Were Millennials "screwed by older generations" at the EU referendum? Evidence from the British Election Study (BES)

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The Intergenerational Foundation

The Intergenerational Foundation (IF) is a London-based, politically neutral think tank which exists to draw attention to the problems facing younger and future generations in Great Britain and Europe. IF is funded by no-strings donations from individuals, charitable trusts, foundations and corporate partners.

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NEWS

EU Referendum Results: Young 'Screwed By Older Generations' As Polls Suggest 75% Backed Remain

'Thanks, Granny'.

🕐 24/06/2016 10:32 | **Updated** 24 June 2016

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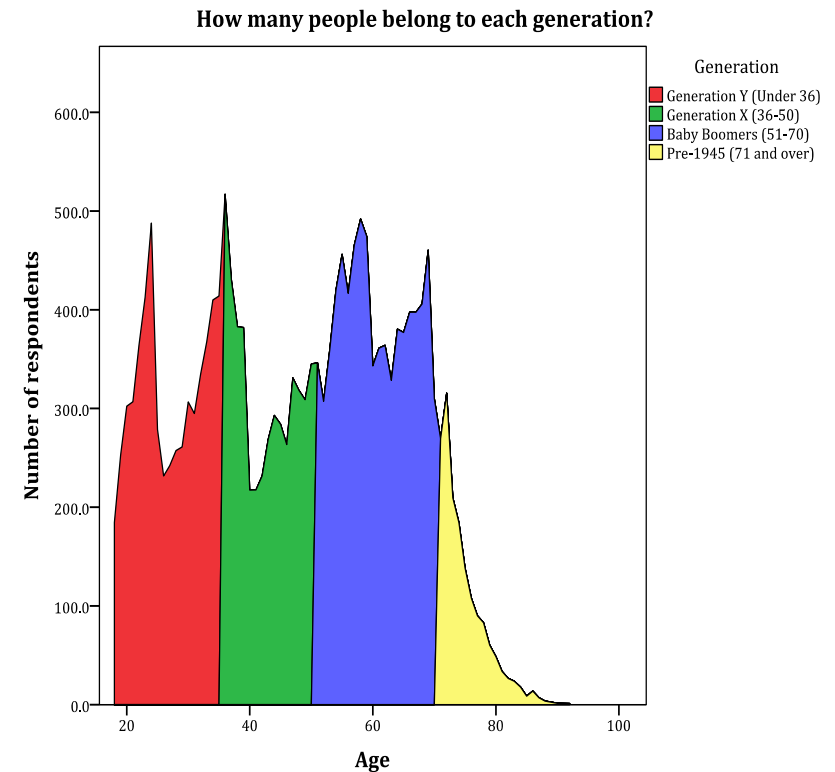Louise Ridley 🐦
Assistant news editor at The Huffington Post UK

Research questions:
1. How did the different generations vote?
2. Why did Millennials favour Remain so heavily?
3. How much variation was there within the Millennial generation?
4. Conclusion
5. Update: How do different generations feel Brexit is going?
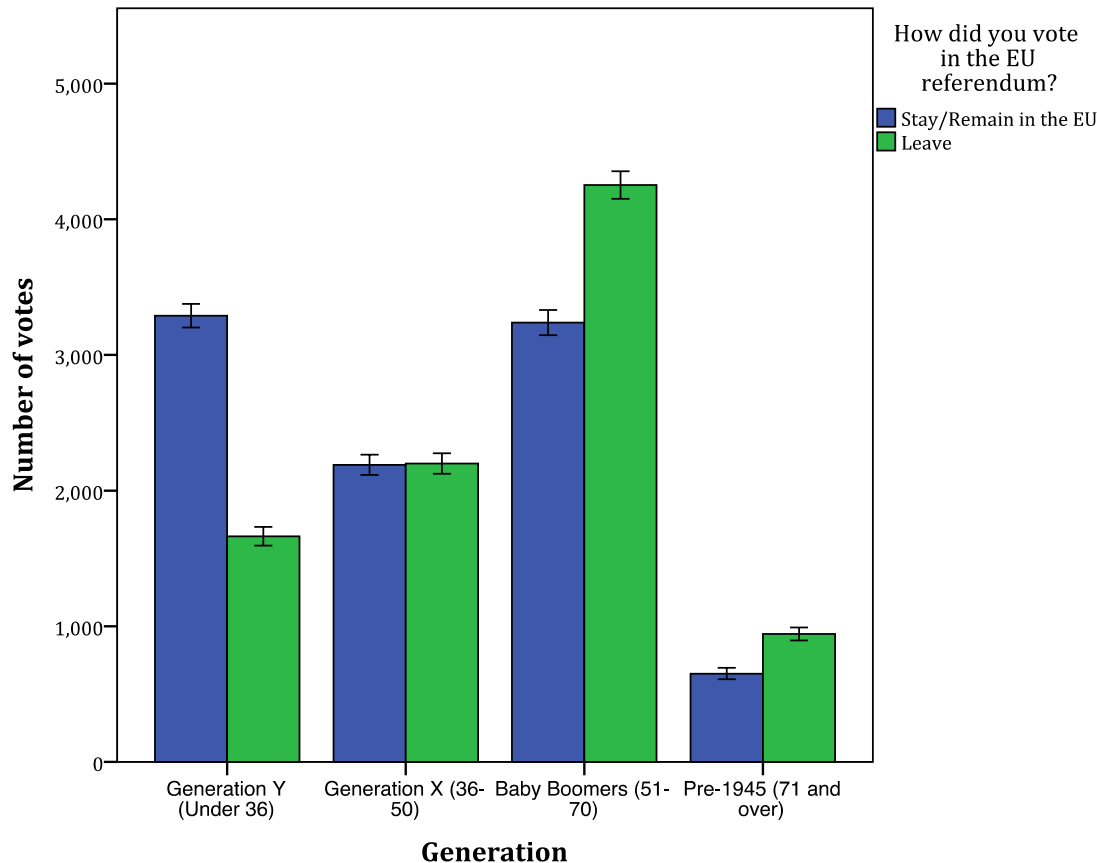
Background: What do we mean by "generation"?

"a group of people who share a time and space in history that lends them a collective persona" (McCrindle, 2009)

Generation	Years of Birth	Approximate age on EU Referendum day
Generation Y	1980–2000	Under 36
Generation X	1966–1979	36–50
Baby Boomers	1945–65	51–70
Pre-1945	Before 1945	71 and above

How many people belong to each generation?

Generation
- Generation Y (Under 36)
- Generation X (36-50)
- Baby Boomers (51-70)
- Pre-1945 (71 and over)

1. How did the different generations vote?

How did different generations vote in the EU referendum?

- BES Wave 9 Data; (n=18,423, weighted using BES "core" sample weight, error bars=95% CI).

- Supports the findings of a strong age gradient from most post-vote polls (e.g. YouGov (2016), Lord Ashcroft Polls (2016) and Survation (2016)).

- Millennials were 23.2% more likely to vote Remain than members of the Baby Boomer generation, 95% CI [21.5%-24.9%]; and 25.6% more likely to vote Remain than members of the pre-1945 generation, 95% CI [22.9%-28.4%].

- However, many more Millennials actually voted Leave than over-70s did, and probable more Baby Boomers voted Remain than Millennials did because of different sizes of generations (and turnout).
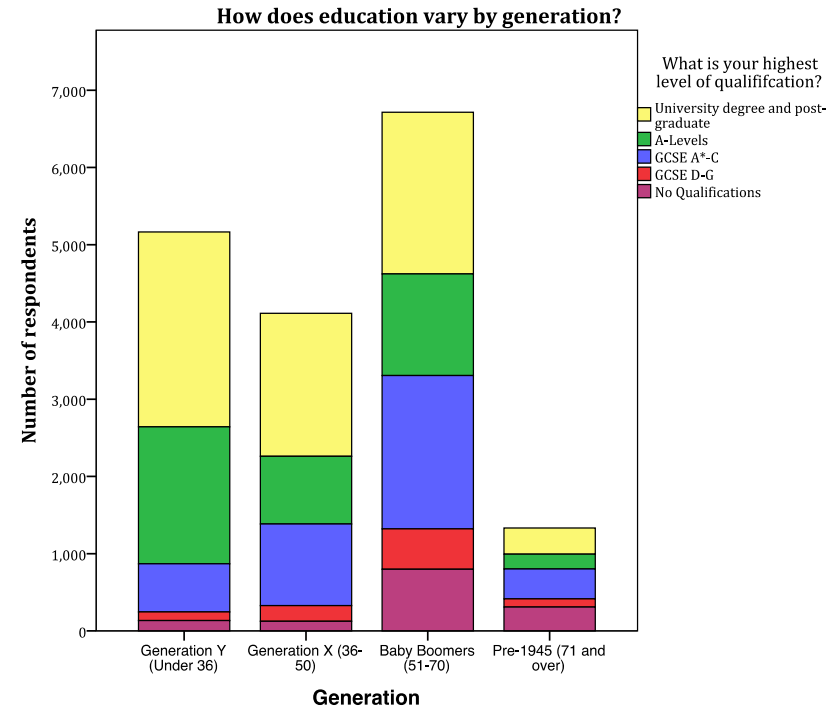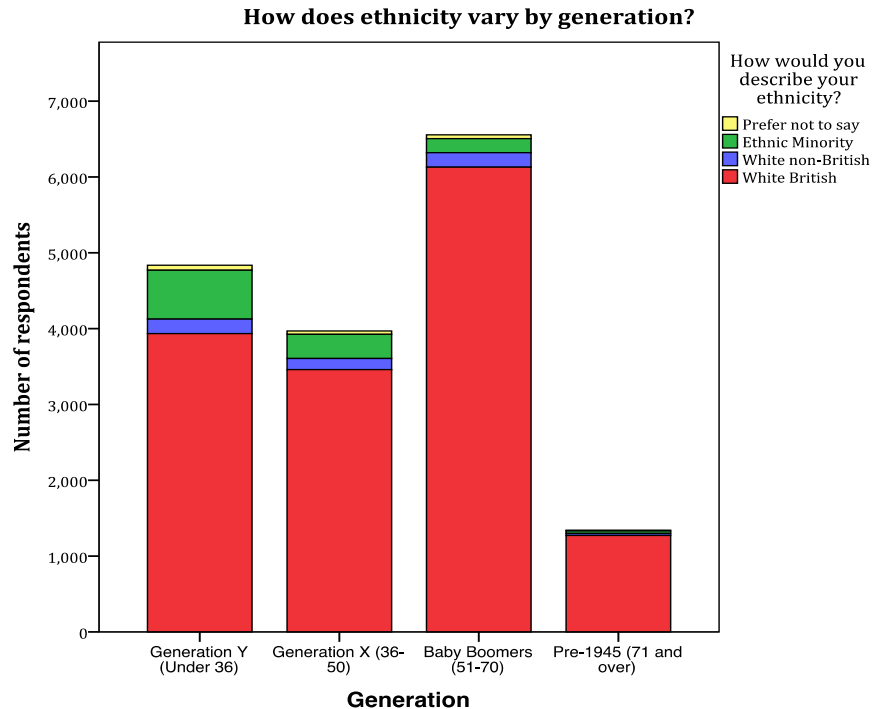
2. Why did young people vote for Remain so heavily?

- The "Left Behind" analysis: *"support for Brexit was strongest in areas where a large percentage of the population did not have any qualifications and were ill-equipped to thrive amid a post-industrial and increasingly competitive economy that favours those with skills"* (Goodwin and Heath, 2016).

- Yet, the economic fortunes of young adults have broadly declined over the recent decades:
  - Over the decade to 2015/15, average net pensioner incomes grew by 19% in real terms, compared to a 10% decline in the real incomes of working-age households (House of Commons Library, 2016);
  - People born in the early 1980s were the first post-war birth cohort to begin their working lives with average earnings that were no higher than the previous generations' had been at the same age, and by their early 30s (which coincided with the EU referendum for many of this group) they had only accumulated half as much household wealth as the previous generation had on average because of lower rates of home ownership and reduced access to final salary pension schemes (Cribb et al. 2016).

- Demographic/socioeconomic characteristics vs personal attitudes? (Kaufman, 2016)

Binary logistic regression analysis using BES Wave 9 data – c.13,000 respondents per model – undertaken in IBM SPSS	
Model	Variables
Model 1	Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Education, Region, Household Income, Housing Tenure, Disability
Model 2	All above + European and British identity scales

Key findings(1):

How does ethnicity vary by generation?
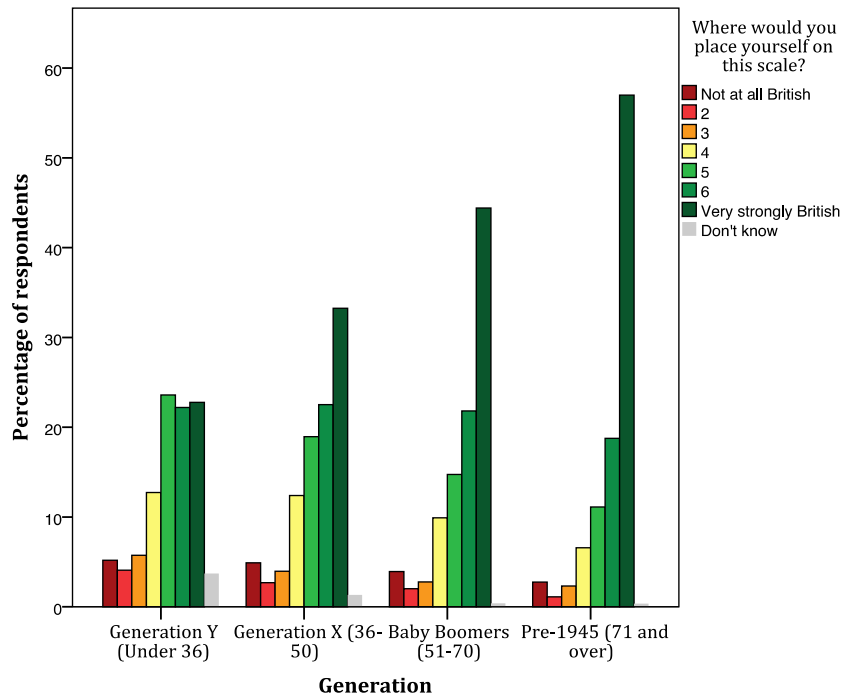
How does education vary by generation?

- Education and ethnicity were the two demographic variables which had the largest impact on someone's likelihood of voting Remain:
  - Model 2 - Voter with no qualifications over 2x as likely to vote Leave as someone with a degree or above;
  - Model 2 – Ethnic minority voter only half as likely to vote Leave as a white British voter;
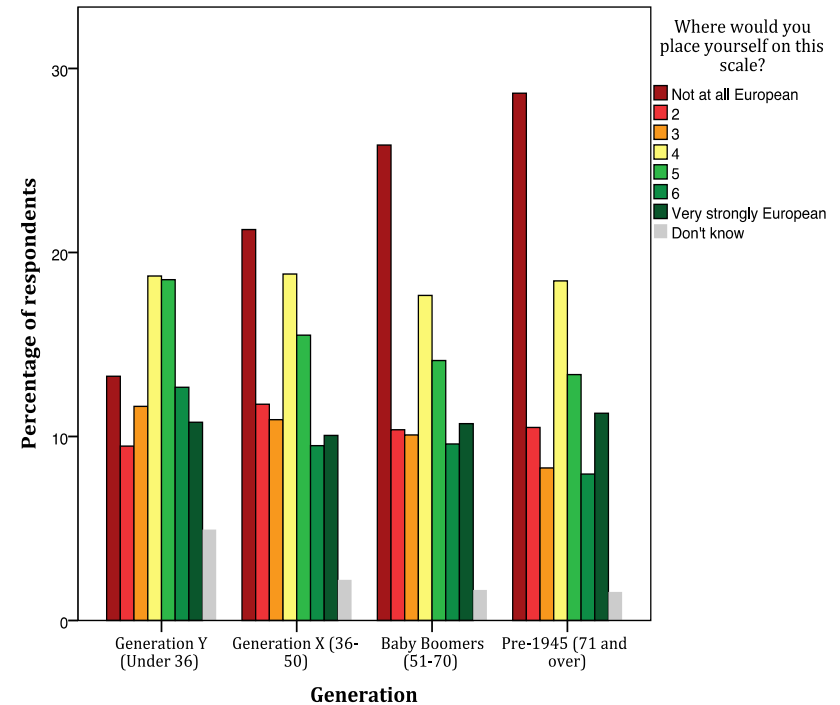 - Model 2 – Effect of age by itself was significant but extremely small.

Key findings(2):

To what extent do different generations feel "British"?

To what extent do different generations feel "European"?
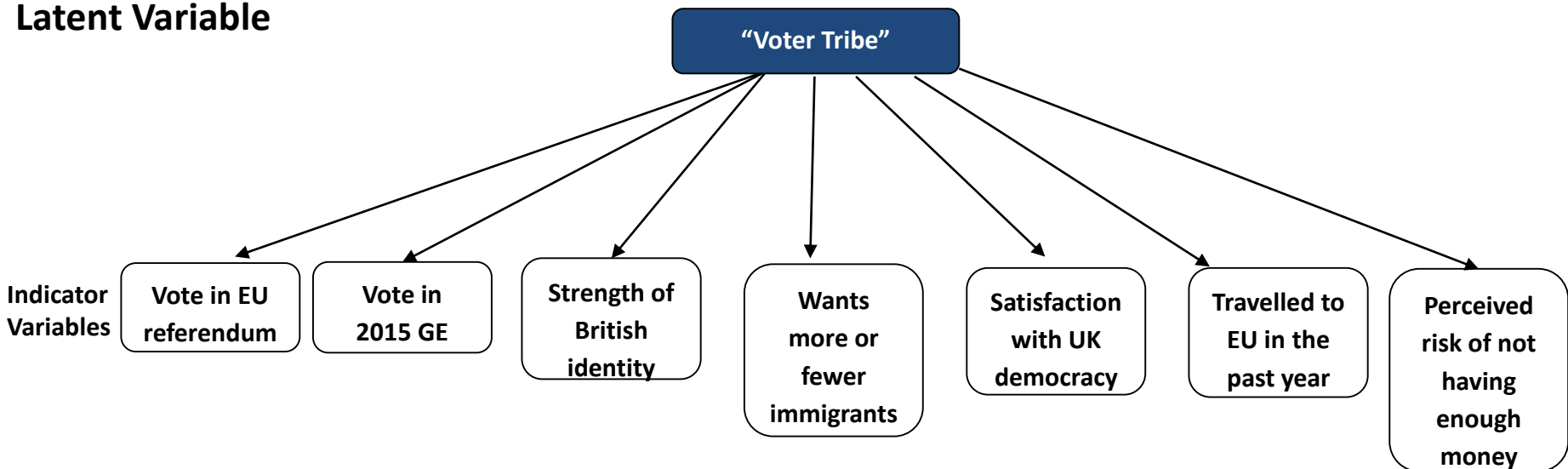
- Adding national/European identity variables improved the cases correctly allocated by the model from 64.9% to 78.6%:
  - Somebody who said they felt "Not at all European" was almost 80 times more likely to vote Leave than someone who said they felt "Very strongly European" ;
  - Someone who said they felt "Very strongly British" was 3.3 times more likely to vote Leave than someone who felt "Not at all British."
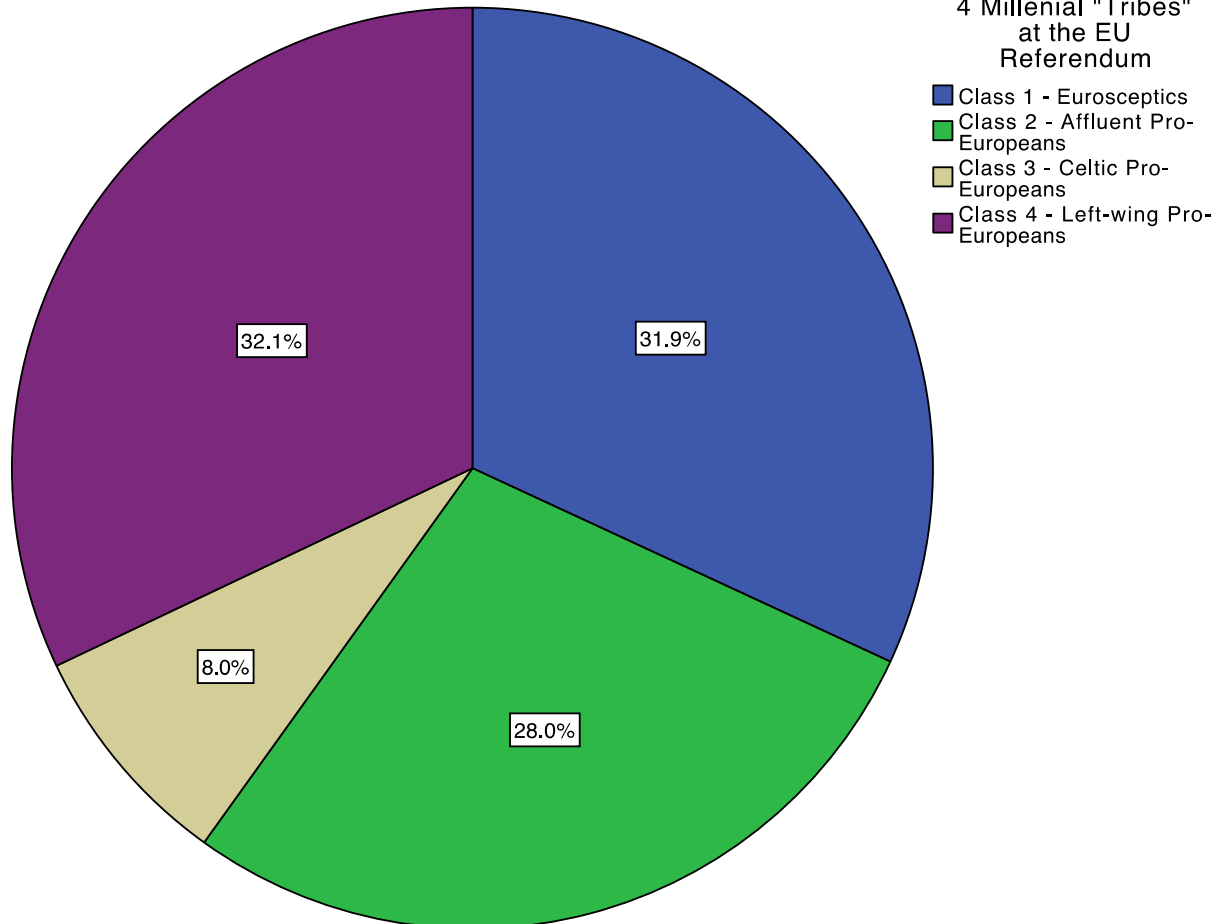
3. How much variation was there within the Millennial generation?

- Latent class analysis was used to divide Millennial voters who responded to BES Wave 9 into distinct groups on the basis of their shared characteristics, following the methodology established by Swales (2017).

- 1,878 Millennials who said they voted in the EU referendum were divided into distinct classes or "tribes" of voters using the poLCA package in r on the basis of 7 manifest variables and 6 demographic covariates (ethnicity, education, region, household income, housing tenure and disability) which can help to predict which class someone falls into.

- A 4 class model was chosen from options ranging from 2 classes to 8 classes on the basis of its Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) statistic (Cooper and Ajoku, 2017).

Latent Variable

Who are the 4 "tribes"?

4 Millenial "Tribes"
at the EU
Referendum

Class 1 - Eurosceptics
Class 2 - Affluent Pro-Europeans
Class 3 - Celtic Pro-Europeans
Class 4 - Left-wing Pro-Europeans

31.9%
28.0%
8.0%
32.1%

Class 1 – Eurosceptics

Manifest values:
- The roughly 1/3 of Millennials who voted to leave the EU;
- Almost 1/3 either voted for UKIP or didn't vote at the 2015 GE;
- Much higher preference for reducing immigration than other classes (almost 87% want lower immigration);
- Very strong British identity;
- Report highest levels of satisfaction with UK democracy (because of Leave vote?);
- Much lower share has visited the EU than in other classes.

Covariates:
- Over 90% are White British;
- Lowest level of educational attainment of the four classes (under 40% attended university)
- Evenly distributed across regions;
- Not markedly poorer than other classes;
- Largest share living with parents or social renting;
- Over 1 in 5 report some degree of disability.

Class 2 – Affluent Pro-Europeans

Manifest values:
- 96% voted for Remain;
- Almost evenly split between Conservatives and Labour (20% supported Lib Dems) at 2015 GE;
- Immigration not a big issue: almost evenly divided between wanting more, the same or less immigration;
- British identity almost as strong as among Eurosceptics;
- Nearly 60% are satisfied with UK democracy;
- 75% have visited another EU country;
- Very low risk of poverty.

Covariates:
- Over 90% are White British;
- Best-educated of 4 classes (over 77% attended university)
- Almost 50% live in just 3 regions: London, SE and East of England (22% in London);
- Wealthiest class – 1/3 have household incomes above £60,000 per year;
- 75% are either mortgagors or private renters;
- Very low levels of disability.

Class 3 – Celtic Pro-Europeans

Manifest values:
- 88% voted for Remain;
- Around 70% voted for SNP or Plaid Cymru at 2015 GE;
- Over 62% say they want higher immigration;
- Almost 80% report very weak British identity;
- Nearly 90% are very dissatisfied with UK democracy (feeling underrepresented?);
- Almost 70% have visited another EU country;

Covariates:
- Virtually all live in Scotland and Wales (also very small number in the South West)
- Large share of White non-British;
- Very well-educated (over 72% attended university)
- Very similar income levels to Eurosceptics;
- Most are either mortgagors or private renters;
- Low levels of disability.

Class 4 – Left-wing Pro-Europeans

Manifest values:
- Nearly 100% voted for Remain;
- Almost 50% voted for Labour and 28% for the Greens at the 2015 GE (11% didn't vote);
- Two-thirds say they want higher immigration;
- Only 55% say they have a strong British identity;
- Extreme dissatisfaction with UK democracy – almost 90% dissatisfied;
- Highest proportion say they are at risk of not having enough money (over 50%)

Covariates:
- Over 15% belong to ethnic minorities;
- Lower educational attainment than other pro-European classes (only 60% attended university)
- Over 1/3 live in London and the South East;
- Significantly poorer than other classes – 35% have household income below £20,000 per year;
- Largest share of private renters (44%) and almost a quarter live with parents;
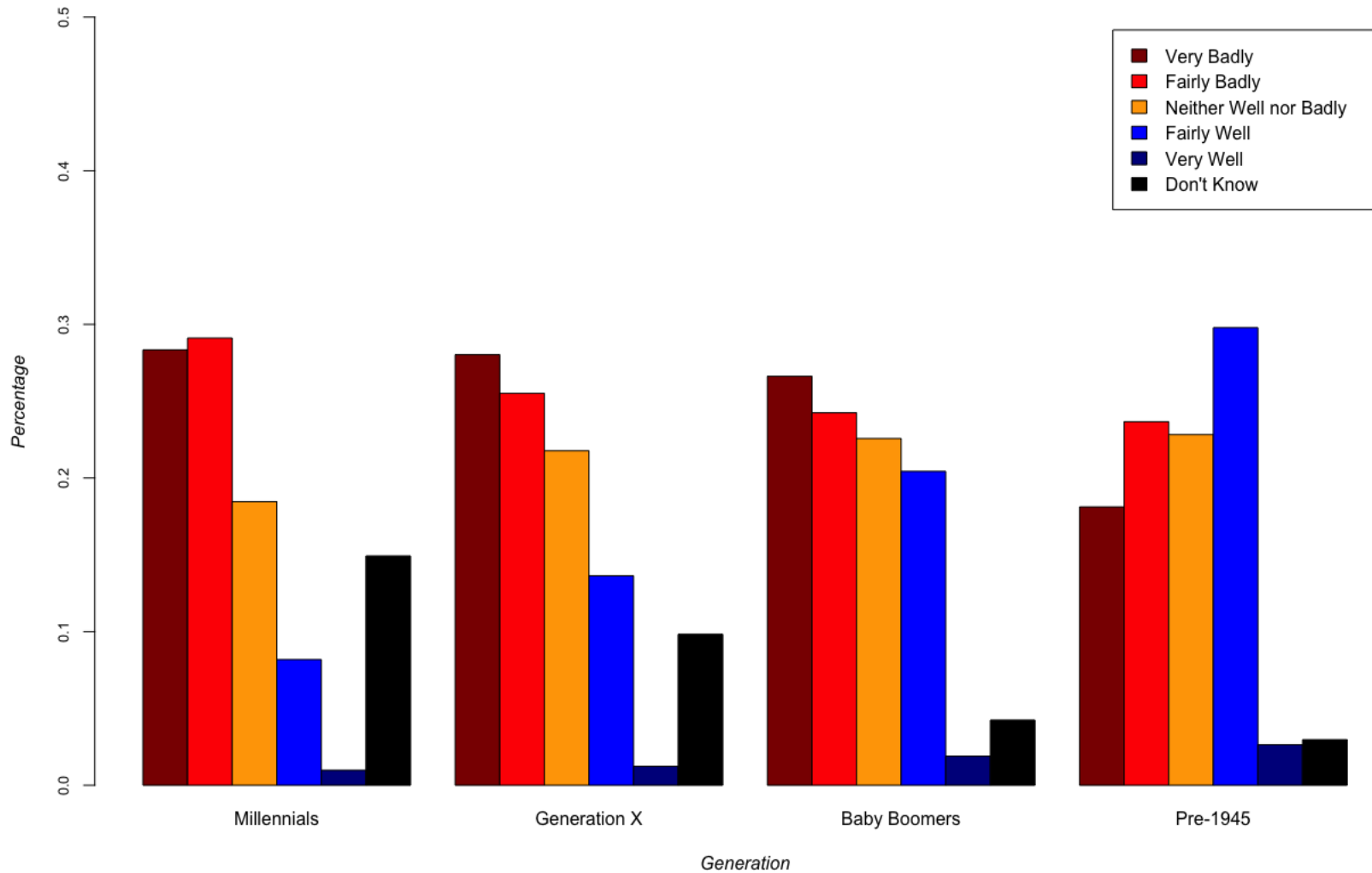- 25% report some degree of disability.

4. Conclusions

- Analysis of the EU referendum vote reveals important divides both between different generations and within the Millennial generation themselves.

- Millennials did not favour Remain because of age *per se*: people of all ages who were highly educated, non-White British and had a more pluralistic national identity favoured Remain - characteristics which were found disproportionately among Millennials.

- **Million dollar question: will public opinion become more pro-European as the population becomes more highly educated and ethnically diverse in the coming decades (evidence from other EU countries suggests better-educated people are more in favour of European integration at all ages). Or will Millennials still become more Eurosceptic with age?**

- Around a third of Millennials are eurosceptics who would favour a "hard" Brexit, but the remaining two-thirds are strongly anti-Brexit.

- Given that they will have to live with the consequences of Brexit for longer than any other generation who voted in the referendum, the voice of Millennials needs to be heard as Britain negotiates its future relationship with the EU.
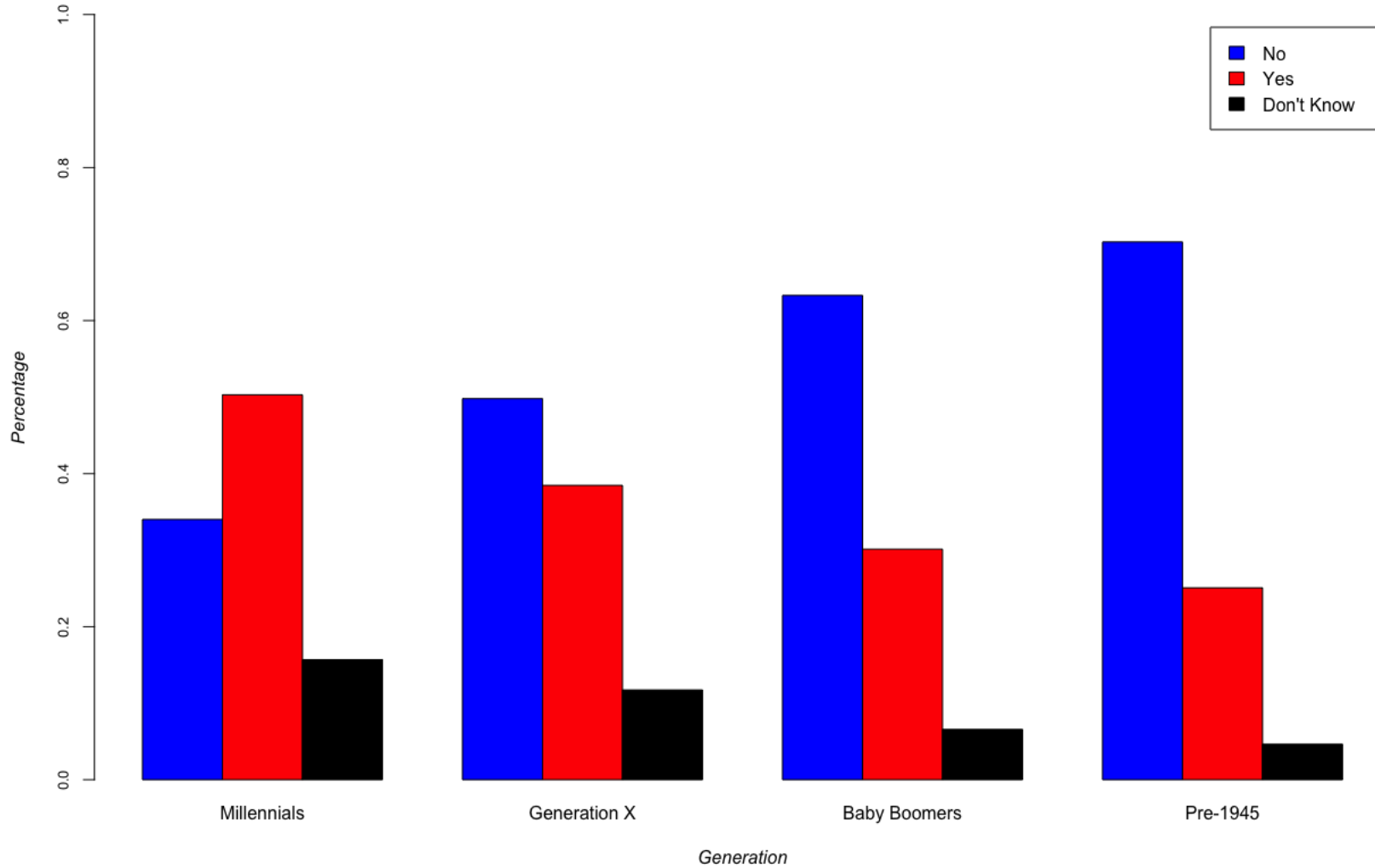
5. Update: How do different generations feel Brexit is going?

'How well do you think the UK government is handling the process of Britain's exit from the EU?' by Generation (BES Internet Panel Wave 14, n=31,063)

'Do you think there should be a second referendum on Britain's membership of the EU?' by Generation (BES Internet Panel Wave 14, n=31,063)

Brexit Priority: Access to the Single Market vs Controlling Immigration by Generation (BES Internet Panel Wave 14, n=31,063)