On April 14, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn held a long awaited speech outlining the party's position with respect to the EU referendum to be held on June 23.

In committing to campaigning for the Remain side, Corbyn amended his longstanding sceptical stance towards the European Union. He warned that a victory of the Leave campaign would pave the way to an aggressive Tory government, which would endanger those worker rights that are currently safeguarded by EU legislation.

The Telegraph wrote that by focusing on "worker rights" and scaremongering about a new Tory government, Corbyn tried to make an appealing case for the Labour base to back a stay-in vote.

The British press covered extensively Corbyn's U-turn on the integration project, which attracted a lot of criticism from the Brexiteers' front. Although negative feedback came mostly from the right, even from inside Labour it has been argued that Corbyn's recent support of the EU project is not genuine but hides instead a move to consolidate his leadership of the party.

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Labour backbencher and former Welfare Minister Frank Field argued that Corbyn was unable to connect with the Labour base and warned that his repositioning could lead to a massive loss of support in favour of UKIP. Given Corbyn's longstanding Eurosceptic views it seems that it might be exactly his own constituency to be at risk here. In a recent article on The Telegraph, Ben Riley-Smith and Kate McCann even suggested that Jeremy Corbyn might decide to reconsider his support to the Remain campaign in order to re-establish a connection with the Labour rank and file.

Is Corbyn really losing support because of its new pro-EU stance? How did people react to his speech? On April 14 and 15, 25,581 unique Twitter users produced 55,357 tweets containing the word (or hashtag) "Corbyn". By looking at these tweets, we tried to answer the above

questions.

How did people react?

We used natural language processing techniques to sort tweets into different categories. After discarding irrelevant tweets, we separated attitudinal tweets – i.e. tweets containing some kind of reaction to the speech or the speaker – from news recast or merely descriptive tweets. We then separated tweets expressing a negative sentiment or disagreement with Corbyn from the rest. Table 1 shows the results of this procedure.
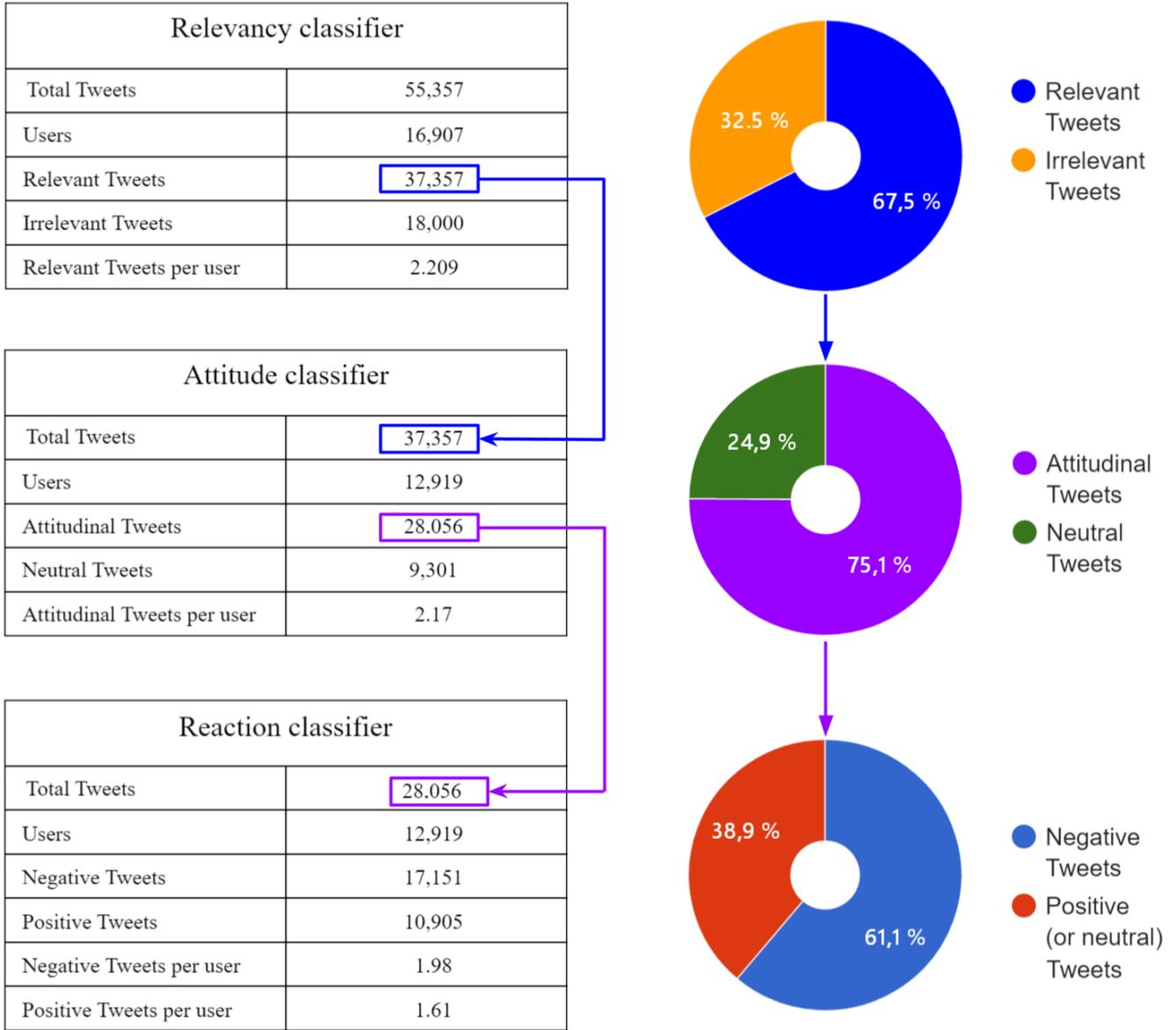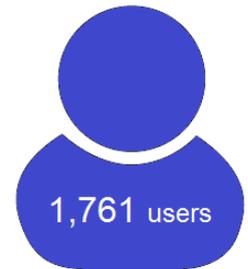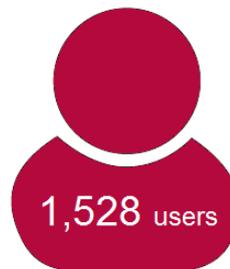
Relevancy classifier	
Total Tweets	55,357
Users	16,907
Relevant Tweets	37,357
Irrelevant Tweets	18,000
Relevant Tweets per user	2.209

Attitude classifier	
Total Tweets	37,357
Users	12,919
Attitudinal Tweets	28.056
Neutral Tweets	9,301
Attitudinal Tweets per user	2.17

Reaction classifier	
Total Tweets	28.056
Users	12,919
Negative Tweets	17,151
Positive Tweets	10,905
Negative Tweets per user	1.98
Positive Tweets per user	1.61

Table 1

Recent poll results show that Corbyn's announcement did not have a significant impact on the Brexit issue, and that Britons are still evenly distributed between Remain and Leave. In the Twittersphere however, the prevailing reaction was negative. As shown in Table 1, out of 28,056 attitudinal tweets, 10,095 (38%) are positive (or neutral) tweets, whereas 17,151 (62%) are negative. This confirms the view that the microblogging platform is a medium

where voices of protest are more visible.

Corbyn losing Corbynistas?

By analyzing the tweets' metadata, we were able to separate those coming from leftist tweeters from the rest. We identified 1,528 users as "leftists" and 1,761 as "other" (a residual category including all remaining politically-oriented profiles, ranging from Liberals to Tories and Ukippers).

	Leftist users		Other users	
	1,528 users		1,761 users	
Relevant Tweets	3,744	43.07 %	4,948	56.93 %
Negative Tweets	1,399	32.35 %	2,925	67.65 %
Positive (or neutral) Tweets	1,322	50.69 %	1,333	49.31 %
Negative Tweets per user	1.89		2.44	
Positive Tweets per user	1.71		1.76	

Table 2

We cross-referenced these data with the classification based on the text of the tweet: Table 2 shows the distribution of tweets between "leftists" and "other" users. Our results indicate

that only relevant tweets are almost evenly distributed between the two groups. Indeed this distribution becomes unbalanced when we look at those classified as attitudinal and negative: in other terms non-leftist users become "louder".

> *The Labour party might therefore have lost some support from those leftist voters who are more sensitive to the argument that the European construction has lost its solidaristic flavour.*

However, and most importantly, almost one out of three negative tweets (that is 1,399 tweets) comes from the leftist area. Even more surprisingly, we found that almost 40% of the users who reacted negatively belong to the same area. In other words, per-user negative tweets were fewer on the left side of the political spectrum than for remaining users. This in turn implies that non-leftist users were more active in expressing their disagreement.

Left and right Brexiteers: sharing a common ground

As expected, Corbyn's pro-EU speech provoked a lot of criticism from the right-wing Brexiteers, conservatives and UKIP supporters. However, a considerable negative reaction also came from leftist Twitter users. We tried to shed some more light on these results by processing the negative tweets through text clustering applications. In terms of content, the "leftist-negative" and the "other-negative" fields share a common ground, namely the criticism of Corbyn's previously highlighted U-turn on Brexit. In particular, it is the political "coherence" of Corbyn — often labeled as a former "man of principles"– to be at the centre of concerns. Austerity-related groups of terms, on the other hand, appear more often among leftist users.

The Labour party (and the Remain field?) might therefore have lost some support from those leftist voters who are more prone to anti-austerity rhetoric and more sensitive to the argument that the European construction has lost its solidaristic flavour.

However and most importantly, the proximity of leftists and right-wing Brexiteers highlights the need to transcend the traditional left-right distinction when it comes to the politics of

European integration. As recently stated by [Raphael Behr](#), "we are in a strange world now where two distinct sets of politics–the old one that follows left-right lines, and a new one that operates around an EU in/out axis–are running concurrently and on top of each other".

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