

# The Public Opinion Monitor

## UK membership of the European Union



This month's edition of the Public Opinion Monitor looks at two new areas: attitudes to coalition and attitudes towards the UK's membership of the EU. The increased levels of UKIP support and the recent announcements on membership referendums have made these issues increasingly important in British politics.

The topic of EU membership has deeply divided the nation, with strong feelings on both sides. Those that support the EU membership tend to do so because they believe it is good for trade, whereas those that want to leave the EU feel this would allow stronger control of our borders and would reduce 'interference' in the British justice system.

However, it is perceived as a complex issue about which the public is not sufficiently knowledgeable. Only a fifth of people are of the opinion that people in the UK understand how the EU works and two-fifths feel that people in the UK are not knowledgeable enough about the EU to be able to decide in a referendum whether the UK should be in or out of the European Union.

Feel free to contact us for further details on this data or any of the other research we conduct.

Contents Vol. XV, January 2013

**2 Voting intentions** – A look at public voting intentions over the last couple of years

**3 EU referendum** – Levels of public support for a referendum on Europe and how people would vote if a referendum was held

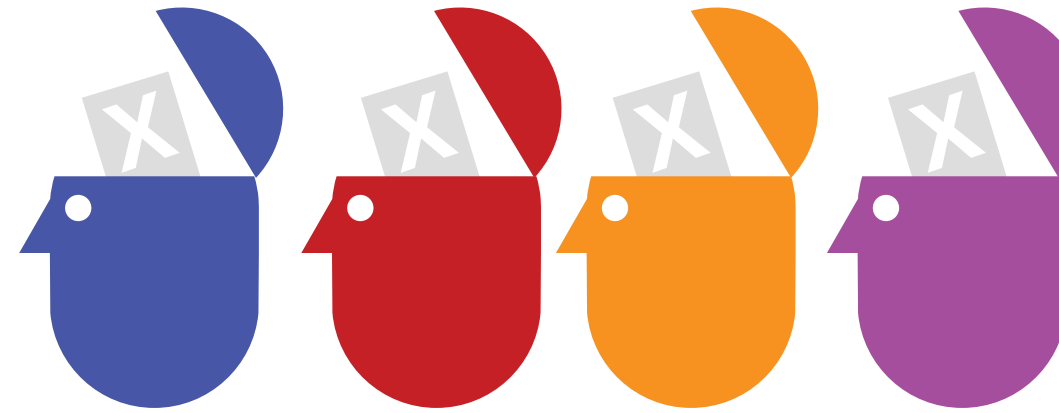
**4 Arguments for and against EU membership** – Reasons for people wanting to be in or out of the EU

**5 Thoughts on the EU** – General attitudes of the population towards the European Union



**Nick Howat**  
Head of Social and Political Attitudes  
TNS BMRB  
6 More London Place  
London SE1 2QY  
t +44 (0)20 7656 5742  
nick.howat@tns-bmr.co.uk  
www.tns-bmr.co.uk

# Voting intentions



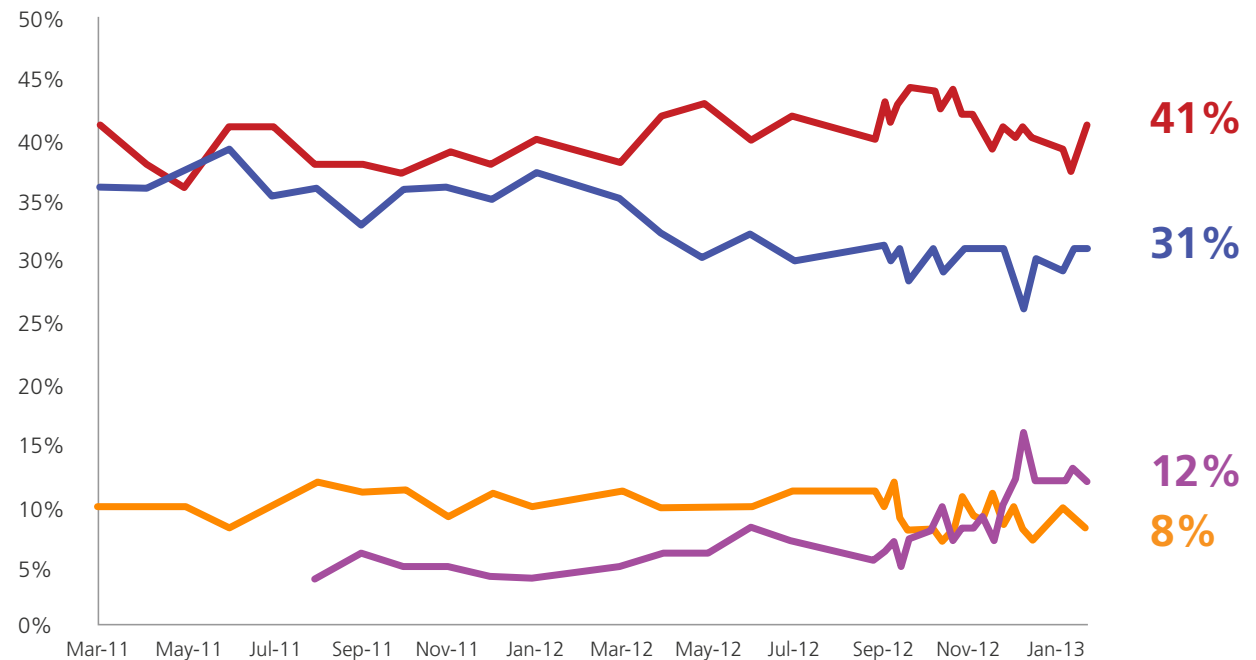
Labour's lead over the Conservative Party currently stands at ten points. Whilst this is down from a peak of 16 points, which occurred just before the start of the party conference season, it has remained relatively stable over the last few months and does not appear to be narrowing further.

The level of support for UKIP continues to stand at around 12% and they are still the party with the third highest level of support ahead of the Liberal Democrats.

Over the coming months, it will be interesting to see whether David Cameron's stronger stance on the European Union can shore up Conservative support and reverse the gains UKIP made in the latter part of 2012.



**If a general election were to be held tomorrow which party, if any, would you vote for?**



Base: Varies by month. 1,237 on 24th January 2013.

Labour Conservative Lib Dem UKIP

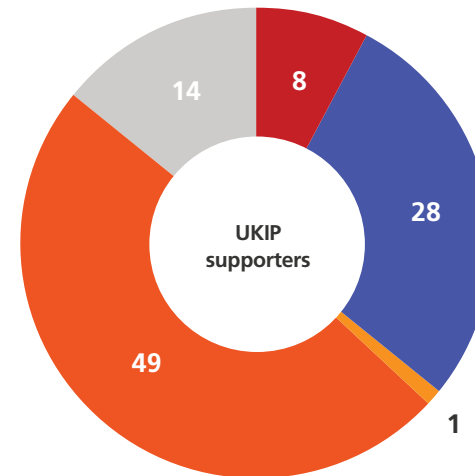
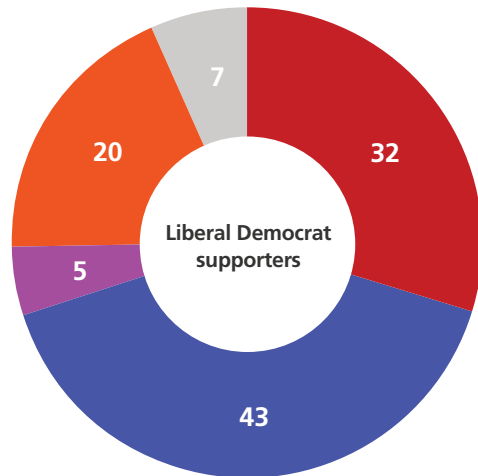
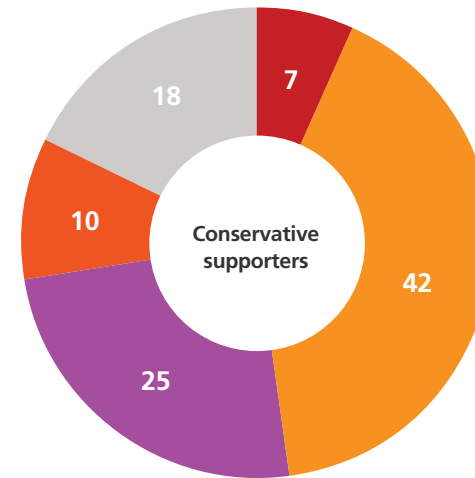
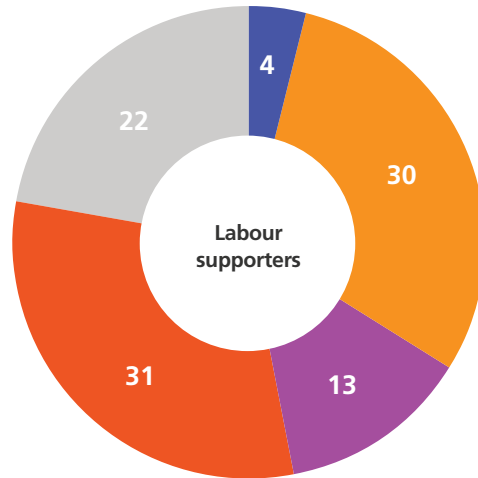


# Voting intentions



**If the party you most prefer failed to win a majority, would you prefer them to... %**

Although Nigel Farage has recently suggested that in 2015 he would be open to UKIP being part of a coalition government, this does not appear to be something that the electorate would favour. If at the next general election the Conservative party did not get an outright majority, Conservative supporters would currently favour forming a coalition with the Liberal Democrats (42%) rather than forming a coalition with UKIP (25%). Furthermore, UKIP supporters would generally prefer to go into opposition (49%) rather than form a coalition with the Conservative Party (28%).



- Form a coalition government with the Labour party
- Form a coalition government with the Conservative party
- Form a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats
- Form a coalition government with UKIP
- Not form a coalition government and go in to opposition
- Don't know

Base: Labour (330), Conservatives (271), Liberal Democrats (64), UKIP (101).



# EU referendum

If a referendum were to be held on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union, more people are currently in favour of the UK leaving the EU than staying a member. Currently, 41% of voters are in favour of leaving the EU, whilst 30% would like the UK to remain a member. However, a fifth (22%) are undecided suggesting that the eventual outcome remains unclear.

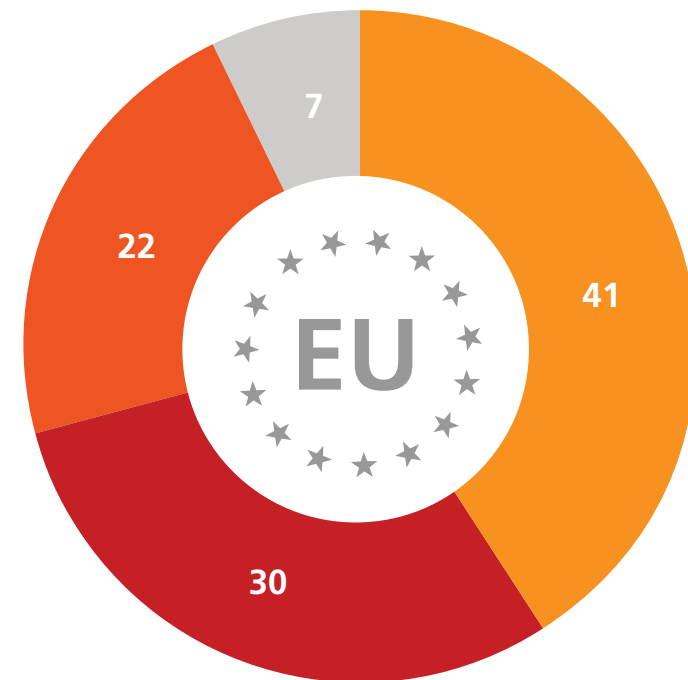
Whilst voters in favour of leaving the EU are in slightly larger numbers overall, the issue is very divisive across party lines. Labour and Liberal Democrat voters tend to favour the UK remaining in the EU (47% and 57% support respectively). Conservative voters are more likely to be in favour of exiting the EU (49%) and UKIP voters unsurprisingly hold the most negative view of the EU, with 91% of their supporters in favour of a UK exit.

The public generally feel that holding a referendum would be the best way for the United Kingdom to decide its future in the EU. Over half (54%) of the public agree that a referendum is the best way to make this decision, and only a small minority (13%) disagree with this.

However there is some concern about how knowledgeable the public are about the EU. Only a fifth (21%) of the public feel that people in the UK understand how the EU works, whilst two-fifths (42%) believe that people in the UK are not knowledgeable enough about the EU to make a decision in a referendum on EU membership.



## EU membership referendum %



■ Stay in the EU   ■ Leave the EU   ■ Don't know   ■ Would not vote

Base: All respondents (1,237).



# Arguments for and against EU membership

There are a huge variety of arguments put forward when debating whether the UK should stay in or leave the EU. For those who are in favour of the UK staying in the EU, the most important driver of this view is the perceived trade advantages which EU membership provides the UK; 70% say this is a reason for their support.

The other main reasons given for supporting EU membership include greater freedom to work and live in other EU member states (36%), making the UK's role in the world more influential (36%) and the increased foreign investment membership brings to the UK (33%).

In comparison, the most popular reason for those wishing to leave is the desire for the UK to have stronger border controls to reduce migration (54%). The other main reasons are exiting the EU would reduce foreign interference in the British Justice system (45%) and save the UK a lot of money (33%).



## Top five reasons for... %

### Leaving the EU

Allow stronger control of borders/  
reduce migration

**54**

Reduce foreign interference  
in the British justice system

**45**

### Staying in the EU

Good for trade

**70**

Freedom to live and work  
in other member states

**36**

Created and  
protects jobs

**20**

Boosts foreign  
investment

**33**

Save the UK a  
lot of Money

**33**

Makes the UK  
more influential  
in the world

**36**

Maintain British  
customs / traditions

**24**

Provide greater control  
of law making

**22**

Base: Those who favour staying in the EU (393),  
Those who favour leaving the EU (524).



# Thoughts on the EU

Membership of the European Union is a very divisive issue; half (48%) of the population feel that the costs of the UK being in the EU outweigh the benefits whilst the other half believe that the benefits either balance out or outweigh the costs. Opinion varies according to political affiliation: 88% of UKIP supporters feel that the cost outweighs the benefits, compared with 51% for Conservative supporters, 35% for Labour and 24% for the Liberal Democrats.

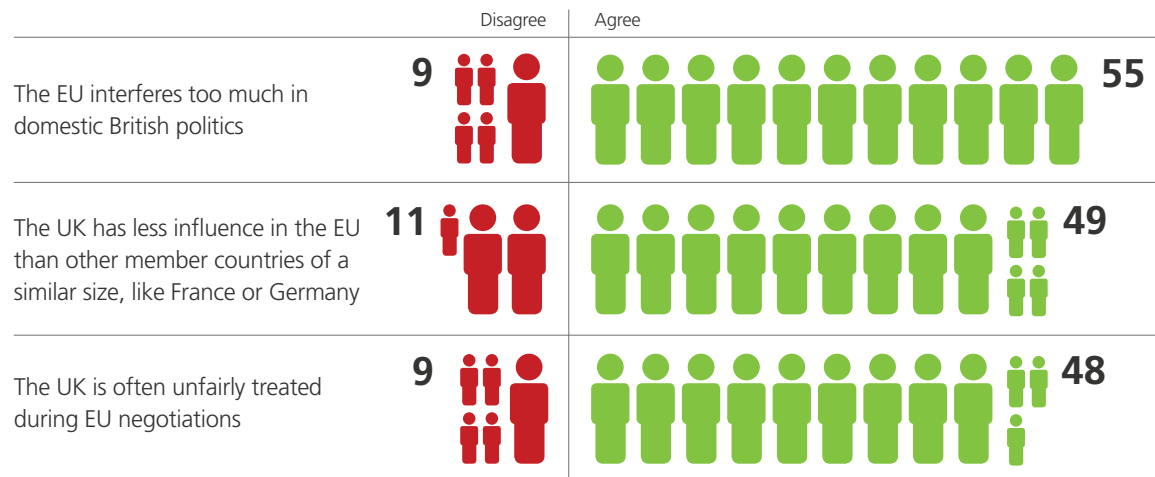
Despite this, there are some common 'gripes' about the EU that cross party lines. Core themes are that the EU interferes too much in domestic British politics, that the UK is often unfairly treated during EU negotiations and that the UK has less influence in the EU than other countries of a similar size. Although the strength of feeling varies by political affiliation, it is of interest that large proportions of the typically pro-Europe Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters agree with these statements.



## Benefits of EU membership vs the costs %



## Proportion who agree and disagree with the following statements... %



Base: All respondents (1,237).

