

Understanding Brexit voters

Much ground has been covered regarding Brexit, but what of the psychological traits and personalities of those that voted leave or remain? Postgraduate researcher **Jay Rowe** wants to find out.

Brexit appeal

Jay has always been interested in politics, but had drifted away from it as an academic discipline. However, his interest was piqued once more when he saw a PhD position open up at the University's Centre for Brexit Studies. He said: "I was never expecting to come back and study a PhD."

"But I wanted to know why Brexit happened – I think we all did, really. I don't think anyone expected it. It had always been a curious question for me and it was almost serendipitous that the subject came up."

Challenging assumptions

Jay's research project looks into the changing attitudes of Brexit voters, but when it came to drilling down to a specific area, gender or demographic, a whole different route was suggested. He said: "My supervisor, Rebecca Semmens-Wheeler, is from a psychology background and she gave me the idea to look into different personality groups and psychological traits."

Principally, Jay is looking into two specific traits:

- **Collective narcissism:** People who take offence and umbrage when a group (or nation) they belong to is criticised or at risk;
- **Collective self-esteem:** An aspect of an individual's self-image that stems from how the individual interacts with others and the groups that the individual is a part of.

While Jay had no prior experience of studying such rich psychological areas, he is excited about the results he'll find: "I'm hoping to gather a good split between personality traits and the ways that they voted."

“We’ll be using ratings scales which have been used for both collective narcissism and collective self-esteem, and it’s important we don’t pre-judge the outcome; often we assume which way people voted, so it’s important that we use this research to challenge those assumptions.”

Rowe-d to glory

Jay is still at an early stage of his research, but already feels like a valued member of the University. He said: “I’m an independent learner, but I like having regular contact with my supervisors, who have been more than happy to oblige.”

“I meet up with my whole supervisory team every couple of weeks to hear feedback or just receive emotional support. It’s been a really great experience so far.

“The best thing about being a PhD student here is that it’s very diverse. People from many different walks of life come here and study some incredible things. It’s a very interesting place to be.”

This piece was originally posted on Birmingham City University’s Research blog. Read the original [here](#).

The Centre for Brexit Studies Annual Conference ‘B-Day: Making a Success of Brexit?’ takes place on March 29 2019 at The RSA in London. Speakers include Sir Vince Cable, Sir Bernard Jenkin, John Mills, Vicky Pryce, Professor Vernon Bogdanor CBE and many more. [Find out more and register for your FREE ticket here](#).