

A Rural Analysis of the EU Referendum Result

Introduction

There is considerable debate about the (likely) policy implications for rural areas that arise from the Brexit referendum result on 23rd June 2016. If this is uncertain, one thing we should be able to say is how many rural residents voted for leave or remain.

The referendum results for each local authority area have been taken (from The Electoral Commission website) and the official rural-urban classification has been applied to them. This short note reports on the findings.

Findings

Only English local authorities have been used for this analysis. The referendum result for England was 53.4% leave and 46.6% remain (so more slanted towards leave than for the UK as a whole).

The table below presents the findings from this analysis. In summary, it shows that:

- A slightly higher percentage of people voted leave in rural classified local authorities than across England as a whole;
- However, there is no clear relationship between the degree of rurality and the per cent who voted leave. For example, a lower percentage voted leave in the most rural category (Mainly Rural) than in three of the other categories;
- Indeed, the highest percentage who voted leave is found in one of the urban categories (Urban with Minor Conurbation);
- The most urban category (Urban with Major Conurbation) was the only one in which a majority voted remain.

Local authority category	Per cent voted for leave	Per cent voted for remain
Mainly Rural (80% of pop'n)	55.5%	44.5%
Largely Rural (50% - 79% of pop'n)	56.1%	43.9%
Urban with Significant Rural (26% - 49% pop'n)	54.9%	45.1%
Urban with City or Town	55.6%	44.4%
Urban with Minor Conurbation	59.4%	40.6%
Urban with Major Conurbation	48.4%	51.6%
England as a whole	53.4%	46.6%

The first three categories (Mainly Rural, Largely Rural and Urban with Significant Rural) can be combined to create overall rural figures. They show 55.5% voting leave and 44.5% voting remain, so once again slightly more in favour of leaving than the England average.

Finally, it is interesting to look at the list of local authority areas which had the highest percentage of votes for leave and remain, to see how many were rural. Those areas are listed in the table below.

Ten areas with the highest (%) leave vote	Ten areas with the highest (%) remain vote
Boston (Lincolnshire)	Lambeth (London)
South Holland (Lincolnshire)	Hackney (London)
Castle Point (Essex)	Haringey (London)
Thurrock (Essex)	City of London (London)
Great Yarmouth (Norfolk)	Islington (London)
Fenland (Cambridgeshire)	Wandsworth (London)
Mansfield (Nottinghamshire)	Camden (London)
Bolsover (Derbyshire)	Cambridge (Cambridgeshire)
East Lindsey (Lincolnshire)	Southwark (London)
North East Lincolnshire	Oxford (Oxfordshire)

Six of the ten areas with the highest leave vote are rural (one being Mainly Rural, two being Largely Rural and three being Urban with Significant Rural). Rural is therefore over-represented on this list. However, the more obvious geography is that the top nine areas all fall within the East Midlands or East Anglia, while the tenth borders the East Midlands.

None of the ten areas with the highest remain vote are rural. Indeed, the obvious point is that eight of them are London Boroughs. The highest remain vote among rural classified areas was in South Cambridgeshire district, which lies 25th in that list.

Conclusion

It can therefore be concluded that rural voters were slightly more likely to have voted leave than voters who live in other areas. However, the pattern is complex and there is no simple relationship between rurality and voting leave. Journalists and political commentators have sought to identify ways in which the referendum divided the country, but there was not any significant rural-urban division.

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September 2016