below) lists the results for Leavers and Remainers and Table 2 lists the results for Conservative and Labour Party supporters for eight different options: the PM's Withdrawal Agreement, No-Deal, a Permanent Customs Union, a Norway-Style Deal, a Canada-Style Deal, Remaining in the EU, a Compromise Agreement, and a 'People's Vote' Referendum.

As with the first pilot the individual results can not be taken too seriously as the sample contains only one hundred interviews using Google Surveys and the level of 'No Answer' is rather high. But this problem can be mitigated by not looking at the raw per cent results but rather at the rank order of the results. In my experience when working on conflicts these rank orders do not change very much between small difficult to get samples and larger samples providing the samples are representative of the groups being compared. This is done in Table 3 (see attached pdf file) for Conservative and Leave voters and for Labour and Remain voters and the results are very revealing.

For the Labour party supporters the top three priorities are 'Remain in EU', a 'Customs Union' and a 'People's Vote' with a 'Norway-Style Deal' and some sort of 'Compromise Deal' fourth and fifth. The pattern of the rank order for Remainers is almost identical with a 'People's Vote' and 'Remain in EU' first and second but with a 'Customs Union' now down to fourth perhaps because, for Labour voters, a 'Customs Union' is party policy and that is why it is second on their list. Significantly 'No Deal' and the 'PMs Deal' is at the bottom of both the Labour party and Remainers lists with a 'Canada-Style Deal' just above them at sixth position.

However, a 'Canada-Style Deal' is first on both the Conservative and Leave lists this being the preferred option for so-called hard line Brexiters. So not much chance of a

compromise there. But the second choice for Conservatives is a 'Compromise Deal' and for them this would be the 'PMs Deal' third or a 'Norway-Style Deal' fourth. Interestingly the 'PMs Deal' drops to fifth place in the Leavers list as they are not always loyal Conservatives and hard line Leavers are content with 'No Deal' which is second on their list behind a 'Canada-Style Deal'. Significantly a 'Norway-Style Deal' is fourth on both the Leavers and Conservative lists and also fourth on the Labour list so, if this were a conflict resolution exercise to stop a violent conflict, then I would conclude that a 'Norway-Style Deal' could form the basis for a compromise peace agreement. Interestingly Grant, Rohr, Howarth, Lu and Pollitt (3) come to essentially the same conclusion in their study of these issues using a cost benefit analysis approach. Given that these rather different methodologies come to the same conclusion perhaps the results of these analysis should be taken more seriously as a solution to the Brexit problem now.

Another approach to resolving this problem proposed by a number of Labour and Conservative party MPs is to combine the top preference for Labour party supporters with one of the top preferences for the Conservative party supporters namely a 'People's Vote' to remain in the EU against the 'PMs Deal' approved in the House of Commons (4). From a conflict resolution perspective, in a 'fighting killing war' this strategy probably would not work as we could not expect the parties to that war to respect the result. But it might work for Brexit. Certainly it is worth a try and if it doesn't work and if everyone is still dissatisfied with the result then they can always fall back on the 'Norway-Style Deal' compromise.

Google Survey Data Files:

This Brexit Pilot Peace Poll was collected between 17 February and 19 February, 2019. The full data files for all three of these polls are available here:

<https://peacepolls.etinu.net/cgi-bin/publications?instanceID=1>

References

(1) Irwin, C. J., (2012) *The People's Peace*, CreateSpace, CA. Available at:

<http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/002539.pdf>

(2) Irwin, C. J., (2019) A way through the Brexit impasse? a Brexit pilot peace poll, *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 7 February. Available at: <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/a-way-through-the-brexite-impasse-a-pilot-brexite-peace-poll/>

(3) Grant J., Rohr C., Howarth D., Lu H and Pollitt A., (2018) *What sort of Brexit do the British people want?* The Policy Institute at King's and RAND Europe. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/publications/what-sort-of-brexite-do-the-british-people-want-2018.pdf>

(4) Helm, T., (2019) Back May's deal, then hold people's vote: plan to end Brexit deadlock, *The Guardian*, Saturday 9 February. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/feb/09/back-theresa-may-brexite-deal-then-hold-peoples-vote-backbencher-plan>

Table 1. Leavers and Remainers per cent 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable' for different options to resolve Brexit

Leave	No Deal	Canada Style Deal	PMs Deal	Compromise Deal	Customs Union	Norway Style Deal	Remain In EU	People's Vote
Essential	14.4	5.0	7.0	8.4	5.5	2.6	0.0	2.6
Desirable	4.8	11.7	5.0	30.2	1.2	6.7	2.6	1.2
Acceptable	26.4	27.2	12.5	13.2	22.5	22.5	0.0	2.9
Tolerable	14.7	20.4	23.6	4.9	12.0	17.4	7.6	2.6
Unacceptable	16.3	8.2	42.0	18.4	31.7	25.5	80.5	81.4
NA	23.5	27.5	10.0	25.0	27.2	25.3	9.3	9.3

Remain	No Deal	Canada Style Deal	PMs Deal	Compromise Deal	Customs Union	Norway Style Deal	Remain In EU	People's Vote
Essential	24.4	21.4	29.2	15.5	43.5	2.4	54.5	55.2
Desirable	9.5	15.1	4.2	26.0	16.7	46.6	19.8	15.5
Acceptable	0.0	20.0	5.3	6.1	18.0	24.9	1.6	10.9
Tolerable	0.0	17.0	2.7	32.2	1.3	4.1	5.3	0.0
Unacceptable	52.5	13.0	39.5	6.5	4.1	13.6	5.0	15.6
NA	13.5	13.5	19.1	13.6	16.4	8.3	13.8	2.7

Table 2. Labour and Conservative per cent 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable' for different options to resolve Brexit

Labour	No Deal	Canada Style Deal	PMs Deal	Compromise Deal	Customs Union	Norway Style Deal	Remain In EU	People's Vote
Essential	30.5	30.5	22.8	0.0	21.5	0.0	51.0	37.6
Desirable	1.0	13.8	5.3	29.5	4.3	36.6	1.7	6.0
Acceptable	7.5	0.0	0.0	11.8	30.2	17.7	13.8	13.8
Tolerable	0.0	8.4	7.5	13.8	1.7	1.7	0.0	0.0
Unacceptable	28.9	15.2	25.6	6.1	3.4	11.9	15.2	17.6
NA	32.1	32.1	38.8	38.8	38.8	32.1	18.3	25.0

Conservative	No Deal	Canada Style Deal	PMs Deal	Compromise Deal	Customs Union	Norway Style Deal	Remain In EU	People's Vote
Essential	27.5	0.0	12.6	27.9	19.0	5.4	5.4	17.2
Desirable	11.8	24.0	15.9	27.5	5.4	11.5	0.0	9.6
Acceptable	6.3	34.9	12.6	19.7	5.4	23.4	3.5	0.0
Tolerable	6.3	18.7	23.6	0.9	18.8	24.2	11.8	6.4
Unacceptable	42.7	10.7	29.1	24.1	45.3	34.5	73.2	66.8
NA	5.4	11.7	6.1	0.0	6.1	0.9	6.1	0.0

Table 3. Rank order for Labour and Conservative options [per cent 'Essential' + 'Desirable' + 'Acceptable' + 'Tolerable'] for resolving Brexit

	To Resolve Brexit?	Labour	To Resolve Brexit	Remain
1st	Remain in EU	66.5	People's Vote	81.6
2nd	Customs Union	57.7	Remain in EU	81.2
3rd	People's Vote	57.4	Compromise Deal	79.8
4th	Norway-Style Deal	56.0	Customs Union	79.5
5th	Compromise Deal	55.1	Norway Style-Deal	78.0
6th	Canada-Style Deal	52.7	Canada-Style Deal	73.5
7th	No Deal	39.0	PMs Deal	41.4
8th	PMs Deal	35.6	No Deal	33.9

	To Resolve Brexit?	Conservative	To Resolve Brexit	Leave
1st	Canada-Style Deal	77.6	Canada-Style Deal	64.3
2nd	Compromise Deal	76.0	No Deal	60.3
3rd	PMs Deal	64.7	Compromise Deal	56.7
4th	Norway-Style Deal	64.5	Norway Style-Deal	49.2
5th	No Deal	51.9	PMs Deal	48.1
6th	Customs Union	48.6	Customs Union	43.4
7th	People's Vote	33.2	Remain in EU	10.2
8th	Remain in EU	20.7	People's Vote	9.3