

Religion played an important role in Britain voting to leave the EU in 2016, research shows

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Faith played an "important and under-appreciated role" in the UK's choice to leave Europe, with Anglicans more likely to back Brexit, a major new study shows.

One in five Brits had religious beliefs that made them more likely to vote Leave and a quarter of voters' faiths meant they were more likely Remain voters.

Catholics, Presbyterians and regular churchgoers and those with the strongest [religious beliefs](#) were most likely to oppose Brexit.

This is the most detailed study yet of Christian religion and support for EU membership and the findings are outlined in a new book Religion and Euroscepticism in Brexit Britain, which traces how religion altered views on EU membership since the UK joined in 1973, through to the referendum itself in 2016 and its aftermath, including the 2019 General Election.

"Anglicans were very likely to vote leave," said Brunel University London's Dr. Stuart Fox who co-wrote the book with Dr. Ekaterina Kolpinskaya at the University of Exeter.

"A typical Catholic would vote to remain in the European Union," said voter behavior expert Dr. Fox. "Catholics are used to the idea of a cross-national authority as in the Pope and the Vatican, so for them, the idea of being governed by an international body like the EU is quite normal.

"Anglican history, meanwhile, is defined by trying to remain separate from the European superblock, and to do that you need a strong independent nation state. For them, anything that challenges it isn't going to be something they're a fan of."

The experts used data from the British Election Study and the Understanding Society survey.

In the 2016 Referendum, for example, a total of 55 percent of Anglicans voted Leave. Experts believe being a member of the Church of England

helps foster an attachment to the English heritage and national identity, and Anglicans are more likely to have [conservative views](#) about social, economic and political change and the power of the British state.

A total of 61 percent of Catholics voted Remain, possibly because their faith means they are less attached to the English national identity or institutions.

People who 'practically never' attended religious services were also more likely to support Brexit.

Religiously inactive Anglicans were 27 percentage points more likely to support Brexit than religiously active and devout Catholics—a difference similar to that between university graduates and non-graduates.

Faith will also affect how people are likely to vote in the forthcoming local elections in May, pointing to evidence of a long-running change that saw Labor's traditional support among Catholics collapse and virtually all Christian groups become more likely to vote Conservative.

"There is still a substantial 'religious vote' in British politics," said Dr. Kolpinskaya. "Our study shows the nature of a religious vote changes—with formerly strong ties between Labor and Roman Catholics, for example, weakening. The Conservatives, by contrast, have consolidated much support among Christians by growing their Protestant vote and adding Catholics to it.

While not the only thing that swayed the [vote](#), religion played a significant part in explaining why more Brits than expected voted Leave, Dr. Kolpinskaya said. "Faith also contributed to the rising Euroscepticism that pressed David Cameron to hold a Referendum in the first place, and the stunning victory for Boris Johnson's Conservative Party in the 2019 General Election."

More information: Religion and Euroscepticism in Brexit Britain.
[www.routledge.com/Religion-and ... /book/9780367342258#](http://www.routledge.com/Religion-and-.../book/9780367342258#)

Provided by University of Exeter

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