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## **Many voters do not believe economists are impartial**

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### **Online resource:**

Lait, Ashley and Cliffe, Mark (2019) Many voters do not believe economists are impartial. LSE Brexit (01 Dec 2019). Blog Entry.

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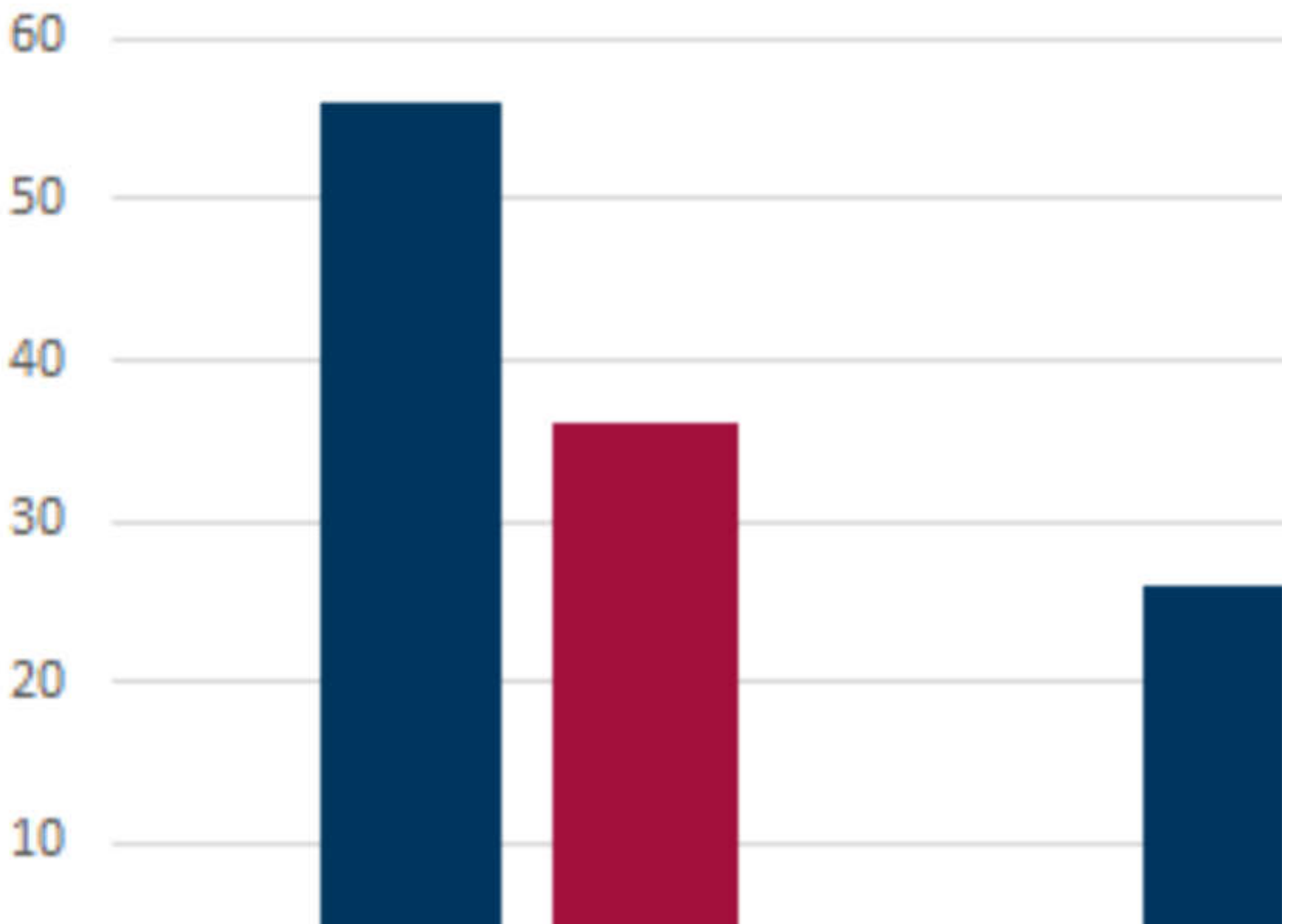
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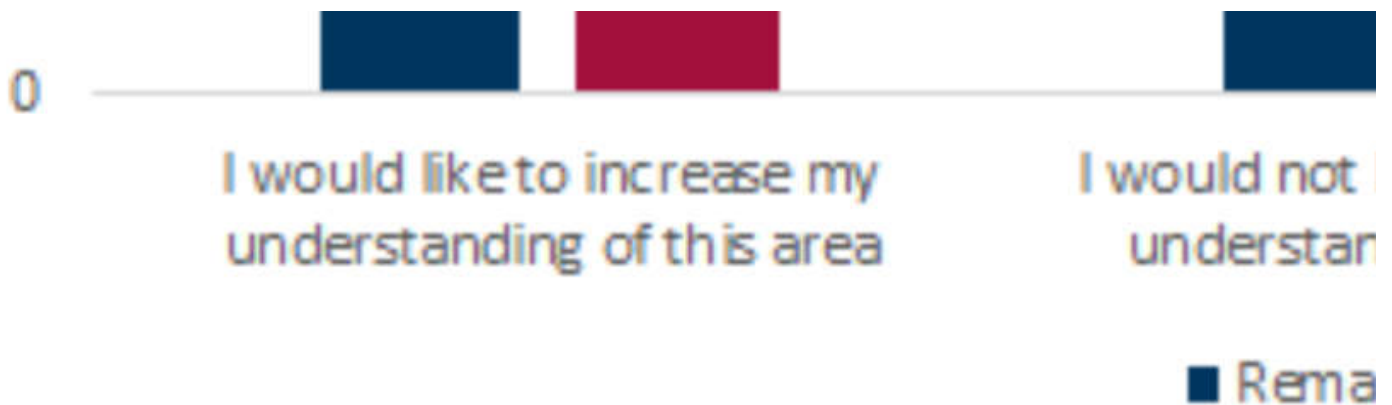
# Many voters do not believe economists are impartial

More than half of Leave voters distrust the opinions of economists, and men, older voters and the less educated are more likely to mistrust them. Nonetheless, more than half of all voters say they want to find out more about the economic effects of leaving the EU. **Alvin Birdi (University of Bristol)**, **Ashley Lait (Economics Network)** and **Mark Cliffe (ING Group)** warn that as the General Election approaches economists need to be extra careful to avoid accusations of political bias.

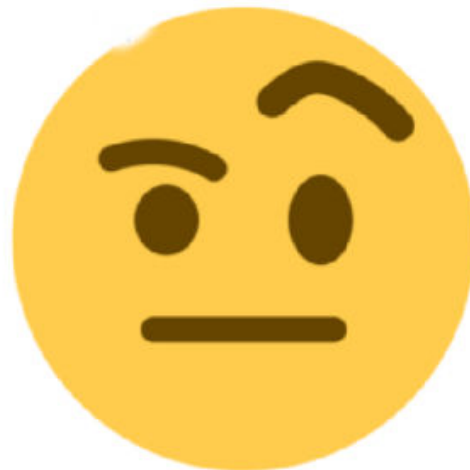
On the surface, it is encouraging that in the run up to an election which is bound to be dominated by Brexit, the [ING-Economics Network Survey](#) finds that there is a healthy interest in learning more about the economic effects of the UK leaving the EU. Over half of respondents expressed an interest in increasing their understanding of these effects. This desire is high across the sample but considerably higher among Remain voters (65%) than for Leave voters (49%).

## With regards to economics referenc





This desire to increase understanding is heartening, but it stems from a troubling lack of knowledge about the impact of Brexit. Indeed, 42% say they do not feel they have a grasp on the economic consequences of the UK leaving the EU, while just under half (49%) feel they did have a grasp of these issues. The lack of understanding seems to be worsening, with 40% of the survey reporting it is becoming harder over time to understand the economics relevant for informed voting in elections and referendums.

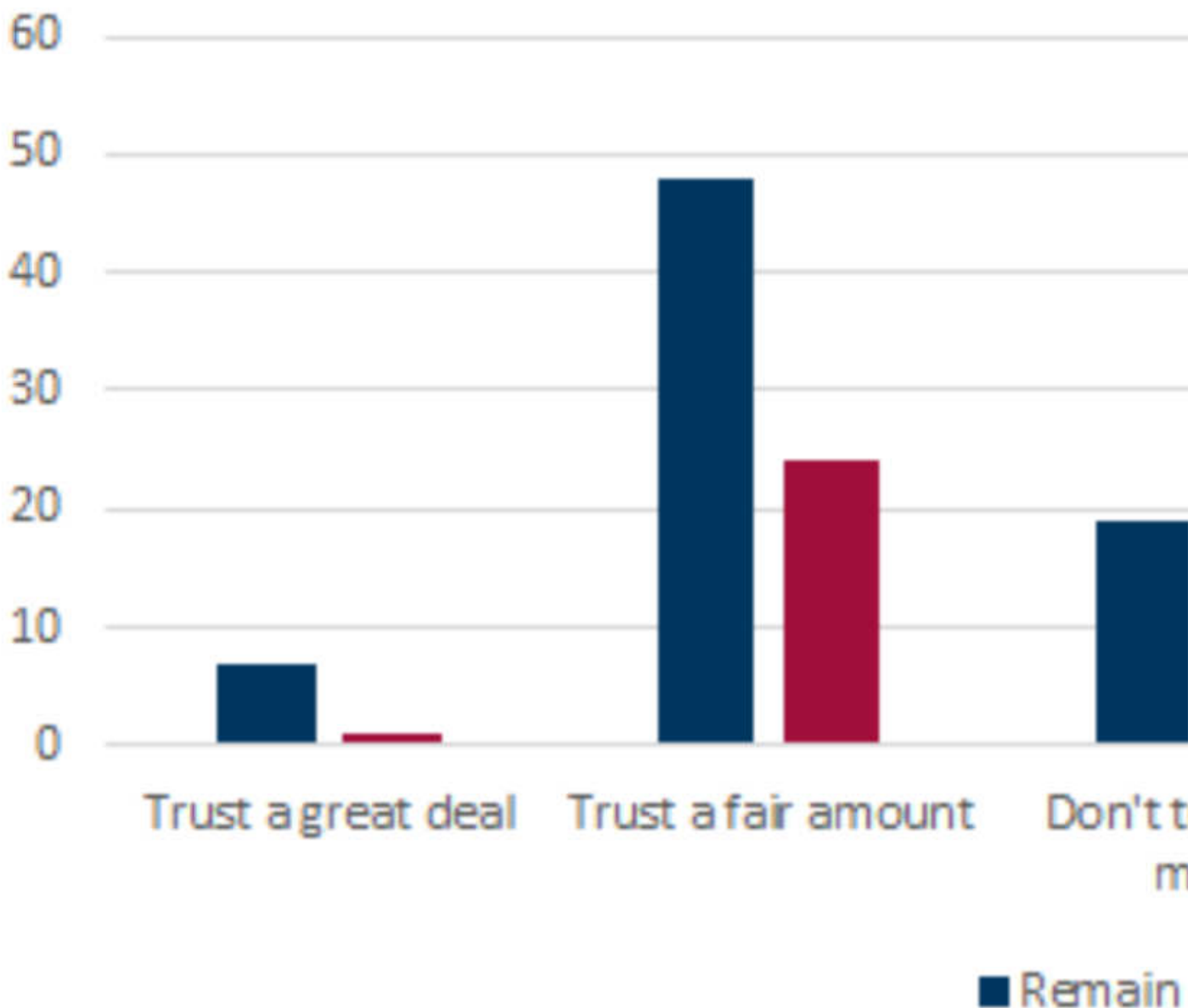


The Twitter and WhatsApp 'Face With Raised Eyebrow' emoji. Public domain

It should be said that a knowledgeable electorate is not the only marker of successful democratic participation and political agency. This is especially the case where any shortcomings in relevant knowledge can be rectified through informed and trusted expert opinion. But if trust in experts is lacking there is a risk of undermining this important democratic input.

Sadly, our survey shows a considerable lack of trust in professional economics opinion, particularly among Leave voters. Significantly higher numbers of Leave voters (51%) distrust the opinions of economists on the world economy compared with Remain voters (23%). Worse still, this scepticism has intensified since the EU referendum, even among Remain voters. 45% of Leave voters have become more sceptical, compared with 28% of Remain voters. Most of the rest express either no change in their scepticism or no opinion.

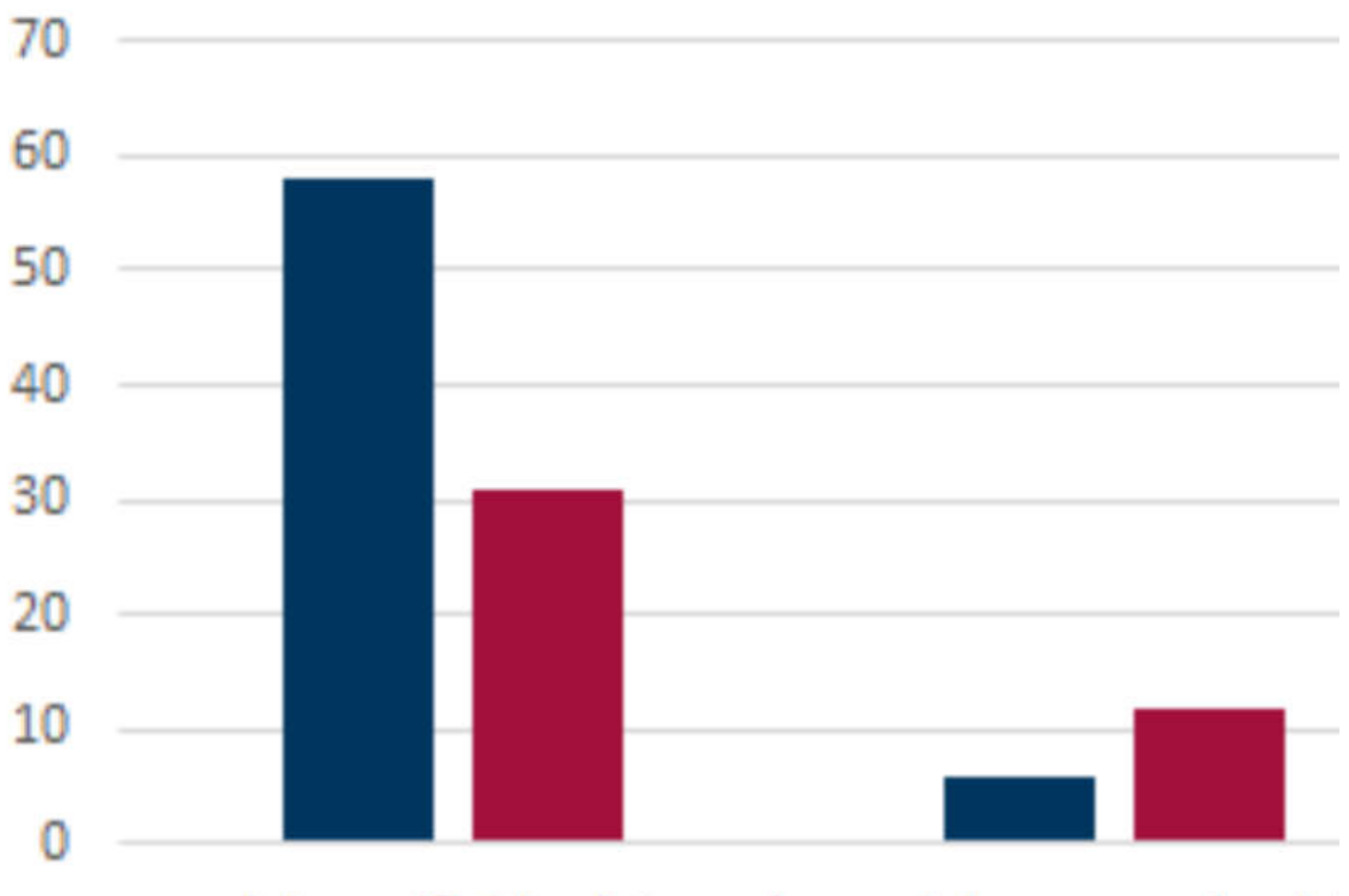
## To what extent do you trust on issues relating to the nat (by EU refere



We find that scepticism is also more prevalent among Conservative voters (46% compared with 31% of Labour voters), older people (over 40% of over 50-year-olds compared with just under a quarter of 18-49 year olds), men (36% compared with 31% of women) and the less educated (24% of people without GCSEs are much more sceptical compared with 11% of people with a degree).

Indeed, this lack of trust is underlined by the finding that under a third of Leave voters (31%) believe that economists base their comments on verifiable data compared with over a half (58%) of Remain voters. Similarly, 26% of Leave voters believe such comments are based on political affiliations compared with 13% of Remain voters.

## Thinking about the economic impact of Brexit on UK membership on the left, statements comes closest to comments based on...



...mainly verifiable data and ...mainly personal opinion  
analysis

■ Rem

On the eve of an election, much of which will turn on economic issues, the mixture of a perceived lack of economic understanding, a desire to learn more economics and a distrust of those that can provide such understanding is a challenge for democratic participation. The fact that the lack of trust is skewed across political lines underscores both how divisive the EU referendum has been and how the consequences of that division present trust and communications challenges to economists. They need to be extra careful to avoid accusations of political bias in both the tone and substance of their analyses.

### Note

The [ING-Economics 2019 Network Survey of The Public's Understanding of Economics](#) is based on an online poll of 1,641 respondents from across the country conducted by YouGov. A previous cohort was surveyed in 2017. The [first of a series of reports](#) from the survey concentrates on public understanding, trust in economists and differences between Leave and Remain voters.

*This post represents the views of the authors and not those of the Brexit blog, nor LSE.*