

# Beast from the East v Brexit – who won?

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Last Wednesday saw the start of the second round of Brexit Centre roadshows canvassing the opinions of people in areas of the country that voted predominantly to leave the EU. 'Boots on the ground' is so important for academic research on such a media intensive and emotive topic. This geo-political-economic-social-legislative traversing subject is like continually shifting sand, just like the shifting snow we encountered thanks to the 'Beast from the East' and Storm Emma!

Logistically, it was a very challenging first week, getting from Birmingham to Basildon and on to Great Yarmouth for two evenings of debate and conversation in such harsh conditions. Trains were delayed, trains were cancelled, the X1 and X11 buses were our saving grace between Norwich and Great Yarmouth. It seemed that Brexit may have divided a nation but the weather had united every soul struggling to make headway in the snow, chill and wind. Wednesday's leg was okay, just a slight delay as we crossed London to Fenchurch Street for the train to Basildon. We expected a lower turnout due to the weather but were pleased as Alex was interviewed by BBC Radio Essex virtually as soon as we booked in to the Holiday Inn. The audience was hugely boosted by the crew from the 'Is it Worth it?' crowd-funded 'battle' bus and campaign for 'Remainers' that are touring the country after its recent launch. To just make it to Basildon in the near blizzard evening conditions was some achievement!



Despite one casualty in the form of our roller banner, the first event was well attended and participants provided some great discussion. Ideas around identity proved to be particularly interesting, with a division between what it means to be English and what it means to be British. The connotations of one over the other were fascinating, in relation to what people associate with each term. For example some prefer British over English because of the reputation created by football hooligans and the use of the St. George's flag by extreme right-wing groups. This was not however a view shared by everyone.

An opinion offered by a local BBC Radio reporter and remain voter, was the way in which the government presented the facts to the public. Much of what was spoken about at the time was the benefits from the EU and the almost fearmongering beliefs amongst some politicians that if this changed, things would become very bad, very quickly. The comment she had heard at a recent event was that 'if your life is already s\*\*t, how could things possibly get s\*\*ter?' If this was the belief of the 51.89%, it's of little wonder that they voted the way they did. What we need is more leave supporters to offer their reasons first-hand. We are leaving the EU. We were given the choice almost two years ago and yet there is still so much confusion

as to why this is. That's before we even consider the state of the political process at present.



Somewhat remarkably for an area which voted in excess of seventy-percent to leave the European Union, we encountered mostly remain voters. We can of course only speculate at this time as to why that is, but we're hopeful that our future roadshows will shed more light on this. If you're reading this as a leave voter and want to get involved, please do! We want to hear from you. There's no judging. We're a balanced panel interested in research on this subject. With one more week of events and a fair amount of interest in our work via social media, we're hopeful of more fruitful meetings.... And better weather!