

Prejudice and the Brexit vote

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My, my postgraduate researcher who was doing a PhD with me, Katie Sullivan was exploring how people's conscious explicit prejudices and their subconscious, implicit prejudice influence people's behaviour and attitudes. And we were exploring issues such as immigration, terrorism, use of public resources. And so when the Brexit vote in the referendum came along, it was one of those areas that we thought would be of interest to research because particularly cast our minds back The final few weeks of the referendum campaign in particular, there was a lot of focus on issues of immigration and control of borders, as everyone remembers the infamous breaking point poster. But there were many other aspects that went back quite a number of years. So, social surveys have shown quite a dramatic reversal in the 10 years prior to the votes from being largely positive or neutral on issues of immigration in about 2004 2005, to becoming quite negative in around 2014. And when you add in the Office for National Statistics, figures that were released just before the vote, showing high levels of migration to the UK, it wasn't particularly a surprise that the vote turned out the way that it did. But what we wanted to do was try and identify some of the factors that may have influenced people in their decisions that they made. And in our case that was examining their attitudes towards other groups in psychology, there are quite a number of fairly well established theories that go back many years which helped to explain not just people's prejudices, but their attitudes towards different groups their attitudes towards the use of resources within society. So, there are theories such as realistic group conflict, authoritarian personalities, the desires of people to for members of a society to conform to certain ways and beliefs. And there are theories about the beliefs in superiority of groups and nations over others. And over the last two or three years, particularly since the vote there have been some really interesting research studies being carried out by people such as garlic, desireless me Grodd Swami and many Others who are finding these elements, which appear to be linked to the Brexit vote, and then the leave vote in particular, which correlate with issues such as authoritarianism, Islamophobia, nationalism. And so these findings alongside our own non conscious and unconscious prejudice, they've started to explore how some of these issues may have played a role in the vote and subsequent issues that have arisen since such as the increases in reports of hate crime and abuse. With our studies. I suppose it is important to start any discussion when it comes to prejudice by clarifying that prejudice doesn't necessarily equate to racism or xenophobia, and that we approach our research from this point of view that there can be different types of prejudice and they can manifest themselves in different ways. So for our own research we use a dual process model which was designed by Leon something quite a few years ago. And it allows us to categorise people based upon their implicit unconscious attitudes, which we usually measure with something like the Implicit Association test, and also their explicit unconscious prejudices that they're more aware of. And so we usually measure these through questionnaires. And it allows us to put these two types of measurement together to classify people beyond just a simple prejudice, not prejudice classification. So for example, we can identify people who are known in social psychology lectures, aversive racists, and these are people who don't consciously want to appear to be prejudiced, but too often feel uncomfortable around people from other races or cultures. And that can lead them to treating these people differently when they meet up with them. And so we took these measures of implicit and explicit prejudice. And we quite simply asked people in online study so just over 200 participants to complete these measures and to tell us whether they had voted, leave or remain and 200. It may seem like a small sticker but especially when you're talking about the the millions who voted, but from a statistical sampling measure, it works quite well. In terms of being able to measure prejudice quite accurately, we found a strong link between people who were scoring high on measures of explicit prejudice and voting leave at around 70 to 80%. They fall into these categories that we call principled conservatives and modern racist. And we then found the converse with remain voters tended to fall into these categories, that we're low on explicit prejudice. We also then examine people's voting behaviour. In political affiliation, so we asked them the which party they affiliated themselves with. And our findings tended to map on to the national surveys of how

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people had voted to a party members, which gave us a bit of support, I suppose, to about the robustness of the data that we were actually our findings of people's voting behaviour, but also, their political allegiance mapped on quite strongly with what we were seeing in the national surveys across the UK. Everything I've spoken about so far has been very much from a psychology perspective. And to be honest, it sounds quite negative. And this isn't certainly isn't what we wants to come out of this. So one of the key conclusions and the key reasons for writing this paper in the communications journal was because we wanted to expand this beyond the near Psychological explanation. So, yes, we believe that prejudice and also from the other research issues like authoritarians, styles and nationalism, they did have a role to play, they do have a role to play in the Brexit issues even as we go forward. But there are so many other issues which are involved as well. So there are areas of the country which feel left behind people's life chances, their education. All of these have a role to play in this. And so our key conclusion really is that in order for us to explore Brexit and the issues that will undoubtedly continue, it needs to be done in a multidisciplinary fashion, but from a psychological perspective, but also from a sociological perspective, political, economic arguments, all of these need to be brought together to help us understand and address the issues that are going to undoubtedly be with us in our society. many years to come.