



On Thursday 23 June 2016 the UK is being asked to decide:

‘Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?’

So, who’s winning the debate?

First, a little context...

In recent times, opinion polls have been a little more miss than hit. The polls in the run-up to the general election in 2015 were criticised for providing inaccurate predictions of the outcome. According to BBC News on 31 March:

‘Opinion polls before the 2015 election were among the most inaccurate since surveying began more than 70 years ago, an industry-wide review has suggested’

So given what’s at stake in the EU Referendum, we thought: There must be a better, more accurate way of measuring the public mood and presenting this simply, in a way that people understand.

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This is what we did... the short version:

Over the period from 1st January 2016 we took three different data sources: Twitter, opinion polls and betting odds. Then, using the latest machine-learning tools from Microsoft AI, we created an algorithm that applies rules, looking for complex patterns and similarities, then applies weightings based on external sources including what the polls, bookies and news are saying.

The longer version:

We took 3000 tweets with referendum-related hashtags and manually sorted them into those that support either Leave or Remain.

A machine learning algorithm processes these tweets and identifies common patterns between the text and groups (Leave, Remain or neutral). Using these patterns, the system is able to automatically group all new tweets - in real time - from Twitter.

The Tweets are directly stored to the database at a rate of around 15,000 per day and percentages are generated from the numbers of tweets in each group.

In addition to what twitter is telling us, we are using public poll results and betting odds to create an average. This gives us the final percentage of Leave or Remain.

And to contextualise the answer to 'Who's winning?' we have linked to a number of news sources to see what was being said over the course of the campaign.

A greater share of tweets have been identified as being in favour the leave campaign, so we applied a 15% dilution to the results.

It was also identified that there are a huge number of 'bot' twitter accounts. Due to this, our system excludes tweets from users with less than 10 followers or following.

So, over to you to see who said what and if it had an impact

We won't know until Thursday 23 June 2016 whether or not this experiment provides a more accurate prediction than the opinion polls have done, but we think it is an interesting exercise.

Keep up to speed with the debate by following @referendometer

And if you'd like to talk to us about this project or what TheTin might be able to do for you, please get in touch:

You can find out more at www.thetin.net

Or email us at London@thetin.net

In any case - and if you haven't already – please do register to vote:

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

