UK Election Analysis 2017: Media, Voters and the Campaign

Early reflections from leading academics

Edited by:
Einar Thorsen, Daniel Jackson, Darren Lilleker

Political Studies Association
Centre for Politics & Media Research
CSJCC Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture & Community
Bournemouth University

Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community (Bournemouth University)
https://research.bournemouth.ac.uk/centre/journalism-culture-and-community/

Centre for Politics and Media Research (Bournemouth University)
https://research.bournemouth.ac.uk/centre/politics-and-media-group/

Political Studies Association
https://psa.ac.uk

For an electronic version with hyperlinked references please go to:
http://ElectionAnalysis.UK

For a printed copy of this report, please contact:
Dr Einar Thorsen
T: 01202 968838
E: ethorsen@bournemouth.ac.uk

June 2017
978-1-910042-14-4 UK Election Analysis 2017: Media, Voters and the Campaign [eBook-PDF]
978-1-910042-15-1 UK Election Analysis 2017: Media, Voters and the Campaign [Print / softcover]

Design & Layout: Mirva Villa

BIC Classification: GTC/JFD/KNT/JPHF/JPL/JPVK/JPVL

Published by:
The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community
Bournemouth University
Poole, England
BH12 5BB

Printed in Great Britain by:
Dorset Digital Print Ltd, 16 Glenmore Business Park,
Blackhill Road Holton Heath, Poole

Acknowledgements

"Well that's a relief, we won't have to another one of those for a while", we thought, having just published the *US Election Analysis 2016* shortly after the *EU Referendum Analysis 2016*, only a year after the *UK Election Analysis 2015*. Barring any second EU or Scottish independence referendum, the Fixed Term Parliament Act meant we had a four-year breather. Theresa May obviously had other plans, and called a snap election for June 2017!

The surprise announcement came in late April, giving us the shortest lead-in to any of these reports we have produced. This presented a resource and logistical challenge for producing a report of this nature, but more importantly also pushed our contributors at one of the busiest times of the academic year. The ambition and concept of these reports rests on our ability to deliver a rapid publication, which is only possible thanks to all our authors who share in this vision and worked round the clock to deliver their early analysis of the UK General Election 2017.

On behalf of the editorial team we would like to recognise the financial and moral support of the Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, and the Centre for Politics and Media Research at Bournemouth University, and our great colleagues and student community. We are also very grateful to the Political Studies Association for their ongoing support of these reports, and of the fantastic network of PSA scholars who contribute.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to our outstanding Research Assistant Mirva Villa who also helped produce the *US Election Analysis 2016*, and *still* agreed to join another project – despite the incredible demands we place upon her in a very short period of time. Knowing we could rely on you yet again was crucial!

Finally, a special thanks to our friends and family, in particular: Liz, Bec and Teresa.

Contents

Introduction 8
Einar Thorsen, Dan Jackson, Darren Lilleker

1 Context

1. **Looking on the bright side for a change** 11
Jay Blumler
2. **The performance of the electoral system** 12
Alan Renwick
3. **Fixed-term parliaments and the electoral cycle** 14
Richard Parry
4. **Institutions and nation building: there is such a thing as society** 15
Matthew Johnson
5. **Global questions, parochial answers** 16
Roman Gerodimos
6. **The future of illusions** 17
Barry Richards

2 Voters, Polls and Results

7. **A glorious defeat: anti-politics and the funnelling of frustration** 19
Matthew Flinders
8. **Younger voters politically energised, but the generational divide deepens** 20
James Sloam
9. **Why the younger generation of Corbynistas?** 22
Pippa Norris
10. **Young people and propaganda in the wake of the 2017 election** 24
Shakuntala Banaji
11. **The generation election: youth electoral mobilisation at the 2017 General Election** 25
Matt Henn and James Hart
12. **The 2017 General Election: How Votes were split between "open and closed"** 26
Jonathan Wheatley
13. **Cartographic perspectives of the general election** 28
Benjamin D. Hennig
14. **UKIP's former supporters were crucial to the outcome – but not as generally expected** 30
Ron Johnston and Charles Pattie
15. **Why did the Lib Dems fail to benefit from the anti-Brexit vote?** 31
Panos Koliastasis
16. **Meeting the public: the perils and pitfalls of 'walkabout' questions to Theresa May in GE2017** 32
Sylvia Shaw
17. **Political participation in the UK: why might voters have voted?** 34
Bruce Bimber, Shelley Boulianne, Karolina Koc-Michalska and Darren Lilleker
18. **Moments of accidental connection with the 'Great British Public': because Brenda et al know best!** 36
Richard Scullion
19. **When democracy kicked back** 37
Natalie Fenton

3 News and Journalism

20. **Conventional wisdom distorted TV news coverage of campaign** 39
Stephen Cushion
21. **A tale of two leaders: news media coverage of the 2017 General Election** 40
David Deacon, John Downey, David Smith, James Stanyer and Dominic Wring
22. **Did broadcast stage-management create a vacuum for social media?** 42
Charlie Beckett
23. **Ducking the debate** 43
Stephen Coleman
24. **Caught in the middle: the BBC's impossible impartiality dilemma** 44
Martin Moore and Gordon Ramsay
25. **Media policy: the curious incident of the dog in the night-time** 46
Jonathan Hardy

26. **The use and abuse of the vox pop in the 2017 UK General Election television news coverage** 47
Mark Wheeler
27. **Media bias hits a wall** 48
Des Freedman
28. **Declining newspaper sales and the role of broadcast journalism in the 2017 general election** 49
Guy Starkey
29. **Newspapers' editorial opinions: stuck between a rock and a hard place** 50
Julie Firmstone
30. **It's the Sun wot lost it** 52
Mick Temple
31. **From Brexit to Corbyn: agenda setting, framing and the UK media - a research agenda** 54
Steve Schifferes
32. **Is our national press a fading dinosaur? Don't bank on it** 55
Steven Barnett
33. **A mixed mailbag: letters to the editor during the electoral campaign** 56
Iñaki Garcia-Blanco
34. **Long live the wisdom of the phone-in crowd** 57
Ivor Gaber
35. **Fact-checking the election** 58
Jennifer Birks
36. **Should we worry about fake news?** 60
Susan Banducci, Dan Stevens and Travis Coan
37. **Tweets, campaign speeches and dogs at polling stations: the election on live blogs** 61
Marina Dekavalla
38. **Process, personalities and polls: online news coverage of the UK General Election 2017** 62
Emily Harmer and Rosalynd Southern
39. **Online election news can be bloody di cult (for a) woman** 64
Emily Harmer
40. **Not just swearing and loathing on the internet: analysing BuzzFeed and VICE during #GE2017** 66
James Dennis and Susana Sampaio-Dias

4 Parties and the Campaign

41. **The battle for authenticity** 69
Karin Wahl-Jorgensen
42. **Was it the Labour doorstep or the Labour smartphone that swung it for Jeremy?** 70
Tim Bale
43. **The election at constituency level** 71
Ralph Negrine
44. **Over-managing the media: how it all went wrong** 72
Suzanne Franks
45. **Aristotle and persuasive copywriting in the 2017 General Election** 73
Nigel Jackson
46. **Rhetoric of the 2017 General Election campaign** 74
Andrew Crines
47. **When is an electoral 'bribe' not a bribe?** 75
Chris Roberts
48. **PEBs in 2017: not gone, but largely forgotten?** 76
Vincent Campbell
49. **'Strong and stable' to 'weak and wobbly': Tory campaign, media reaction and GE2017** 78
Dr Anthony Ridge- Newman
50. **The Greens and the "progressive alliance"** 79
Jenny Alexander
51. **It's the way I tell 'em: car crash politics and the gendered turn** 80
Karen Ross

52. **Dogwhistle sexism** 81
Heather Savigny
53. **The Women's Equality Party and the 2017 General Election** 82
Elizabeth Evans and Meryl Kenny
54. **The resurrection of ethical foreign policy** 84
Victoria Honeyman
55. **Why immigration faded from view in election 2017** 85
Thomas Brooks
56. **Invisible enemies, wars without winners: when 'khaki elections' fail** 86
James Morrison
57. **The sobering reality of backdoors: cybersecurity and surveillance circumvention during GE2017** 87
Einar Thorsen

5 **The Digital Campaign**

58. **Corbyn, Labour, digital media, and the 2017 UK election** 89
Andrew Chadwick
59. **Was it 'AI wot won it'? Hyper-targeting and pro ling emotions online** 90
Vian Bakir and Andrew McStay
60. **Sharing is caring: Labour supporters use of social media #GE2017** 91
Anamaria Dutceac and Michael Bossetta
61. **Labour's social media campaign: more posts, more video, and more interaction** 92
Richard Fletcher
62. **Like me, share me: the people's social media campaign** 94
Darren Lilleker
63. **The alternate and in uential world of the political parties' Facebook feeds** 96
Matt Walsh
64. **Social media and the Corbyn breakthrough** 98
Mark Shephard
65. **The UK digisphere and the 2017 election** 99
Aljosha Karim Schapals
66. **From voices to votes: how young people used social media to in uence the General Election** 100
Vyacheslav Polonski
67. **All LOLs and trolls** 102
Alec Charles

6 **The Nations**

68. **Nasty, British and Short: an emotional election** 105
Russell Foster
69. **Scotland in the 2017 UK General Election** 106
Michael Higgins
70. **The General Election did little to solve Wales' 'democratic deficit'** 107
Morgan Jones
71. **GE2017 in Northern Ireland: total eclipse of the moderates** 108
Neil Matthews
72. **Twitter, dual screening and the BBC Northern Ireland Leaders' debate** 110
Paul Reilly

7 **Brexit and European Perspectives**

73. **Brexit without Brexitland** 113
Chris Gifford
74. **Why the General Election will make little difference to the Article 50 negotiations** 114
Simon Usherwood
75. **Totem, taboo and trigger word: the dominance and obscurity of Brexit in the campaigns** 115
Charlotte O'Brien

76. **The Conservatives and Brexit: the election and after** 116
Philip Lynch
77. **The 2017 UK election: re ections from Norway** 117
John Erik Fossum
78. **Partisan and plentiful: the 2017 UK election in the German press** 118
Isabelle Hertner
79. **Expect the unexpected: French media perceptions of the 2017 UK General Election campaign** 119
Emmanuelle Avril
80. **Poles apart: Polish perspectives of the 2017 UK 'Brexit election'** 120
Paweł Surowiec
81. **Theresa and Jeremy: who is closer to Matteo? An Italian view of #GE2017** 121
Emiliana De Blasio and Michele Sorice

8 Personality politics and popular culture

82. **A tale of two leadership campaigns** 123
Pete Dorey
83. **Seeing Jeremy Corbyn and not seeing Theresa May: the promise of civic spectatorship** 124
Katy Parry
84. **Corbyn and his fans: post-truth, myth and Labour's hollow defeat** 126
Cornell Sandvoss
85. **It's the stans wot (nearly) won it** 127
Matt Hills
86. **Celebrities4Corbyn: continuity and change in Labour's use of celebrities** 128
Ellen Watts
87. **The othering and objectication of Diane Abbott MP** 129
Deborah Gabriel
88. **"Theresa May for Britain": a personal brand in search of personality** 130
Margaret Scammell
89. **Maybot, Mummy or Iron Lady? Loving and loathing Theresa May** 131
Shelley Thompson and Candida Yates
90. **Politics, charisma, and the celebrity spectre of Nigel Farage** 132
Neil Ewen
91. **Mainstream broadcast comedy and satire** 133
Kay Richardson
92. **Sound bites: the music of Election 2017** 134
John Street and Adam Behr

Introduction

Dr Einar Thorsen
Associate Professor of Journalism and Communication at Bournemouth University

Email: ethorsen@bournemouth.ac.uk
Twitter: @einarthorsen

Dr Daniel Jackson
Associate Professor of Media and Communications at Bournemouth University

Email: JacksonD@bournemouth.ac.uk
Twitter: @dan_jackson9

Dr Darren G. Lilleker
Associate Professor of Political Communication at Bournemouth University

Email: dlilleker@bournemouth.ac.uk
Twitter: @DrDGL

"We want a strong and stable government, not a coalition of chaos, led by Jeremy Corbyn". These words, uttered by Greg Knight - Conservative candidate for East Yorkshire - in the campaign's most infamous campaign video, came to represent a microcosm of the 2017 UK General Election campaign. First, it put Theresa May front and centre of all Conservative campaign communications. Second, it contained the Conservative Party's key election message - based on the belief that endlessly repeated slogans were the only way to cut through the increasingly chaotic and fragmented news cycle. And third, it was a terribly executed piece of political communication, which rather summed up the Tory campaign as a whole. By the end, 'strong and stable' was a thoroughly discredited slogan, as the Tories went on to develop their own 'coalition of chaos' with the Democratic Unionist Party.

Things weren't supposed to turn out like this. In early April 2017, the Conservatives were at least 20 points up in most polls, and the Prime Minister's personal ratings soared above those of Jeremy Corbyn by at least 40 points. These were unprecedented numbers, and so with her opponents looking ripe for the taking, Theresa May took the opportunity to crush the Labour Party for a generation and secure her own mandate. With the might of the Conservative campaigning machine at her disposal and the partisan press firmly behind her, she was widely expected to deliver a landslide majority for her party.

But we live in unconventional times, where the rules of the game are being perpetually rewritten. Even in the context of the election of Trump the Brexit vote, the General Election of 2017 will go down as one of most extraordinary campaigns of recent times.

This was also an election campaign that was twice suspended: firstly, after the Manchester Arena bombing on 22nd May that killed 23 and injured 119 people; and secondly, after the London terrorist attack 3rd June that left 8 dead and 48 wounded. Both events had a dramatic impact on the 'mood of the nation', and of course influenced the agenda of the campaign with regards to security and policing.

This unique election has raised countless questions and talking points, which pollsters, journalists, academics, commentators and politicians alike are all busy analysing. This project, and report that follows, is our contribution to our shared purpose of making sense of the 2017 election. To do this, we have again turned to leading academics in the UK and beyond – a mix of world-leading experts and early career researchers – to offer their reflections, analysis and early research findings on the election campaign.

After **Section 1** outlines the context in which this election was called, we begin to unpack voting patterns in **Section 2** and their possible explanations. After over a decade of rising multi-party politics, 2017 saw the return of two-party dominance, with the Conservatives and Labour gaining 82% of vote share and 89% of seats. The real story of voters in 2017 was turnout (at nearly 69% the highest since 1997) despite an electorate seemingly jaded from repeated votes, and the mass mobilization and engagement of younger voters (particularly by the Labour Party). Here, the unprecedented generational divide between young and old is one of the key stories to emerge.

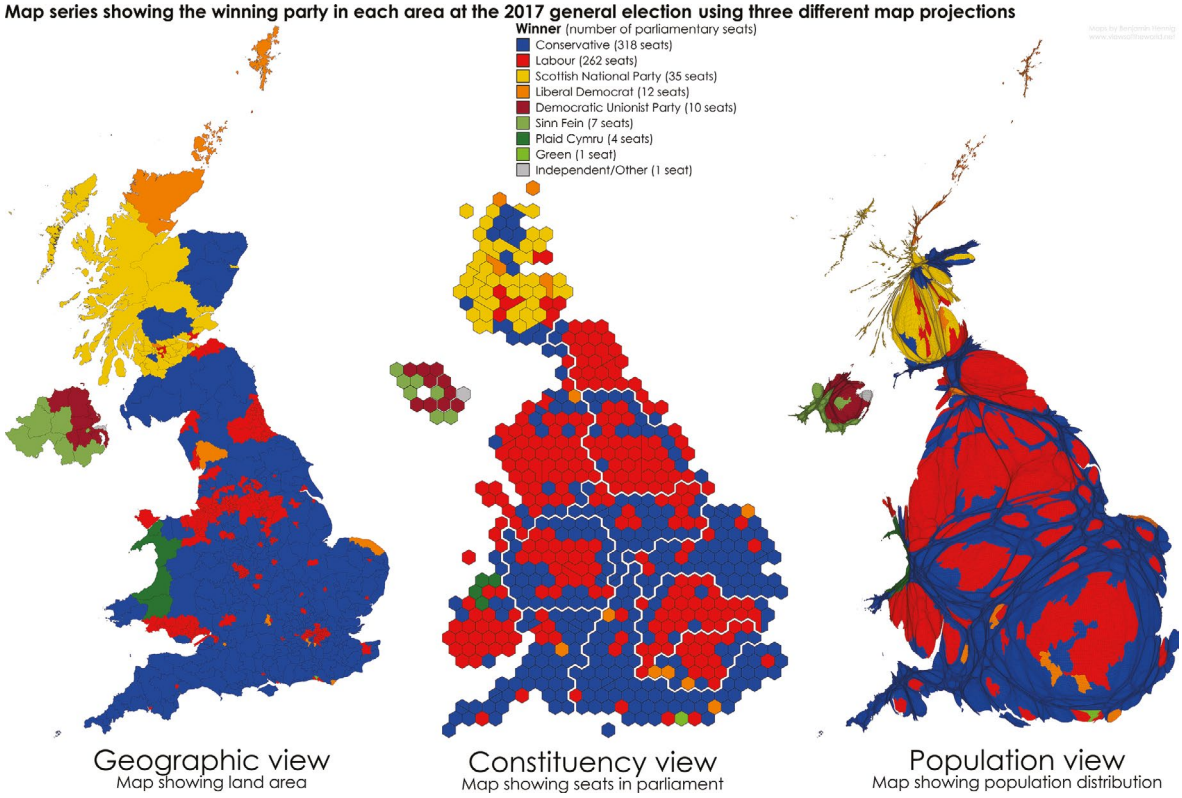
In both the 2015 General Election and 2016 EU referendum campaigns, the (mostly right-wing) British press was credited with a crucial influence on the outcomes, and in 2017 they again followed their usual script. Abuse was continually directed at the Labour party and its supposedly shambolic leader, amid a constant diet of misinformation and spin. But this time – no matter how bluntly partisan – the press had limited effect. **Section 3** examines this phenomenon in detail, pointing towards the counter-balancing role of social media (**Section 5**), which for the first time, might have played a decisive role in a UK election campaign. The power of television also endures. As Jeremy Corbyn relished being in the spotlight, Theresa May performed badly when unscripted and dodged debating with opponents. **Section 4** thus examines the party and campaign dynamics that might explain this most unexpected of results exploring the reasons for the Tory campaign faltering from the start and for Labour to be resurgent.

With an increasing dis-United Kingdom under the shadow of Brexit we also examine the dynamics across the nations of Britain. There are two important stories that emerged from the nations in 2017 which are examined in **Section 6**. The first is the erosion of the SNP share of seats (from the historic high in 2015), and the second is in Northern Ireland, where the DUP not only gained seats but became kingmakers in a hung parliament. **Section 7** then moves to focus on Brexit, the pretext for the election that largely became a non-issue, hence it is important to gauge perspectives of the contest from key European countries.

Finally, in **Section 8** we capture perhaps one of the most interesting dynamics of the election. The interplay between politics and popular culture and the role personality played in the outcome.

Published within ten days of the result, these contributions are short and accessible. Authors provide authoritative analysis of the campaign, including research findings or new theoretical insights; to bring readers original ways of understanding the campaign. Contributions also bring a rich range of disciplinary influences, from political science to cultural studies, journalism studies to psychology. We hope this makes for a vibrant, informative and engaging read.

Map series showing the winning party in each area at the 2017 general election using three different map projections



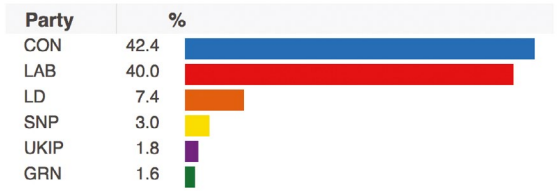
Result maps courtesy of Ben Hennig, see his Chapter 13 for a discussion of different projections.

PARTY	SEATS	+/-	VOTES	VOTE SHARE	+/- %
Conservative	318	-13	13,669,883	42.4	+5.5
Labour	262	+30	12,878,460	40.0	+9.5
Scottish National Party	35	-21	977,569	3.0	-1.7
Liberal Democrat	12	+4	2,371,910	7.4	-0.5
Democratic Unionist Party	10	+2	292,316	0.9	+0.3
Sinn Fein	7	+3	238,915	0.7	+0.2
Plaid Cymru	4	+1	164,466	0.5	-0.1
Green Party	1	0	525,435	1.6	-2.1
UKIP	0	-1	594,068	1.8	-10.8
Social Democratic & Labour Party	0	-3	95,419	0.3	0.0
Ulster Unionist Party	0	-2	83,280	0.3	-0.1
Alliance Party	0	0	64,553	0.2	0.0
The Yorkshire Party	0	0	20,958	0.1	0.0
National Health Action	0	0	16,119	0.1	0.0
Christian Peoples Alliance	0	0	5,869	0.0	0.0
British National Party	0	0	4,642	0.0	0.0
Monster Raving Loony Party	0	0	3,890	0.0	0.0
Women's Equality Party	0	0	3,580	0.0	0.0
Pirate Party	0	0	2,321	0.0	0.0
English Democrats	0	0	1,913	0.0	0.0
Workers Revolutionary Party	0	0	771	0.0	0.0
Social Democratic Party	0	0	469	0.0	0.0
Others	1	0	186,675	0.6	+0.3

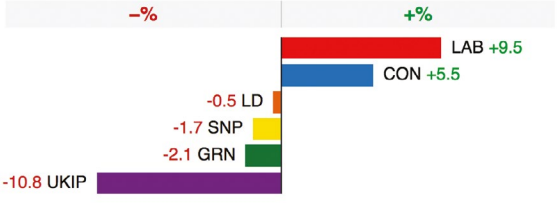
After 650 of 650 seats
Change compared with 2015

Turnout 68.7%
Electorate 46,843,896

UK vote share
after 650 of 650 seats



UK vote share change since 2015
after 650 of 650 seats



http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2017/results

1

Context

Looking on the bright side for a change

Amidst a mixed overall picture, two key features of the 2017 election campaign stand out as systemically significant for the role of communication in British politics. Should they be sustained in the future, the prospects for democratic citizenship look brighter.

The confrontation between two different models

Since the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader in mid-2015, academics, journalists, and the UK citizenry at large have been simultaneously exposed to two radically different approaches, the driving forces, actor relationships, rules of the game and values of which stand in sharp contrast to each other. On one side, there has been a political consultancy-led model, while on the other, there has been a movement-led one. Questions then arise over the staying power of the hitherto quite firmly entrenched notion of the 'campaign communication game' and whether and how it may co-exist with the alternative.

Pressures for similarity stem from the uncertainty and unpredictability of the modern election campaign, which often demands immediate responses by all involved to intrusive events and rivals' ploys. Nevertheless, distinct and sharp contrasts marked the conduct of the major parties in 2017. In particular:

- **preferred style of political discourse:** sound-bitten slogans vs. extended speech, repeated Tory emphases on 'strong and stable leadership' (later, the dangers of a 'coalition of chaos') vs. Corbyn's sustained critiques of austerity and inequality allied to visions of a social and political order that would serve the interests of 'the many not the few'.
- **policy detail:** a light Conservative offer presented in a short and undetailed manifesto vs. Labour's policy-abundant one, dealing with nationalization, economic investment, public finances, the NHS, social care, school funding, housing, tuition fees, pensions, the creative arts, etc., etc.!
- **assumptions about the role of human nature in politics:** Lynton Crosbyites' decidedly limited view of the desire and ability of the average person to take in political information as against Jeremy Corbynites' belief in an appetite of citizens to learn what politicians intend to do if given power.
- **news publicity tactics:** the Conservatives catering to conventional news values (novelty, drama, conflict, sensation) in order to dominate headlines in contrast to Labour's releasing of discrete policy proposals in the hope they would be reported and discussed by broadcast journalists.
- **message discipline:** reflected in Mrs. May's refusal to take part in debates, limited acceptance of interview requests, tendency not to respond directly to questions posed in interviews, appearances in stage-managed events, attempts to control journalists' access.
- **presidentialization:** a Conservative campaign built heavily round Theresa May personally, relegating the party to second place.
- **campaign communication ethics:** the continual denigration of Jeremy Corby and occasional mis-representation of his political positions, in contrast to Corbyn's refusal to make or even respond to personal attacks, which, in his words, 'would devalue yourself and the process'.

The rejuvenation of public service journalism

Writing after the 2010 campaign, I noted 'some diminution and decline of the civic mission of British broadcasters' as one of three main trends that had 'formatively shaped election television' since 2001. Writing after the Brexit result, I maintained 'the broadcasters were jointly responsible [with politicians] for the poverty of the referendum campaign', instancing four main shortcomings of their coverage. In contrast, in 2017, the BBC had demonstrably pulled up its public service socks:

2016: failure to broaden the campaign issue lens
2017: commitment to cover a broad range of issues from a broad range of angles in Today and extended 10 p.m. bulletins, such as the NHS, the cost of living, the state of the economy, social care and Brexit options
2016: impartiality carried to an extreme
2017: fewer attempts at a strict balancing of rival parties' claims within reports
2016: shortage of information provision
2017: deployment of specialist correspondents to provide 'reality checks' on contested issues
2016: prominent attention paid to misleading/false statements (e.g. a £350 million windfall for the NHS by leaving the EU)
2017: occasional inclusion of 'fact checks' within news bulletins (not just online)

The BBC also made a noticeably hard-hitting commitment to 'journalistic interventionism'. In Question Time specials, for example, moderators frequently challenged dubious or vague assertions by politicians. In interviews, politicians were forthrightly condemned at times for their 'half-baked policies', 'terrible record', 'pretty damning figures' of failure, contradictory positions , etc. Esser and Humbricht (2014) distinguish between 'desirable' journalistic interventionism that scrutinizes policy positions and a 'less desirable' form that aims at game-related aspects and distracts from the real issues. That distinction probably needs refinement. Policy interrogation can be overly aggressive (e.g. Paxman to Corbyn and May), breach the impartiality norm, or unduly pare a politician's stance down to its more vulnerable aspects.

Some conclusions

In UK 2017, the consultancy-led model was wounded, whether fatally remains to be seen. But in an 'age of authenticity' it may repel more voters than it attracts.

Political agency matters. Politicians with convictions may not need to 'self-mediatize'.

The existence of a principled, well-resourced public service broadcaster matters.

Exposure to Jeremy Corbyn's ideas and personality via broadcast media probably explains much of his party's remarkable surge as well as the equally remarkable transformation of his public image.

The 'crisis of public communication', which Michael Gurevitch and I deplored, may have eased a bit. In communication as in politics, hope may stand a chance of beating fear!

Prof Em Jay G.Blumler

Emeritus Professor of the Social and Political Aspects of Broadcasting at the University of Leeds.

Email: J.G.Blumler@leeds.ac.uk

The performance of the electoral system

Dr Alan Renwick

Deputy Director of the Constitution Unit at University College London.

Email: a.renwick@ucl.ac.uk

Twitter: @alanjrenwick

The House of Commons is elected by the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. Whatever its imperfections, FPTP is supposed to have one crucial advantage over its proportional rivals: it generally produces single-party majorities, which, its supporters say, help deliver (to coin a phrase) strong and stable leadership.

Clearly, that did not happen this time. Indeed, this was the second election in three that failed to perform as FPTP's backers expect. The decline of the UK's traditional two-party system since the 1970s has made such outcomes more likely. Multipartism weakened in this election but did not disappear: the minor parties still hold more seats than at any post-war election before 1997. Unless things change dramatically, results such as this may become fairly normal.

Does that mean that this election result has strengthened the case for electoral reform? Perhaps, but we should not be too hasty.

FPTP's biggest flaw is generally seen as its failure to translate votes for different parties proportionally into seats. In 2015, for example, UKIP famously secured just one seat despite receiving more than an eighth of all votes. By the standard measure (the so-called Gallagher index), however, the 2017 election was the least disproportional since 1955 and by far the least disproportional since 1974. The reduction mostly reflects the shift back towards two-party politics: FPTP is much more likely to distribute seats in rough proportion to votes if those votes are overwhelmingly cast for only two parties.

At the same time, this proportionality may have been achieved at a cost: at least some voters clearly felt forced by FPTP into backing one of the two main parties to avoid 'wasting' their votes. Such tactical imperatives limit voters' ability to express their true preferences. But it is too early to say confidently whether levels of tactical voting were unusually high or low this time.

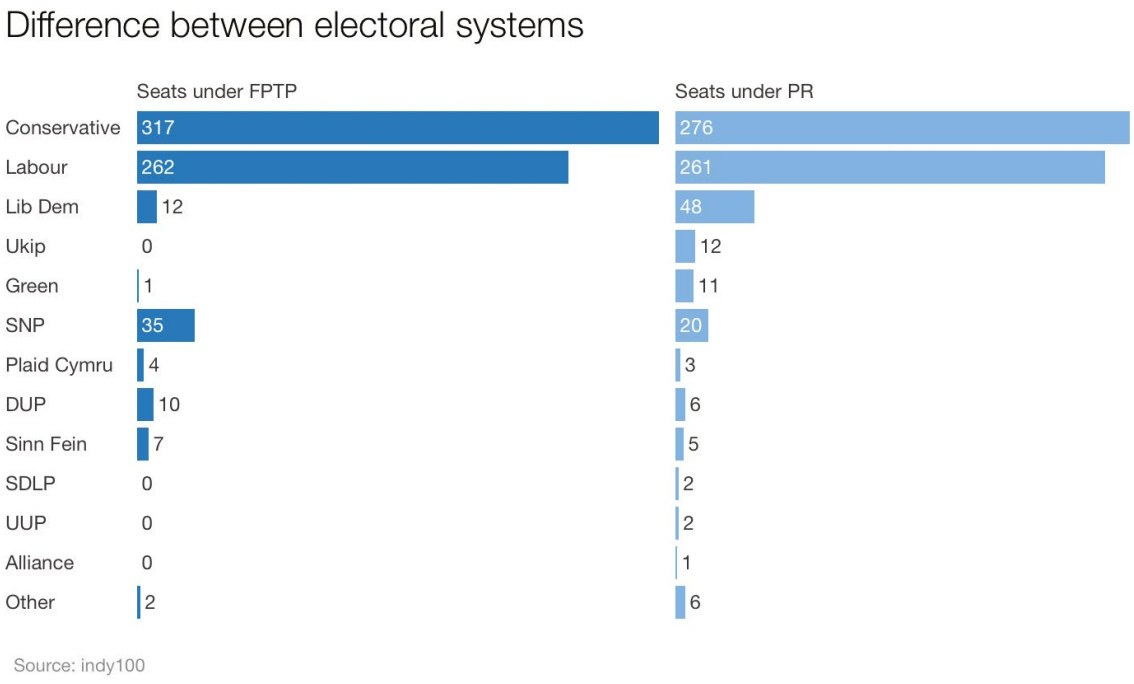
Another concern about FPTP is that it can give majority power to a party with only minority support among voters. In 2005, Labour won a clear majority on only 35.2 per cent of the votes cast (or, given low turnout, just 21.5 percent of the eligible electorate). This time, however, the Conservatives won 42.4 of the vote and 29.1 of the eligible electorate. In both cases, these are the highest figures for one party this century.

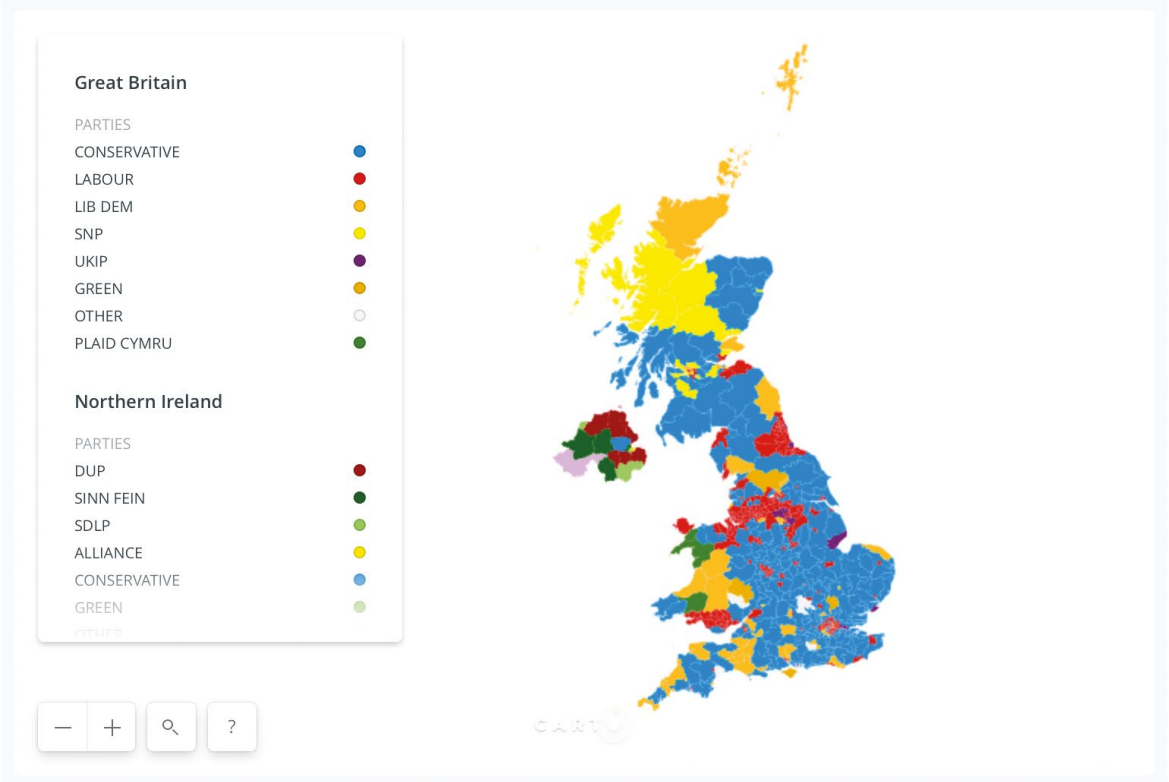
Supporters of FPTP praise it for holding MPs accountable to local voters. FPTP's detractors, by contrast, point out that this often fails to work in practice: in safe seats, the candidate of the majority party will almost inevitably win. The proportion of marginal seats has tended to fall somewhat over time, favouring the anti-FPTP side of this debate. This time, however, numbers of marginals rose: 14.9 per cent of seats now have margins below 5 per cent – the highest figure since October 1974 – and 26.0 per cent have margins below 10 per cent. There are, of course, still some extremely safe seats: thirty-five have margins above 50 percentage points. But the problem has shrunk.

FPTPs' critics also point towards its poor record in promoting representation of society in all its diversity. Each party has only one candidate in each constituency and will therefore seek the candidate who it believes will appeal to most voters. Given stereotypes and expectations, that is most likely, on the traditional view, to be a white male. Assessing the system's 2017 performance on this criterion requires some nuance. The number of women MPs – 208 out of 650 – is the highest ever, and, at 32 per cent, the proportion is ahead of the European average. But we remain behind most of the long-standing democracies of north west Europe that should be our comparators. The House of Commons also still lags the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, and UK delegation to the European Parliament, all of which use more proportional systems, though it is marginally ahead of the Northern Ireland Assembly. There are, meanwhile, 52 BME MPs and, according to Andrew Reynolds of the University of North Carolina, 45 out LGBT MPs – a world record share. Whether FPTP is still holding back social representation in the UK therefore looks unclear.

Where does this leave us? The problems generally associated with FPTP have in fact been relatively mild in this election: disproportionality is unusually low, the government's popular support base is larger than in other recent elections, society is better represented, and fewer MPs have safe seats. This election has not strengthened the case against FPTP.

But the result does weaken the positive case for FPTP. That case is based largely on the claim to foster single-party majority government, which the system has again failed to deliver. If FPTP continues to produce minority governments, it will become less obvious why its disadvantages ought to be tolerated.





What the UK electoral map would look like with Proportional Representation, courtesy of indy100

(https://www.indy100.com/article/uk-election-map-proportional-representation-system-2017-conservative-labour-7784956)

Fixed-term parliaments and the electoral cycle

Prof Richard Parry

Honorary Fellow in the Centre on Constitutional Change at the University of Edinburgh and was previously Reader in Social Policy.

Email: Richard.Parry@ed.ac.uk

The 2017 general election was an attempt by Theresa May to overturn the imposition of a regular electoral cycle on UK politics. The Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011 was meant to prevent prime ministers exploiting a favourable political conjunction in order to extend their mandate and increase their majority. May was happy to say 'I called the election…' in her stump speech though she did require a Commons motion backed by two-thirds of the total membership. And she planned never to be troubled about it again. The Conservative manifesto said (p43) 'we will repeal the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act', feeling no need to give any justification or explanation for this constitutional change. Any repeal cannot in fact be totally simple as the statutory basis for a maximum five-year term now rests on the 2011 Act. There would be political, and possibly legal, controversy about replacing a parliamentary framework for early dissolution with a reversion to the previous exercise of royal prerogative under ministerial advice. The Conservatives may now need the lifeline of the 2011 Act to sustain their fragile hold on the newly elected House of Commons.

May took a risk in assuming – correctly - that a politician's natural response to the whiff of grapeshot would bring most MPs on board. Labour did have a blocking one-third of members but declined to use it (and did suffer a minor rebellion the other way). The 2011 two-thirds mechanism is actually derived from the Scottish Parliament, with the difference that there the extraordinary election does not replace the normally-scheduled election unless it is within six months of it. With the 2011 Westminster act, the five-year clock starts again after an election, a further temptation to premature dissolution.

May had challenged the early 21st century trend to codify and structure the UK constitution and its electoral arrangements. Devolution law was one example of this. In terms of a second Scottish independence referendum, legislation is precise on granting additional powers to the Scottish Parliament (as was done in 2013 to remove temporarily any doubt about its ability to pass a legal referendum act) and managing any UK override of potentially illegal devolved action (by a referral to the Supreme Court within four weeks of passage). The Conservative manifesto declined to take a position on either of these, taking refuge in the formulation 'in order for a referendum to be fair, legal and decisive, it cannot take place until the Brexit process has played out and should not take place unless there is public consent for it to happen' (p32). This could mean almost anything.

In Scotland, the early election was a particular disruption to the electoral cycle. The SNP was looking for five years of benefit from its 2015 near-sweep in Scotland (56 out of 59 seats and a tantalizing 49.97% of the popular vote) and a near-majority in Holyrood in 2016 (63 seats out of 129, with six pro-independence Green members available). These mandates were on the line politically and have now been attenuated. In the campaign the SNP had to face premature scrutiny of their ten-year record in devolved government, and were forced into a yet higher level of caution on a second independence referendum. Their manifesto text was 'at the end of the Brexit process, when the final terms of the deal are known, it is right that Scotland should have a real choice about our future' (p29). The date of that choice now seems set to be postponed indefinitely.

The Conservative manifesto also promised to bring in first-past-the-post voting for mayoral and police commissioner elections and put on hold any further House of Lords reform. May tried to reinstate a nostalgic, pragmatic UK tradition in which sovereignty and flexibility are prized, there is no fixed electoral cycle, and the ruling UK party takes strong control. The shock election outcome traps May as both winner and loser, and constrains her scope for significant action on the constitution and everything else.

Institutions and nation building: there is such a thing as society

For much of 2010-2015, I ran a participatory project involving community co-researchers from Ashington, Northumberland. The project traced the ways the dissolution of institutions through neoliberalism was inflicting on once functioning communities avoidable harm, despite valiant efforts of community members. Nationalized industry had provided subsistence and purpose had been dissolved; community institutions, Unions and social clubs had provided formal welfare and community cohesion, were demeaned and devalued. The consequences were appalling: successive generations gradually becoming more dysfunctional as institutions disappeared. The key finding was clear: people need specific institutions and neoliberalism cannot provide them. This election supported that finding in important ways.

For much of the election campaign, supposedly informed left-leaning commentators have, in equal measure, dreaded the forthcoming Tory landslide and seemed to regard it as, in many ways, preferable to the incompetence of Corbyn's Labour. May's Red Toryism and patriotic rhetoric was seen as the perfect means of appealing to English nationalism in a way that captured the mood of Brexit – the logical extension of Labour 'moderates' who argued that recent electoral woe reflected Labour's inability to understand the nation.

In large part, this perception was due to the contempt in which voters were held. Regarded, almost uniformly, to be incapable of recognizing their interests, there was a post-feudal sense that voters were unable to engage seriously with key debates, absorbing uncritically authoritarian soundbites especially where those soundbites served to damage collective interests. There was evidence to support such belief in my community on the banks of the Tyne. Here, I encountered views that rendered cognitive dissonance a community pursuit. One skilled working class voter in his 70s outlined his quandary thus: "The grandkid is paying £9 grand a year for a two-bit degree and now we might not be able to give him the house because my missus might lose her marbles". Obviously a Labour vote secured, then? Not quite: "I've never voted Tory, but that Corbyn's a bloody clown. May'll sort it".

Yet, as the campaign wore on, it became apparent older voters were not immune to reason. First, the Social Care reforms indicated the self-interest of older voters was threatened by a Conservative Government. Then, a series of campaigns, often independent of party affiliation, highlighted the crumbling condition of national institutions and public services. The consequences of cuts to those institutions became tragically clear in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Manchester and London. Most importantly, the Conservative Manifesto and the narrative of Conservative politicians made clear to many that the notion of 'austerity' had been misleading – a means of smuggling permanent small government into politics under the guise of 'belt tightening'.

At the same time, young people, shocked at being dragged out of the EU, starting to think of themselves as a constituency with shared interests, were motivated by the message of hope promoted by Corbyn. They were attracted to the Manifesto pledges targeted explicitly at them and sought through social media to make voting Labour socially acceptable, breaking a 'spiral of silence' among other groups. Just as in the Irish referendum on Gay Marriage, the young actively engaged to counter understandings derived from the tabloid press. Gone was the apathy of my generation in our 30s, grounded in belief that elections served merely to elect the least worst administrators of neoliberalism. In its place, a substantive discussion about how our society ought to be organized.

This was apparent at Corbyn's rallies. In Gateshead, some 10,000 people of all ages, stood in heavy rain to endorse Labour's plans to nationalize transport, energy and industry and to create new national education, care and investment institutions. This was nation building.

As the campaign reached the last few days, Labour were cast in direct contrast to the empty nationalism offered by May's Red Toryism – proud to be British, but unwilling to invest in Britain's future. Indeed, as May refused to take seriously a nurse's plea for an end to wage cuts in real terms or leading police officers' pleas for investment in police numbers, it became apparent any future Conservative Government was committed to making very easy choices – giveaways for wealthy actors who did not need (and, in the case of Corporation Tax cuts, had not asked for) extra resources, and cuts for those she claimed to serve.

My first inkling that any of it had had any effect was on my way to commentate on the election for BBC Radio Cumbria. My taxi driver in Gateshead began by condemning the two party system and indicating that he would have preferred to vote UKIP. However, he stated that he just could not bring himself to vote Tory. They had, after all, ravaged the region and spent decades failing to invest in our lives. He and his colleagues abandoned UKIP and voted for a lentil eating hippy from Islington. So, it turned out, did the older voter concerned about student debt and the dementia tax. His grandchildren – who, like many other young people, actually voted – swayed his thinking in the days before the ballot. In an unusual example of the 'Bradley Effect' out-group bias, confronted with a box bearing the name of a party tribally associated with another group, he had found himself unable to act – he was a 'Shy Labour' voter.

This election confirmed what many of us have long argued: institutions matter. It seems that one institution supposedly cherished by May's Government played a central role in Labour's rise: the family. Young people opened the gateway to their elders. Society is fashionable again.

Dr Matthew Johnson

Lecturer in Politics at Lancaster University. His research focuses on issues such as Englishness and the relationship between culture, public policy and wellbeing.

Email: m.johnson@lancaster.ac.uk

Global questions, parochial answers

Dr Roman Gerodimos

Principal Lecturer in Global Current Affairs at the Faculty of Media and Communication, at Bournemouth University.

Email: rgerodimos@bournemouth.ac.uk

Twitter: @gr_roman

The election results created suspense, confusion and uncertainty. They raised more questions than they provided answers. Yet, one thing became clear: Britain's electoral and political system is unable to generate debate, solutions and representation for the really important issues currently facing the country. These issues are not local; they are not even primarily national, although they have both local and national consequences. Britain – along with many other countries around the world – is facing a set of pressing, complex and interconnected global challenges. Yet, the narratives afforded by the first past the post system (FPTP), and by the current leaders of the main political parties, were almost parochial.

What, precisely, is the Government's (or, indeed, the opposition's) plan for Brexit? In fact, what is the plan for Britain's role outside the European Union, and in the world at large? Can Britain count on its 'special relationship' with a United States led by an embattled, distracted President Trump? How will the British economy remain competitive against Germany or China? What is the future of NATO and of collective security in Europe at a time when Putin's Russia is staging a concerted campaign of cyber attacks and intervention in the domestic politics of Western countries, triggering a New Cold War? What are Britain's humanitarian and legal responsibilities, as a global advocate of human rights and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, vis-à-vis the millions of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and North Africa?

These are not abstract, fuzzy, questions. They affect communities and the lives of citizens across the UK: Islamist terrorism is not a purely national phenomenon; it is a global phenomenon with local and national implications. While there are certain things that central and local government can do to tackle this challenge, there are many others that require cross-national collaboration. Framing each new terrorist attack as a "barbaric atrocity" by "cowards" against "innocent civilians", and exhausting rhetoric and media coverage on symbolic gestures of remembrance and solidarity deters serious debate and does not help address the root causes of the problem.

Climate change will be felt across Britain. It will lead to further coastal erosion, floods, drought and extreme weather phenomena, to say nothing of the humanitarian and migratory consequences on other parts of the world.

Dependence on fossil fuels cannot be overcome through national means alone. Making sustainable forms of energy economically viable requires substantial investment in research and development that can only come from broad international collaborations.

Tackling cybercrime, intellectual property theft, or the ethical, economic and practical implications of nanotechnology, biotechnology, artificial intelligence and driverless cars, all require transnational action.

Ignoring this ongoing reality – this layer of complex, globalised questions – the UK's electoral and political system produced local, almost provincial, responses: first past the post encourages localism and the politics of the micro-community. DUP – which can only be described as a fringe party, geographically and ideologically – found itself controlling the future of the country. The swing from the SNP to the Conservatives in Scotland appears to have been driven by opposition to a second independence referendum. The Conservatives increased their vote share because they absorbed UKIP's support, especially in the North. Labour performed well – especially across university towns – partly because students want a payback on their tuition fees. The Conservatives' campaign was derailed by the so-called 'death tax' – the social care provisions in the Tory manifesto. Neither party's manifesto included a clear plan for the Brexit negotiations. The Remain camp was not even represented as a coherent cause.

While Jeremy Corbyn succeeded in mobilising young people, and while millions of voters are concerned about inequality, Labour provided conventional answers – such as borrowing, taxation and nationalisation – without considering the structural context within which the British economy will operate outside of the European Union. Possible trade isolation and cut-throat competition would require Britain to become the ultimate tax haven and cheap labour employer in order to survive. The global, structural root causes of inequality – deregulated governance, widespread tax avoidance and tax evasion through remote havens and complex schemes – were not touched upon.

Practical solutions, such as the Tobin tax (targeting speculative currency exchange transactions), require a different mode of governance – global governance – and a different mode of global citizenship and globally-conscious political debate and representation. Over and above all the subject-specific issues facing us right now, we are suffering from a serious democratic deficit and a real need for global awareness. While one cannot expect a single national election to begin to solve these issues, the narratives and personalities of the 2017 election are a sad and stark reminder of the disconnect between the local and the global.

The future of illusions

If proof were still needed, in the age of the Trump presidency, that democratic politics does not proceed in a rational way, then our 2017 General Election has thrown up some telling illustrations of the churning affect, and the illusions to which it is attached, that can shape electoral outcomes.

What do we make of the surge of idealistic engagement amongst the young set off by Corbyn's campaign? It isn't clear how young the 'young' were, nor how many seats they directly won, but preliminary analysis of the results points to the likely importance in the vote of this surprising mobilisation. Most importantly, we don't know what will happen to that idealism now the election is over, nor is it fully clear what issues are most important to it. Much will depend on the direction offered to it by Corbyn himself, especially given the lack of charisma and appeal elsewhere in his front bench team.

Yet television coverage was repeatedly showing us the depth of public cynicism about politics. It was conveyed in the default cliché rehearsed in many vox pops: 'They're all in it for themselves'. Anyone these days asked by a journalist if they trust politicians would be afraid of looking foolish if they said anything but 'No'.

Of course the behavior of some politicians of all stripes has fed this conventional wisdom, but the cynicism is mis-directed. It is not their own individual self-interests which most politicians seem to be pursuing but the interests of their parties. Those collective interests (like those of 'the country') may at times be easily confused by politicians with their personal ambitions, as perhaps in May's opportunistic call for an election. But much of the deception and pretension in political discourse is a product of our dysfunctional party system, and is in order to protect or advance the *party*.

The House of Cards illusion of Westminster as populated entirely by self-serving crooks has become an enduring feature of our political culture. Fortunately it does not prevent people from voting – the turnout of 69% was an encouraging feature of the 2017 election. But it comes and goes in the public mind, a recurrent hissing at hopeful politics. Does the fresh enthusiasm for Corbyn (when disentangled from re-treads of Far Left fervour) signal a weakening of this illusion, induced by television and social media images of an unpolished and unaffected person?

Other illusions are more transient, products of particular conjunctures. A prominent one during this campaign was that it was the 'Brexit election', to determine whether we would have a 'hard' or 'soft' Brexit. Since control over immigration was (according to the Ashcroft Poll) the second most popular reason for voting Leave in the referendum, we may assume that for many people 'hard Brexit' meant, positively and simply, a hard border. Yet the only party claiming to offer this was UKIP, obliterated by the electorate, and anyway the whole issue of Brexit was obscured by the Corbyn surge at the centre of which were the issues of inequality, redistribution and public services.

Cue here for another illusion to make its claim on our understanding: that politics is always fundamentally about the economy and material interests. This most long-standing notion can take several forms: individual self-interest, sectional interest, or general concern for the 'economy' can all be seen as key drivers of electoral choice. While for some people any of these calculations might be crucial, few of us (none of us?) are in a position to make them without recourse to ideas and assumptions borrowed or taken on trust from elsewhere – which means that even the most dispassionate calculations depend on affect-laden illusions about what is going on in the world. And for others, perhaps a majority, the calculative element is at most secondary, as shown clearly by the many referendum Leave votes cast in search of a sense of control and independence, and those Remain votes based on an attachment to a cosmopolitan identity. The Remain campaign's mistake, of course, was to treat the issue as an exclusively economic one.

Labour's new voters in 2017 were seemingly values-driven rather than identity-expressing, but they certainly were not calculators. They want a more fair society, with more public ownership and social provision. Idealism by definition comes with illusions, in this case likely to include some idealisation of Corbyn and possibly others around him. Impressive though the campaign has been, and laudable in its call for social justice, the question now is whether the idealism it evoked will be channeled into the sterile illusions of our self-idealising political parties and factions, or will be a force for the longer-term changes in our political culture and electoral system needed to realize the vision of a better society.

Prof Barry Richards

Professor of Public Communication at Bournemouth University.

Email: brichards@bmth.ac.uk

2

Voters, Polls and Results

A glorious defeat: anti-politics and the funnelling of frustration

It's not easy being a Professor of Politics. Everyone expects me to know what's going on and what's likely to happen. But I'm just as bamboozled as everyone else by the outcome of the UK's recent general election. And yet 'bamboozlement' is becoming something of a byword for modern democratic events - think Brexit, think Trump, and now think 'Corbyn the conqueror' - the unlikely cult hero leading an 'old' political party re-designated as a grassroots social movement.

And yet to some extent recent events in the UK are symptomatic of a broader international trend that is often (but incorrectly) labelled in terms of anti-political sentiment. Incorrectly labelled because the undoubted existence of high levels of social frustration and political disengagement amongst large sections of the public actually veils a desire for a 'different' politics – not the denial or rejection of the need for democratic politics itself. It is this that explains the growth of populist nationalism - with variants on both the right and left - in Europe and the United States. It also helps explain the recent election result in the UK.

The success of Jeremy Corbyn and his '*New-Old*' Labour was that it managed to tap into and funnel the large reservoir of social frustration with politics that has been identified by political scientists for some years. Corbyn offered a very 'different' type of politics in terms of *content* (i.e. a clear shift to the left built around higher taxes and nationalisation) and *form* (against the clean-cut on-message image of 'professional politicians'). Corbyn's rather chaotic and almost amateurish approach came across as refreshingly honest; never before have a scruffy beard and an un-tucked shirt become such electoral assets.

If you are *anti-political* (in terms of how politics was 'done' in the past), if you are *anti-politician* (in terms of politicians who all look and behave the same) and if you are *anti-establishment* (in terms of believing in the existence of a largely untouchable political elite) then the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn positioned itself like a political lightning-rod to channel those frustrations. This is a key point that many of his opponents failed to understand. The more the media attacked and mocked him, the more Theresa May refused to engage, the more Boris Johnson described the Labour leader as a 'benign herbivore' and a 'mutton-headed mugwump' the more this seemed to energise and build Corbyn's support base. It simply confirmed in the minds of the disaffected just how brash and arrogant the political elite (including the media and commentariat had become).

Funnelling frustration and offering a positive message formed the magic formula for the Labour Party's glorious defeat. It tuned into the populist signal.

The critical element, however, which offers a key to understanding contemporary democracy more broadly was the manner in which the Labour Party secured the support of at least three very different segments of the previously disillusioned or disengaged.

The first segment was the traditionally anti-political youth vote (aged 18-24) that were dismissed for much of the election as 'snowflake voters' who would melt away before getting to the polling booth. The pollsters were wrong as around 72 per cent of younger voters placed their cross on the ballot paper (up from just 44 per cent in 2015). Many young people remained angry about the EU referendum vote and therefore overlapped with a second section of the public who were, put simply, 'anti-hard Brexit'. This included remainers and soft-Brexiteers but the common denominator was deep-seated concern about the increasingly belligerent, nationalist and aggressive tone of the Conservative Party. Which, in turn, flows into a third and final group – the white working classes or 'Left Behind' that had rejected mainstream politics and progressive values and led 'the revolt on the right' seen in the emergence of UKIP. The simple fact seems to be that a large proportion of the 'left behind' went back to the left and the Labour Party as they prioritised an anti-austerity agenda and investment in public services above the anti-immigrant anti-Europe stance offered by the Conservatives.

The lessons for understanding democracy around the world?

Firstly, the public are not anti-political: they are 'pro-political' but 'pro-a-different-way-of-doing-politics'. They crave the existence of real policy choices and a positive vision for the future. Secondly, the concept of democracy is in flux and is arguably more fragile than at any point in the last fifty years. Politicians need to be popular but this is very different to falling into the trap of populism (the very opposite of democratic politics). Finally, the rules of the political game have changed but nobody seems to know quite what they are anymore. We need a new language of politics in order to fully grasp what kind of democracy this is (let alone where it might be going).

Prof Matthew Flinders

Professor of Politics and Founding Director of the Sir Bernard Crick Centre for the Public Understanding of Politics. His latest book What Kind of Democracy is This? is published by Policy Press, 2017.

Email: m.flinders@sheffield.ac.uk

Twitter: @PoliticalSpike

Younger voters politically energised, but the generational divide deepens

Dr James Sloam

Reader in Politics & International Relations at Royal Holloway University.

Email: James.Sloam@rhul.ac.uk

Twitter: @James_Sloam

Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed a sharp decline in youth participation in general elections. 60% of 18-24 year olds voted in the 1992, compared to an average of 40% over the last four polls. As the graph below shows, the gap between youth and overall turnout has increased significantly during this period.

However, there is overwhelming evidence to show that young people are interested in 'politics' (more broadly defined) and engage in a whole multitude of civic and political activities: from demonstrations against university tuition fees, to the boycotting of products that damage the environment, to campaigns against the closing of parks or youth clubs in local communities. So, young people are often interested in, and engaged in, key issues, but have for many years been put off by politicians and political parties.

This was illustrated by the 2016 referendum on British membership of the European Union, when an estimated 60% of 18-24 year olds turned out to vote on this issue of concern. But most young people were disappointed by the result. Around three quarters of this age group (and 82% of university students) voted for the UK to remain in the EU.

It is nevertheless clear that the gap between youth attitudes and those of older voters has grown: from the Iraq War, to student tuition fees, to immigration, to Brexit. Indeed, the Labour Party under Ed Miliband managed to increase its share of the vote amongst 18-24 year olds in 2015, while losing ground amongst older cohorts.

One of the main surprises in 2017 general election was the strength of turnout amongst younger voters. A YouGov survey released on 13 June, estimated that 57% of 18-19 year olds and 59% of 20-24 year olds took part in the poll. Constituency results also show that the swing to the Labour Party was significantly higher in areas with relatively young populations.

Data from a Populus survey, which I helped to design (commissioned by Bite the Ballot and Freud), showed that young people were engaged. 18-24 year olds were more likely to vote in the 2017 general election than they were at a similar stage before the 2015 poll: 57% stated that they were certain to vote (a month before the election) compared to 46% two years ago. 18-24 year olds were actually as likely to vote as 25-34 year olds and 35-44 year olds (though still well behind the over 45s – of whom around 80% were certain to vote).

The same survey suggested that young people were energised by Brexit, Jeremy Corbyn, and the clear ideological divisions between the Labour and the Conservative Party. 81% of 18-24 year olds claimed that they were following the general election closely, compared to an average of 80% for all age groups (only topped by the interest of the over 65 age group). Furthermore, 88% of 18-24 year olds stated that they were following Brexit negotiations closely – more than any other age group!

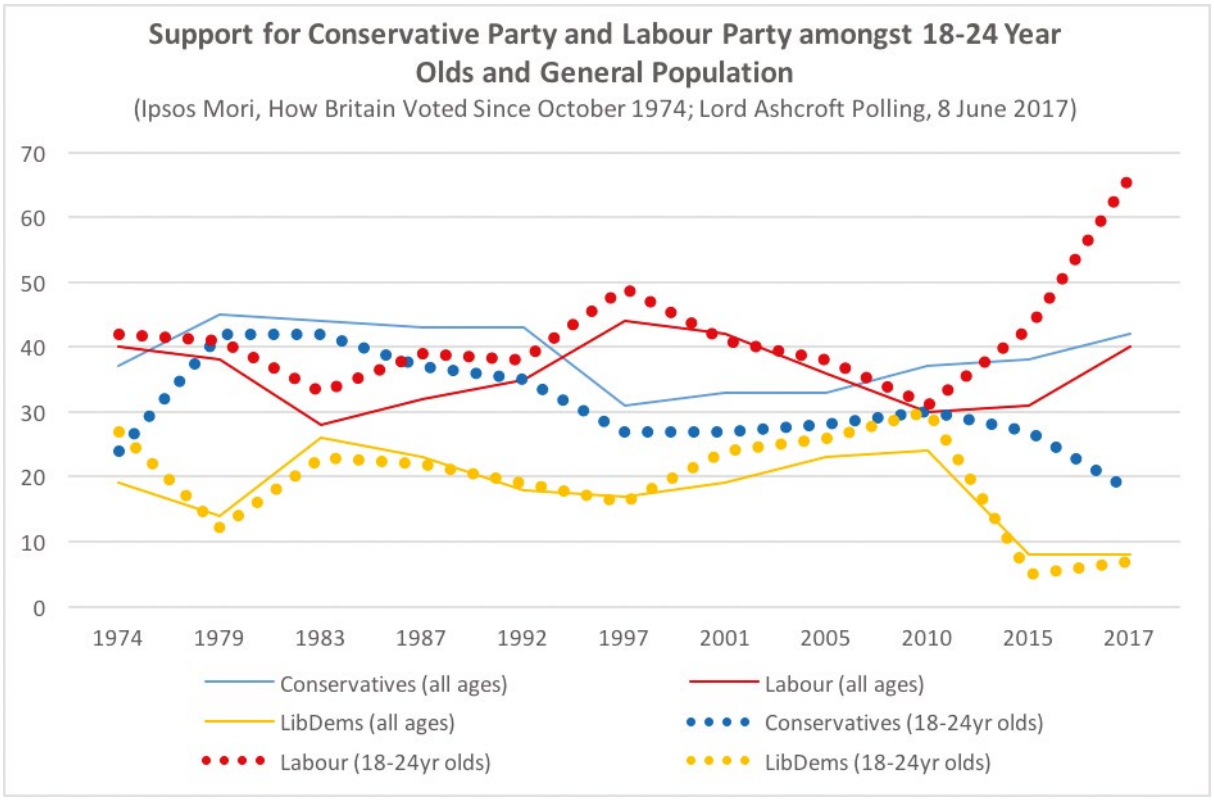
Younger voters were following the general election and Brexit negotiations much more closely than the most popular entertainment programmes: 34% for Game of Thrones and 32% for Britain's Got Talent. These figures illustrate that the popular claims – that younger citizens are apathetic about and uninterested in politics – yet immersed in their own leisure pursuits – are plain wrong.

Although we cannot say for certain that the EU referendum encouraged young people to engage more actively in the general election, we can say that those who supported Remain in last year's poll had a very similar demographic profile to those who voted for Corbyn: young, highly educated, and supportive of cultural diversity in Britain. According to ICM, 75% of 18-24 year olds who voted Remain, voted for the Labour Party.

Young people were clearly attracted to Corbyn's perceived authenticity and policy program, but this was a two-way street. In 2017, the Labour Party appealed directly to this demographic through proposed investment in education (including, the abolition of university tuition fees) and housing, and guaranteeing workers' rights. By contrast, there was little for young people in the Conservative Party manifesto beyond vague references to intergenerational justice.

These differences in emphasis on age cohorts in party manifestos, was reflected by unprecedented differences in support for the two main political parties amongst younger and older citizens. According to Lord Ashcroft Polling on 8 June, 66% of 18-24 year olds (who expressed support for a political party) intended to vote Labour, compared to 38% nationally and only 23% of over 65s! On the other hand, just 18% of 18-24 year olds supported the Conservative Party, compared to 58% of over 65s. The Figure below illustrates how the gap between youth support for Conservatives and Labour has widened dramatically since 2010 to a level unseen in recent political history.

In 2017, younger voters were politically energised by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. In an echo of the 1960s, young people expressed themselves as (in Inglehart and Norris' terms) left-of-centre cosmopolitans, reacting both to austerity politics and the cultural conservatism found in older generations and embodied by the Leave campaign in the EU referendum. The Conservative Party will need to take note of these developments if they are to building a majority in future parliaments.


Support for Conservative Party and Labour Party amongst 18-24 Year Olds and General Population
(Ipsos Mori, How Britain Voted Since October 1974; Lord Ashcroft Polling, 8 June 2017)
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1974
1979
1983
1987
1992
1997
2001
2005
2010
2015
2017
Conservatives (all ages)
Labour (all ages)
LibDems (all ages)
Conservatives (18-24yr olds)
Labour (18-24yr olds)
LibDems (18-24yr olds)

Why the younger generation of Corbynistas?

Prof Pippa Norris

Paul McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at Harvard University, Professor of Government and International Relations at Sydney University, and founding Director of the Electoral Integrity Project.

Email: Pippa_Norris@Harvard.edu

Twitter: @PippaN15

One of the most remarkable developments in recent elections has been the propensity for younger citizens to vote, and support older socialist leaders advocating policies last fashionable during the 1970s.

The British Labour party was pleasantly surprised to find young people flocked to Jeremy Corbyn's rallies, a 68-year stalwart who never held office since entering parliament in 1983. A lifetime protestor, pacifist and antiwar campaigner, his Labour manifesto promised to nationalize key industries, scrap tuition fees, boost workers' rights, raise taxes on the wealthy and negotiate a soft EU exit.

The British Election Study (BES) shows 1970-2010 Conservatives consistently held a modest advantage among pensioners. But the age gap recently expanded and the June 2016 Brexit referendum saw a generational chasm. Younger people were significantly less likely to vote but when they did, around two-thirds voted Remain, by contrast 57% of pensioners voted Leave. Similar divisions persisted in 2017 , according to the Ashcroft General Election day poll, Labour received the votes of 23% of pensioners but 67% of 18-24 year olds. By contrast, 59% of pensioners voted Conservative, but only 18% of 18-24 year olds. According to Sky News, turnout among 18-24-year-olds was 66.4%, up 43 per cent from 2015, especially in seats with many aged 18-29, possibly due to the high levels of the college educated populations in these constituencies. Class cleavages are negligible, although education was important; even controlling for age, the higher the share of college-educated, the larger the Con>Lab swing of the vote.

Similar patterns, for a similar candidate to Corbyn, were witnessed during the 2016-7 US Democrat primaries. Bernie Sanders' substantial lead over Clinton among younger voters was one of the hall marks of the contest (Figure 2).The generation gap was also evident in the Clinton-Trump vote (Figure 3); the 2016 American National Election Study showed if those under 55 had voted, Hillary Clinton would be president. Youth were least likely to vote, though education was significant, occupational class inequalities, the underlying issue of both Sanders and Corbyn's campaigns, failed to predict voting in either contest.

So what explains these substantial age gaps? One explanation is that younger people are more idealistic and left-wing, attracted by the radical egalitarian economic message of both leaders; plausible if younger generations feel they face more limited economic opportunities than their parents and grandparents. Yet the evidence remains mixed. One study reported those who came of age under Thatcher were more rightwing towards wealth redistribution and the welfare state for example.

Alternatively, youth voters may be attracted more by social liberalism (such as gender equality, globalization, and climate change) and antipathetic towards the authoritarian values associated with nationalism and immigration underpinning the campaigns of Theresa May and Donald Trump. In this view, Left-Right divisions may have made way for cultural cleavages around values of transactional national interests versus global cosmopolitan cooperation There is considerable evidence for this claim, for example, a Pew study noted growing ideological and partisan generational gaps,,American youth are more tolerant, engaged and supportive of social justice. Equally a World Values Survey shows persistent generation gaps along authoritarian and libertarian perspectives.

An election day poll of 14,384 respondents, with CATI and online fieldwork 6-9th June does not show distinctive generational experiences (i.e. Boomers vs Millennials), life cycle effects (where attitudes change with age), or period effects (arising from specific events, like the financial crash).

Figure 4 shows UK youth are far more liberal than their parents and grandparents who are more socially conservative on the Internet, the green movement, feminism, multiculturalism, globalization and immigration. The age gaps are substantial, for example a 30-point age gap between the youngest and oldest in approval of the green movement reflecting broader comparative evidence about the growth of libertarian and post-materialist values in many post-industrial societies.

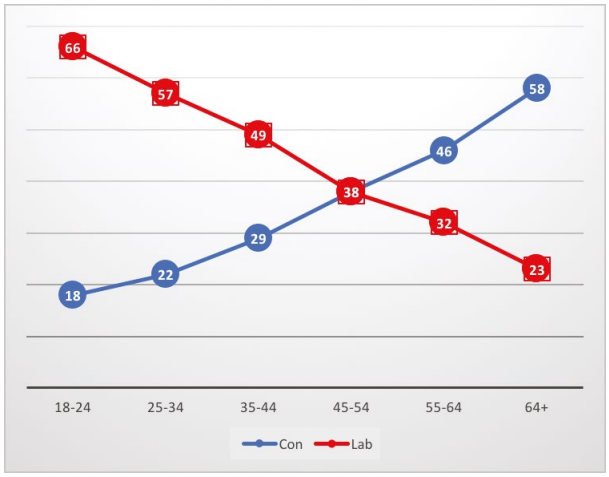
Comparing public opinion on economic issues shows similar age gaps (Figure 5); with young people exhibiting more leftwing attitudes suggesting they were more likely to be attracted towards Labour's platform.

Yet austerity seems to have minimal impact. Figure 6 shows less consistent age gaps on expectations of life chances in 30 years, whether social change was for the better or worse, and opportunities for advancement and social mobility.

The striking age gap similarities evident in recent US and UK elections, and the closure of occupational class cleavages, raise important questions about the changing nature of party competition. If these represent generational shifts, and if young people can be mobilized to vote, then this could transform the policy agenda, future of party competition, and offer prospects for long-term electoral change.

Figure 1:

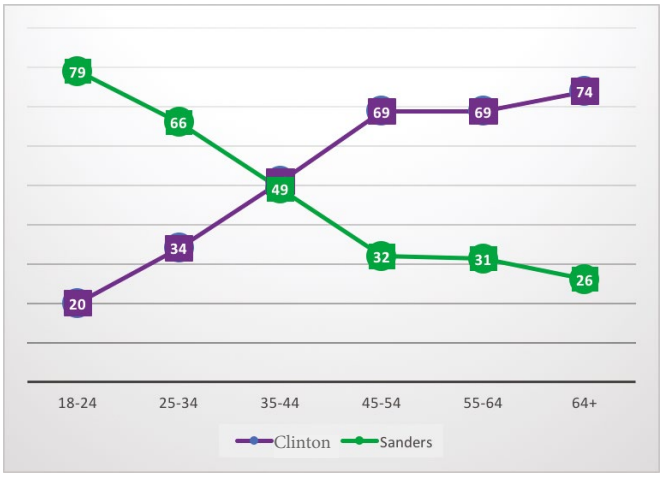
% Vote for the Labour and Conservative parties by age group, UK 2017 general election



Source: N. 14384 F/w 6-9 June 2017 http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2017/06/result-happen-post-vote-survey/

Figure 2:

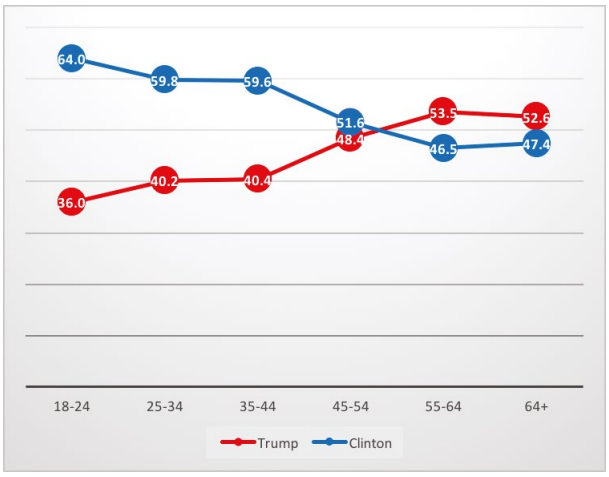
% Vote for Sanders and Clinton by age group, US 2016 Democratic primaries



Source: American National Election Study, time-series dataset http://www.electionstudies.org/

Figure 3:

% Vote for Clinton and Trump by age group, US 2016 presidential election



Source: American National Election Study, time-series dataset http://www.electionstudies.org/

Figure 4:

Young are more socially liberal, and also more anti-capitalist, UK 2017 General Election

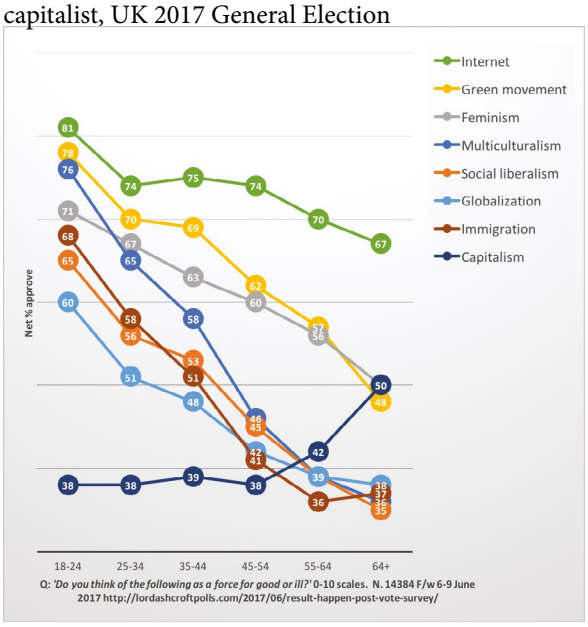


Figure 5:

Young are more left-wing towards social and economic policy issues, UK 2017 General Election

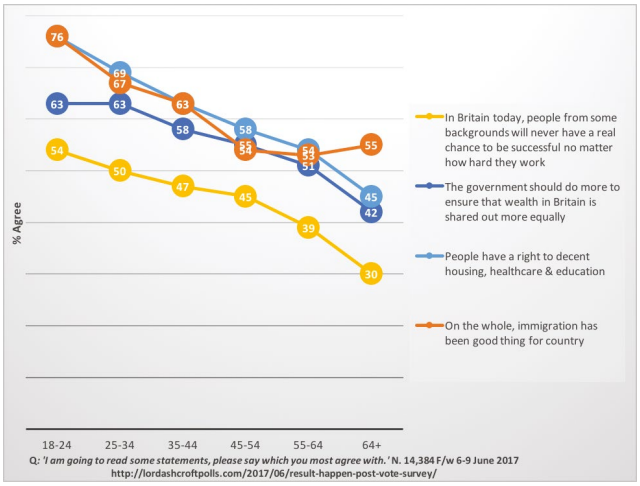
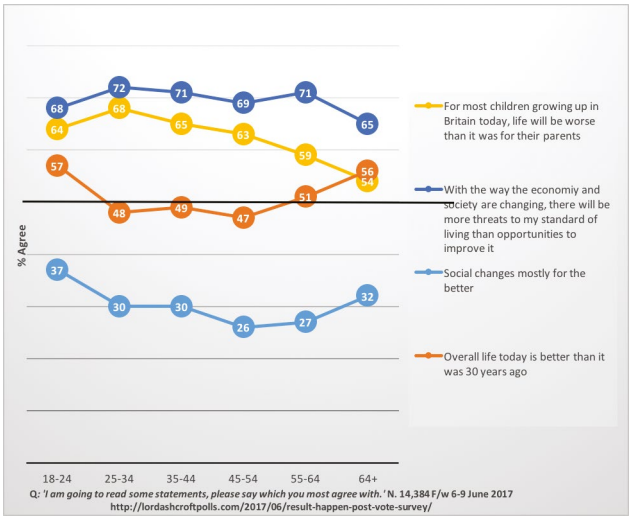


Figure 6:

Young and old are similar in attitudes towards social and economic change,, UK 2017 General Election



Young people and propaganda in the wake of the 2017 election

Dr Shakuntala Banaji

Associate Professor in Media and Communication at the LSE and Programme Director: MSc Media, Communication & Development.

Email: s.banaji@lse.ac.uk

The normative role of mainstream media in democracies is to serve the public interest by representing the voices of citizens and holding those in power to account. Often, it appears, the British media choose to do neither. "The kind of bullying I've seen by The Sun, Daily Mail and even The Guardian and BBC of Jeremy Corbyn and us young people that supports him, would've destroyed some people. Even my uncle's showed me the front pages and been like 'What you supporting this loser for, mate?' But I just told him: 'don't always believe what you read.'" Ongoing media analysis and youth focus groups for EU Horizon 2020 Project CATCH-EyoU and for the All Party Parliamentary Group on A Better Brexit for Young People by Sam Mejias and myself suggests many young people view Corbyn as the opposite of an irresponsible politician and their skepticism about the values and views of mainstream media are more than justified.

In the run-up to the announcement of the election, even the so-called 'liberal' media published material demonstrably more hostile to Corbyn than that published about previous Labour contenders. The stories were so vicious and contemptuous that young people interviewed about citizenship and democracy, commented that they felt the mainstream media were "bullying" Corbyn, "disgustingly unfair", "totally biased", "liars" and "belonged to the Rich". Nevertheless, they continued to read these media, and few relied on alternative or online sources. Only one considered starting his own alternative blog. They were thus, de facto, responsible, and critical citizens.

Reports based on content analysis of media coverage of Corbyn concluded mainstream media were biased, and that much of the UK print media deliberately undermined the Labour leader's public image. They did this by 1) ignoring, 2) under-representing or 3) misrepresenting his own statements and those of his Labour party allies, 4) taking statements out of context, 5) sensationalizing past relationships, and 6) giving airtime/print space to critics on the of the Labour right and in government. The photograph of Jeremy Corbyn walking beside a world war veteran, cropped to make it look as if Corbyn was dancing insultingly on Remembrance Sunday, is only one case of such deliberate misrepresentation.

Representations of Corbyn and front bench colleagues as terrorist sympathizers, and of him as a coward who'd refuse to press the nuclear button screamed from billboards and circulated on Twitter. Loughborough University reports during the campaign the British media disproportionately attacked Corbyn and Labour. The work of delegitimizing Labour's policies and personal records continued unabated in the first week of June, with The Daily Mail, The Express and The Sun leading the attack. Younger citizens and those with longterm leftwing sympathies Tweeted and Facebooked their discomfort and anger, sometimes getting thousands of shares. Young people participating in our research repeatedly commented Corbyn is a hugely experienced MP with decades of constituency work, and a record of considered, ethical voting in parliamentary decisions on war, social benefits, civil and human rights. Several spoke of arguments with family members over the Brexit referendum and Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. In Huddersfield, Portsmouth and London young people also pointed out repeated attempts by British media to sensationalize, personalize and vilify have left little space for the public at large – or in their case, their older relatives – to get to know Corbyn's positive qualities. The May 29 TV appearances finally gave Corbyn and May equal airtime.

The context of media bias is, of course, significant. Corbyn and his shadow chancellor John McDonnell are exceptionally principled leftwing MPs, with no intention of changing their policies to satisfy big corporations. Much of the UK mainstream media expresses the ideological bias of their owners, with links to big business and conservative elites. Since the Leveson Inquiry links between Conservative government members and News International are no longer secret, and Twitter reports that Rupert Murdoch's reaction to the exit polls was to storm out of the room. In this context, uncritical trust in media is tantamount to an abandonment of democracy.

In this fraught context, the stunning success of Labour, and Corbyn's personal authority, has to be an incredible, momentous, political achievement: a triumph of critical citizenship and the young. My project observed networks of Labour activists and volunteers from Momentum, local Labour members, and alternative media producers working tirelessly in the past two months to get the "message" about social democratic policies and Corbyn's integrity out to the public: a message that should have been given a fair and equal billing in mainstream media. Offline and online work – such as Momentum's 'Bernie Sanders Training Events' and My nearest Marginal allowed inexperienced citizens across generations to get involved in supporting the campaign, and to express their solidarity outside the mainstream media bubble. The election result is a resounding confirmation that young voters, socialist values, alternative leftwing media and grassroots work on doorsteps can challenge mainstream media. But, mainstream media is still incredibly powerful, and those who trust it, particularly in the middle and older age groups, risk allowing themselves to be misled. Surely, as citizens and scholars, we should not be satisfied with always being the underdog – surely we need to point out, and fight to undermine the political power, propaganda, and everyday biases of mainstream media.

The generation election: youth electoral mobilisation at the 2017 General Election

Now the dust has settled, how should we account for the surge in youth turnout at the 2017 UK General Election with estimates that as many as 72 per cent of those aged 18-24 cast a vote - representing a significant increase on the last election and a departure from recent patterns of youth abstention? When Theresa May unexpectedly called a snap election on 18th April 2017, such an outcome seemed virtually unthinkable. The Conservative lead over Labour in the pre-election polls appeared unassailable, and the 50-day campaign period loomed long, flat and predictable. For many young people, another vote, soon after what they considered a deeply disappointing 2016 referendum outcome to leave the EU, heralded little more than the prospect of another 5 years in which their concerns would remain ignored by the political elite. The likelihood that Britain's youth would flock to the polls seemed somewhat remote.

Certainly since 1997, election turnouts have been very generational affairs, characterised by strong voting by older citizens and abstention by the nation's youth. At the 2015 General Election, only 43 per cent of registered 18-24 year olds voted, over 20 per cent below the average turnout and 35 per cent below those aged 65 and over. However, recent voting events suggested a possible change in the electoral wind, that youth could be attracted to the polls in 2017. In particular, over two-thirds (68 per cent) of those aged 16-24 voted at the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum and 60 per cent of 18-24 year olds voted at the 2016 European Union referendum, suggesting British youth will vote when motivated by the political issues at stake or feel that they can influence the result.

One early indication that we might see those 2014 and 2016 referenda youth turnout rates repeated in 2017 was revealed in Hansard's Audit of Political Engagement shortly before Theresa May's announcement. This suggested that 39 per cent of young people said they were certain to vote - a large increase on the 16 per cent who said they were certain to vote at a similar point in 2015.

There were other clues pointing to a possible upsurge in youth mobilisation. Nearly one million (919,691) under 25s signed-up to vote in the month before the 2017 registration deadline; this surpassed registration rates in the build up to the 2016 EU referendum (709,076) and 2015 General Election (657,570). Furthermore, young people's certainty to vote soared to 63 per cent in polls before the election. Jeremy Corbyn seemed certainly to be a factor behind this surge and his openness to more direct forms of democracy appealed to young people who prefer politics created from below. Labour were leading the Conservatives by 57 points in the 18-24 cohort according to one poll shortly before the 2017 election, whereas only 16 per cent more of 18-24 year olds preferred Labour to the Conservatives at the 2015 election.

So why did Britain's youth feel motivated to vote in 2017? One critical factor was their direct experience of recent government austerity policies. According to the Resolution Foundation and the Institute for Public Policy Research, young people have faced an unprecedented attack on their socioeconomic conditions in recent years; state support has been withdrawn from them (and often transferred to older age groups), their employment positions are increasingly precarious, access to homeownership is decreasing and wages are below those of previous youth generations.

Moreover, at the 2017 General Election, a number of youth-centred policies were promoted by the parties. All bar the Conservatives and UKIP backed extending voting rights to those aged 16 and 17. Labour's manifesto promised large increases in the minimum wage for under 25s, the abolition of university tuition fees, restoring the Education Maintenance Allowance and greater employment security. The Liberal Democrats produced a youth manifesto written in consultation with young people, although the Conservative's manifesto commitments were somewhat limited in scope.

Another potential factor was youth disappointment following the vote for "Brexit" at the EU referendum. The fact that three quarters of 18-24 year olds voted to "remain" may have motivated them to vote in 2017 to contest older generations' preferences, which are often at odds with their political desires. Furthermore, young people may have also been more inclined to vote in 2017 as they believed they could influence the result. The Conservative Party were defending a working majority of 17 seats and research from the BBC before the election suggested young people could influence the result in up to 10 seats. While Henn and Foard (2014) suggest that contemporary youth doubt their influence in politics, their importance to the result of the 2017 election may have made them reconsider the impact they could have.

The 2017 General Election will be remembered for many things. The unprecedented wave of terror attacks that formed the backdrop to the election. The stark ideological choice on offer between a very traditional Conservative party and a resurgent Labour party led by a long-term socialist that ultimately only narrowly failed in defeating the incumbent Conservatives by a 2.4 percentage share of the national vote. The election will also be recalled as the event that captured the imagination of a new generation of young people who announced their return to the electoral stage in a way not seen in decades.

Prof Matt Henn

Research Coordinator for Politics and International Studies in the School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University. His research focusses on youth and political engagement and he teaches in the areas of citizenship and political participation.

Email: matt.henn@ntu.ac.uk
Twitter: @MattHenn2011

James Hart

PhD student within the School of Social Sciences at Nottingham Trent University. His research investigates why young people's turnout at elections is declining and whether membership of particular social groups influences the likelihood of participation in electoral politics.

Email: james.hart2015@my.ntu.ac.uk

The 2017 General Election: How Votes were split between "open and closed"

Dr Jonathan Wheatley

Lecturer in Comparative Politics at Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom.

Email: jwheatley@brookes.ac.uk

Twitter: @JonWheatley64

As I have argued elsewhere, today politics in the United Kingdom and in much of Europe more generally is more complicated than a simple struggle between left and right. While issues of redistribution of wealth and private or public ownership of essential services have been critical issues in this month's general election, the election took place in the shadow of last year's vote to leave the European Union. While Brexit did not dominate the election as some commentators thought it would – and some politicians hoped it would – the UK's future relationship with the EU is one element of a broad set of issues that have created a deep division within society. This division is essentially about the significance of "the other", whether that be a power beyond our borders such as the EU, or a minority within, such as immigrants or Muslims. It is a divide between those whom David Goodhart describes as "from anywhere" and those "from somewhere", between cosmopolitan "citizens of the world" and those who feel neglected and left behind by globalisation and feel that government is more interested in pleasing "outsiders" than its own people. Thus politics is not only shaped by (economic) left versus right, but also by a cultural dimension sometimes referred to as "open against closed".

This election has been marked above all by a polarisation of the political parties. In line with Theresa May's comment at last year's Conservative Party Conference that "if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere", since the vote to leave the EU and May's victory in last year's leadership contest, the Conservatives have positioned themselves near the "closed" end of the cultural dimension, drawing in former UKIP supporters, but at the same time have downplayed their position on the economic right by promising to increase the living wage and statutory rights for family care and training. This was a deliberate appeal to Labour's former working class heartlands. At the same time, Labour took a very clear position near the left pole of the economic dimension by pledging to bring essential services back into public hands and increasing public expenditure through higher taxes on the wealthy. Finally, the Liberal Democrats and Greens both positioned themselves at the "open" end of the cultural dimension by calling for a second EU referendum. In Scotland, a rather different dynamic played out, with the critical divide being between those who favour independence and those who prefer the Union with the SNP located at one poll and the UK-wide parties at the other.

According to evidence obtained from data from English users of an online Voting Advice Application called WhoGetsMyVoteUK that ran from 24 May until 8 June and attracted some 100,000 users, a major rift has opened up between supporters of the Labour Party, the Greens and the Liberal Democrats on the one hand, and Conservative and UKIP supporters on the other. Supporters of the former three parties tend to be economically left-wing and "open", while the supporters of the latter two are generally "closed" in the cultural sense, with quite a significant gap between the "open" and "closed" ends of the spectrum that is a kind of no-mans-land for party supporters. This is illustrated by the diagram below that shows the positions of users who claim to support these five parties on policy issues that correspond to each of the above-mentioned dimensions. For more details on how the positions of party supporters were calculated, as well as a comparison with their positions in 2015, please refer to a recent article I wrote for LSE blogs.

In the end, despite their acceptance of Brexit, Labour managed to gain the support of young, cosmopolitan, "open" voters, eclipsing the Liberal Democrats and Greens, who hoped they could draw on the support of this group, although in those few constituencies in which the Liberal Democrats posed a greater threat to the Conservatives (such as Oxford West and Abingdon, Twickenham and Bath), these voters proved ready to vote tactically to oust a Tory incumbent. At the same time, the Conservatives picked up the older, more culturally "closed" vote and even made some headway against Labour in some more working class Northern constituencies. In total, the more "open" parties, i.e. Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Greens, SNP and Plaid Cymru garnered 52.5% of the vote, while the "closed" parties of the Conservatives and UKIP won 44.3%.

On April 18, when she announced the general election, Theresa May claimed that "The country is coming together, but Westminster is not". Evidence would suggest that both Westminster and the country remain deeply divided.

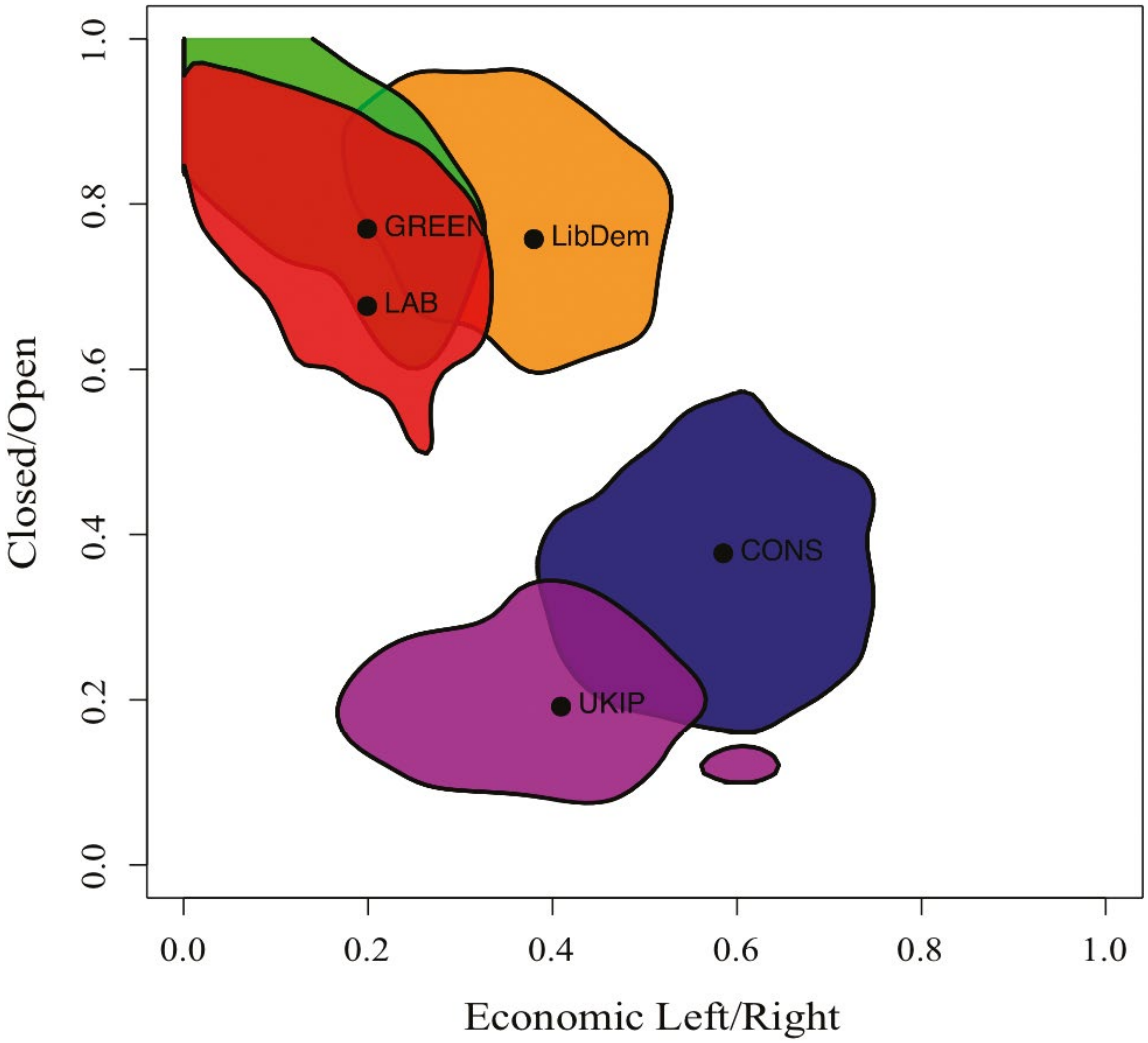


Figure: Mapping the UK's ideological divide

Cartographic perspectives of the general election

Dr Benjamin D. Hennig

Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Iceland and Honorary Research Associate in the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford. He is involved in the Worldmapper project and is author of the mapping blog www.viewsoftheworld.net.

Email: ben@hi.is

Twitter: @geoviews

Data and statistics play a central role in election analyses. While politicians, spin doctors and commentators quickly aim to interpret the outcome according to their views, it is a much more complex task to provide a more thorough analysis of the underlying geographical patterns, demographics and other factors that have contributed to a specific election outcome.

From a geographical perspective maps are important in evaluating the spatial voting patterns in an election. Maps give an immediate understanding of the emerging political landscapes in a quickly accessible and more intuitive way than numbers or ordinary charts. They also allow for a visual exploration as well as revealing spatial correlations, which is particularly valuable when the actual outcome is as unexpected and surprising as in 2017.

The contribution of cartographic research has led to an increasing diversity of electoral maps in recent years. Along with the digital turn in cartography that has shifted map production to computers over the past 40 years more advanced methods of geographic data analysis and its visualisation were developed that contribute to different types of electoral maps that have become more common in recent years, especially in the United Kingdom.

This cartographic analysis of this June's election results provides different insights into the underlying spatial patterns by using three types of maps. Apart from a geographic perspective using a conventional land area map, two so-called cartograms allow for the results to be seen from very unique angles. Cartograms are maps that are transformed on a 'scale other than a true scale'. This means that statistics other than land area determine the shape of a map, while still retaining basic geographical references.

The unusual shape and still widespread use of cartograms can make them hard to read and understand for the untrained eye. When accustomed to the map display, they can reveal unique and novel insights into the underlying data that conventional maps fail in conveying. Two types of cartograms are used in this feature to provide such additional insights: The hexagon shaped cartogram is a representation of the parliamentary constituencies, each constituency being represented by a hexagon (some changes in constituencies over the past decades are reflected in split and merged hexagons). The other cartogram is a so-called gridded cartogram which works like an equal-population projection in which each person gets an equal amount of space by resizing grid cells of equal area according to their total population. Less populated areas become smaller, while densely populated areas are increased in size.

The gridded population cartogram magnifies the most populated parts of the country, so election results in cities hardly visible in a normal map become visible in the cartogram. This is also the most accurate depiction of how people voted relation to each political party. Though true to how people are represented, this equal-population projection does not fully reflect the share of seats each party holds in parliament due to the first-past-the-post principle. The size of the electorate in each constituency varies quite significantly, reaching from slightly below 22,000 (Na h-Eileanan an Iar in Scotland) to almost 109,000 (Isle of Wight in South East England). The actual political implications are therefore best shown using the hexagon map which displays geographically the share of seats each party holds.

Here are some of the patterns that become visible:

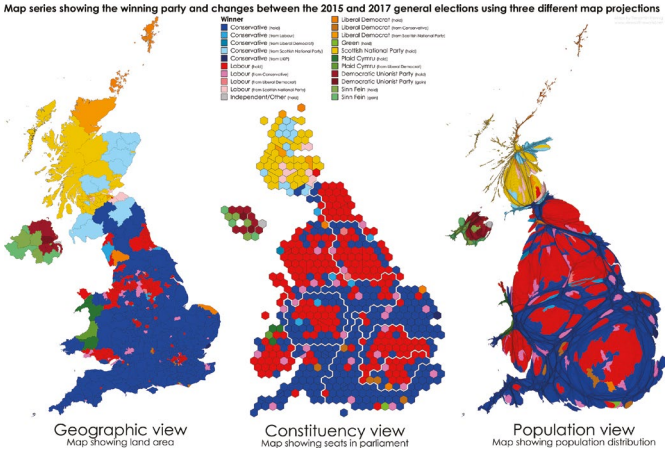
The overall results of the winning party reflect a typical geographic pattern of voting where rural constituencies are more likely to vote Conservative while urban areas largely vote Labour. The population cartogram highlights this particularly well, as it reduces the dominance of rural areas due to lower population densities. This fairly consistent pattern is again manifested at this election with London now dominated by Labour constituencies. The Urban/Rural divide becomes much clearer in the population cartogram.

An urban-rural, but also a North-South divide in England become even more apparent in the cartograms. These divisions are hard to identify in a conventional map, since they correlate closely with the population and constituency distribution. Labour's strongest vote shares are in the urban centres, even in some constituencies where Labour did not win an outright majority. The Conservative strongholds, in contrast, are largely in the East, South East and South West of England as well as in the suburban fringes in the North. Similar patterns are repeated in Scotland and – to a smaller extent – in Wales.

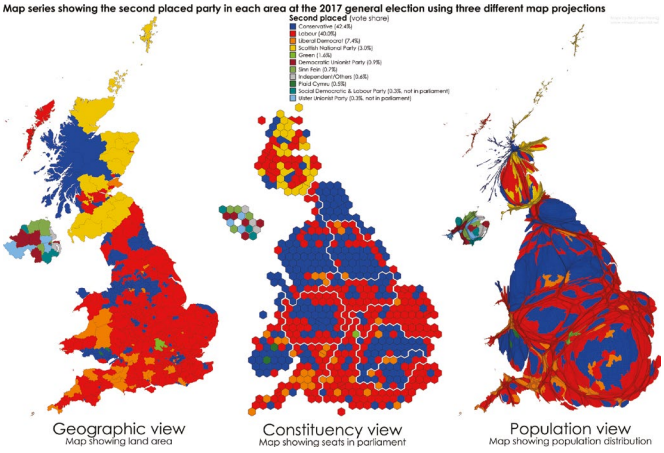
A final look at the voter turnout reveals turnout was comparably high at 68.7 per cent and with a turnout below 60 per cent found in the old industrial North of England and parts of Scotland, largely areas of stronger Labour support. More striking, however, is the change in turnout in Scotland compared to the 2015 general election. While turnout was relatively high in most parts of Scotland, it has reduced almost everywhere, in some parts by more than 5 percent. Having been called to the polling booth for the fourth time in three years might have led the Scottish electorate to experience voter fatigue.

To fully understand the new political landscapes of the United Kingdom, only a combination of different perspectives as shown here can help to gain a more complete picture. Geography matters not only in its physical dimension, but just as much in its social and political spaces that are depicted in these maps.

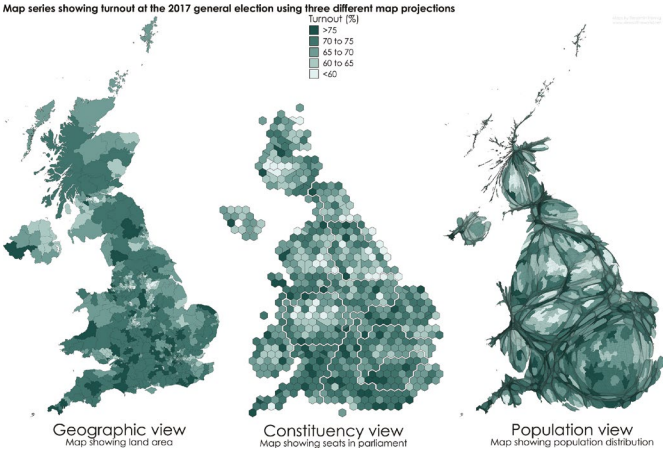
Map series showing the winning party and changes between the 2015 and 2017 general elections using three different map projections



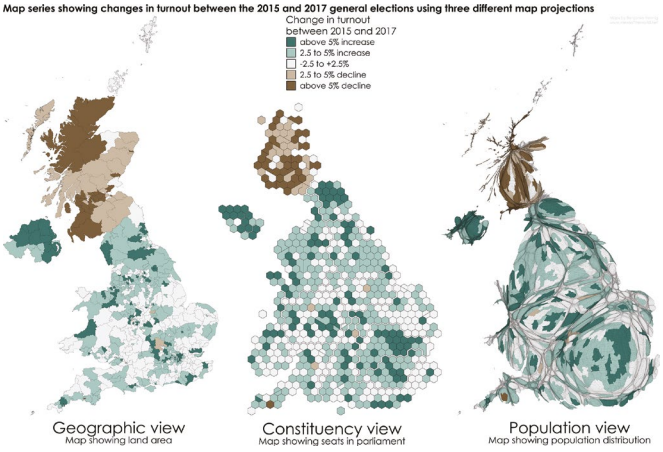
Map series showing the second placed party in each area at the 2017 general election using three different map projections



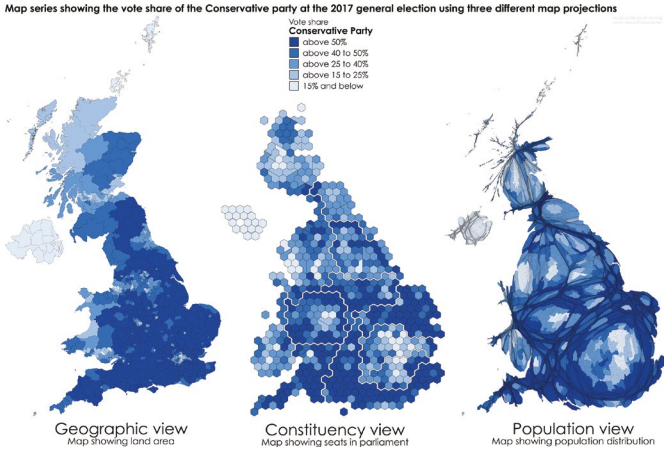
Map series showing turnout at the 2017 general election using three different map projections



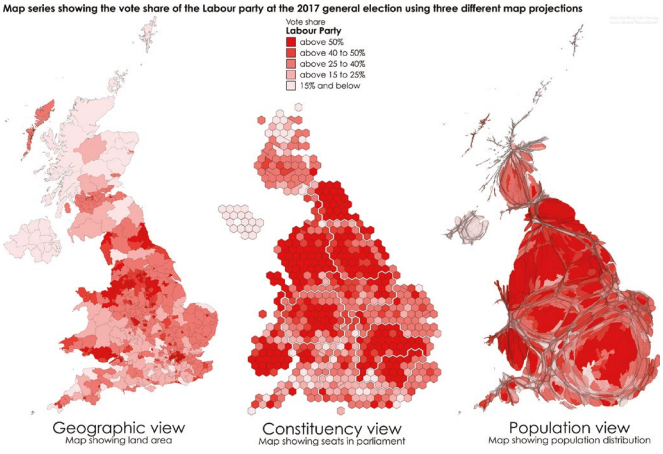
Map series showing changes in turnout between the 2015 and 2017 general elections using three different map projections



Map series showing the vote share of the Conservative party at the 2017 general election using three different map projections



Map series showing the vote share of the Labour party at the 2017 general election using three different map projections



UKIP's former supporters were crucial to the outcome – but not as generally expected

Prof Ron Johnston

Professor of Electoral and Social Geography at the University of Bristol.

Email: r.johnston@bristol.ac.uk

Twitter: @ProfRJohnston

Prof Charles Pattie

Professor of Geography at the University of Sheffield.

Email: C.Pattie@Sheffield.ac.uk

UKIP was a major player in the 2015 general election and the 2016 referendum. It was expected to be important in 2017 too – not by winning substantial votes, but by the choices its former supporters made, Brexit having been achieved. They were expected to help Theresa May achieve the goal set out in calling a snap election: to enhance her mandate in forthcoming Brexit negotiations. To gain a larger majority than Cameron in 2015 she needed support from those who favoured Brexit but had voted for other parties in 2015 – UKIP being the key target.

Having been prominent in pressuring for an in-out referendum and playing a major part in the campaign that produced a narrow majority for Leave, UKIP's raison d'être was eroded. To remain relevant it needed a new purpose and leader – Paul Nuttall – identified two main roles: to ensure a 'hard Brexit'; and to retain the support of individuals who had previously voted Labour, but from which they felt increasingly alienated. UKIP could become the voice of the precariat.

Opinion polls initially suggested a wide Conservative lead over Labour with UKIP's support – compared to 2015 – probably reduced by two-thirds. Many former UKIP voters were expected to switch to the Conservatives, as the party delivering Brexit, rather than Labour, seen as 'lukewarm'. UKIP decided to promote that shift by not fielding candidates in many Labour-held marginals, in most of which UKIP's 2015 vote share s exceeded Labour's majority, to assist Conservative campaigns in those target seats.

Labour won 42 seats with a majority over the Conservatives of less than 10 percentage points in 2015. UKIP fielded a candidate in only seventeen – and in just three where it won less than 10 per cent. A number received campaign visits from Theresa May, expecting major gains.

Those expectations were dashed. Only five seats were won by the Conservatives (two in constituencies with no UKIP candidate). Indeed, Labour retained all fourteen of the most marginal four won in 2015 with majorities of less than one percentage point.

Why? In most of them Labour's vote share increased by more than the Conservatives', suggesting that more former UKIP voters switched to Labour. Many, especially northern constituencies such as Dewsbury and Halifax, had voted Labour before 2015; but were expected to vote Conservative in 2017 because of their views on Brexit. But they didn't. Brexit had been agreed and they didn't need to vote Conservative to ensure it happened. Instead, they were attracted by Labour's anti-austerity policies and put off by some Conservative policies – notably on social care, pensions and schooling.

Although the Conservative-Labour polling gap closed over the campaign it was still generally believed the Conservatives would increase their majority and few, if any, of their 2015 marginal seats would be lost. UKIP fielded 27 candidates in the 44 seats won in 2015 by the Conservatives by less than ten percentage points. In twenty the Conservative MP had voted Remain in 2016 and would probably be re-elected but a good UKIP performance would ensure they were aware of the strength of pro-Brexit local opinion. Only four Conservative MPs in marginal seats who had voted Remain did not face a UKIP opponent, compared to 13 of the 17 who voted Leave.

That strategy largely failed too. The UKIP vote collapsed across virtually all 44 seats, Labour being the major beneficiary. It won twenty-one of the constituencies, ten where UKIP didn't field a candidate and eleven where it did. As in Labour-held marginals, more former UKIP supporters switched to Labour; there also, it seems, Labour's policies were more attractive and Brexit was relatively unimportant – nine of the twenty Conservative MPs who voted Leave in 2016 lost their seats, as did twelve of the twenty-four who voted Remain.

UKIP won 12.6 per cent of the votes in 2015: in 2017 it was 1.8 per cent (back to 2001 levels), although polls suggested it would do about twice as well. (Many who said they would vote UKIP were maybe unaware there was no UKIP candidate in their constituency.) A majority of those who deserted UKIP were widely expected to vote Conservative, helping the party protect its marginal seats and win its targets from Labour. But they didn't. Brexit was happening, and with the Conservatives expected to win the election a 'hard Brexit' was very likely. Voting UKIP, where it fielded a candidate, or Conservative to stress Brexit's continued importance was seen unnecessary – especially among former Labour supporters for whom voting Conservative was anathema. Labour offered more attractive policies to those 'just about managing', and there was no reason not to return to their former loyalties.

The Conservatives, many pollsters and commentators – and perhaps many in Labour too – seriously misread how 2015 UKIP and 2016 Brexit voters would vote in 2017. UKIP alone did not block the Conservatives search for a larger majority or aid Labour's unexpected advance. Labour's policies attracted and mobilised many young voters –probably impeding advances by Liberal Democrats or Greens. Anti-SNP tactical voting also probably aided Conservatives' Scottish victories, without which their lead over Labour could have been much smaller and their chances of forming a government significantly reduced. But in the big story of the 2017 election, the behaviour of UKIP and its former supporters played a (the?) major role – just not the expected role.

Why did the Lib Dems fail to benefit from the anti-Brexit vote?

The decision of Britain to leave the European Union (EU) has shaped British politics. Prime Minister Theresa May called an early election for June 2017 specifically asking the British electorate to decide who is the most capable of negotiating the Brexit process.

In this context, the Liberal Democrats attempted to project itself as the most pro-EU political force in order to benefit from the anti-Brexit (Bremain) vote. Lib Dems pledged to prevent Conservatives from seeking a 'hard' Brexit as well as to call a second referendum once the negotiation process has finalized.

However, it seems that the Liberal Democrats failed to benefit from the pro-EU part of the electorate. Although it gained five more seats than in the 2015 parliamentary elections, they saw their vote share fall to 7.4 per cent of the vote down from 7.9 per cent they had won previously. In parallel, Labour seemed to benefit from the anti-Brexit vote more than the Lib Dems.

As a result, the question that naturally emerges is why? Two main factors may explain the poor electoral performance: weak demand and weaker supply.

On the demand side, it seems that in the course of the election campaign the issue priorities of the British electorate changed to some extent. According to a post-election survey, almost one in three voters (28 per cent) considered Brexit as the most important issue facing the country. In parallel, the number of those who had backed the Remain side in the 2016 referendum appeared to have diminished. As a Yougov poll has indicated, around half of those who had voted in favour of Britain staying in the EU now share the view that the government has a duty to implement the Brexit process, while another half of them still want to reverse the referendum result. In other words, the rise of the so called 'Re-Leavers' weakened the anti-Brexit vote.

Against this backdrop, on the supply side, it is evident that Lib Dems failed to address credibly the concerns of their targeted voters. The campaign strategy of the party to stress the need for a 'soft' Brexit as well as to pledge a second referendum on whether the British people must accept the Brexit deal or to remain in the EU probably alienated both the hard Remainers and the Re-Leavers, generating more confusion rather than offering clarity. In particular, the promise of a second referendum probably estranged those 'Re-Leavers' who acknowledged the result of the referendum preferring a 'soft' Brexit, while the goal of a 'soft' Brexit made it difficult to attract 'hard' Remainers who wanted to overturn the referendum. It is indicative that one of the main reasons for which those who had voted for the Lib Dems in 2015 stated that they would not vote for them in 2017, was that they did not approve their policies.

In parallel, the position of Lib Dems had already been undermined by their record as part of the 2010-5 coalition government and particularly by their collaboration with the Conservatives. According to a pre-election YouGov survey, almost four in ten of those who had voted for the Lib Dems in 2010 and abandoned them in 2015 stated that they had no intention to vote for the party in 2017 due to their 'broken promises' during their governing period.

Certainly, the party had renewed its leadership, while it remained in opposition for two years. However, it seems that this did not suffice in order for the Lib Dems to cover up for their leadership deficit in the eyes of the public. It is indicative that Tim Farron's favourable opinions did not exceed the 20 per cent mark compared to Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn, who enjoyed higher popularity ratings.

However, it can be argued that the electoral result could produce opportunities for the pro-EU forces and particularly for the Lib Dems. It is reasonable to assume that the failure of the Conservative party to win an absolute majority is a rejection of the prospect of the 'hard' Brexit. In parallel, the political uncertainty that the election outcome generated might soon lead to fresh elections. So, the anti-Brexit parties might have an opportunity to shape the future of the country by turning the future of British politics to a pro-EU direction. However for the Liberal Democrats it would seem to be a challenge to regain their pre-2010 standing. Having been pushed to third place as Britain returns to two-party politics, and with a diminishing vote share, they may seem an even greater irrelevance by the time of the next election

Dr Panos Koliastasis

Research Fellow in Politics at the Hellenic Open University in Greece. His research focuses on political communication, voting behaviour and comparative politics.

Email: pkoliastasis@gmail.com

Meeting the public: the perils and pitfalls of 'walkabout' questions to Theresa May in GE2017

Dr Sylvia Shaw

Senior Lecturer in English Language and Linguistics at the University of Westminster and has recently published Gender, Power and Political Speech: Women and Language in the 2015 UK General Election (with Deborah Cameron).

Email: S.Shaw@westminster.ac.uk

Twitter: @shaw_sylvia

One of the more notable themes of the GE2017 campaign was Theresa May's reluctance to engage in spontaneous public exchanges. Immediately after the General Election was called she announced that she would not take part in any 'head-to head' election debates and her subsequent public appearances were reportedly strictly managed to ensure that she was surrounded by Conservative Party supporters and not exposed to spontaneous questions.

Here I use a discourse analytic approach to investigate one particular event where the guard slipped: an encounter with Kathy Mohan, a member of the electorate who questioned Theresa May in Abingdon market about the loss of her Disability Living Allowance (DLA). I identify the particular interactional difficulties that these events presented for Theresa May and show how all politicians should be cautious of these events as they are susceptible to contested representations in the media.

The first and most obvious characteristic of spontaneous public events is exactly that – politicians cannot prepare for them in advance and so the topic, tone, and detail of the question can take them by surprise. Theresa May appears to be more reliant on pre-planning than other political leaders. Her Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQs) performances show a hyper-controlled style and her responses seem prepared in advance. Although she cannot predict Corbyn's weekly questions in PMQs, she can prepare her stock rhetorical tricolons or 'sets of three' and adversarial, ad hominem 'soundbites', that have become characteristic of these exchanges (such as: '*He can lead a protest, I'm leading a country*'). In contrast, it is impossible to predict any aspect of the spontaneous 'walkabout' public exchanges, and these prepared catch-phrases are unsuitable for such interpersonal conversations.

Kathy Mohan starts the conversation with the direct question '*Are you going to help people with learning disabilities*?', followed by '*I want you to do something for us*' (see Example 1, line 8). May's initial response ('*We've got a lot of plans…*') evades the demand and attempts to provide a general response, aligning to her manifesto. However, Mohan interrupts May to correct her (line 10) in a way that shows no regard for May's status as PM. This pattern is repeated throughout the conversation and Mohan interrupts May nine times during the exchange (see Example 2 lines 21, 25, and 28). May is confronted by a self-confessed 'angry' voter who directly contradicts her and underlines the personal impact of the loss of the DLA (see Example 2 lines 33-37). May attends to Mohan's questions, does not directly interrupt her and gives appropriate 'minimal responses' which indicate attentive listening (for example the 'yes' and 'right' in Example 1, line 14), but she does not directly engage with Mohan's demands or her personal circumstances.

Responding to the public voice of the voter rather than an opposing politician in a more formal forum is therefore complex: May needs to manage *affect and* politely attune to the individual 'face' or politeness needs of the questioner while at the same time attending to the impressions of the immediate and overhearing media audiences. This is more difficult than responding to questions from political opponents in political or media events (such as televised election debates or interviews), because politicians can completely disregard the face needs of their interlocuters and *only* attend to the immediate and 'overhearing audience' of the broadcast or social media.

Interestingly, in the political campaigns of GE2017 that were rife with political insults, slurs and fake news from different directions, one of the media 'takeaway' messages from this interaction was that Theresa May 'did not know the difference between 'learning disabilities' and 'mental health''. Example one suggests that May assumes Mohan has 'mental health' issues (line 9), and that Mohan corrects her (line 10). However, this transcript is taken from heavily edited versions of the conversation (for example from The Guardian and BBC news websites). A longer version is represented in Example 3 (the added information is highlighted in red and it is taken from the Mirror and Sky News websites). In the second, longer version of the conversation it is clear that Mohan uses the phrase '*learning difficulties and mental health*' more than once to describe the situation, which possibly explains why May uses this phrase herself. May also defends her use of the term '*mental health*' in this conversation when she appears on *BBC Question Time* later in the election campaign. Whether May does or does not conflate these two terms is debatable but the differences between the two versions of the video are startling. Certainly, the record of these spontaneous public events is highly unreliable given that there is no recourse to a definitive version of the 'real' conversation. Therefore, it seems that politicians have every reason to be wary of this type of political interaction as it is particularly susceptible to alternative media representations.

Transcription Key
KM = Kathy Mohan (member of the public)
TM = Theresa May
NB = Nicola Blackwood (Conservative candidate for the Abingdon constituency)

[ ]= overlapping utterance with the line above/below
(.) = pause of under a second
Underline = particular emphasis on word or syllable
CAPS = increased volume
'=' = Equals sign shows 'latched' utterances that run straight on from one speaker to another without a pause.

Example 1: Kathy Mohan Questions Theresa May (Abingdon market, 15th May 2017)

KM: I want you to do something for us=
TM: =we've got a lot of plans for people with mental health [particularly]
KM: [AND] learning dis[abilities]
TM: [and learning]
disabilities=
KM: =because I've got mild learning disabilities (.) and I haven't got a carer at the moment
TM: yes right
KM: and I'm angry

Example 2: Kathy Mohan interrupts Theresa May

NB: Kathy we've
done a lot to help haven't [we]
KM: [no] I'm talking about everybody not just me I'm talking about for
everybody who's got mental health and anybody who's got learning disabilities (.) I want them
not to have their money taken away from them and being crippled=
TM: =we are going to do a number [of]
KM [the] fat cats keep the money and us lot get [nothing]
TM: [Kathy] we are going
to do a number of things let me just tell you one thing [which isn't about money]
KM: [well put the put the] do you know what I
want (.) I want my my (.) um disability living allowance to come
TM: mm
KM: back not have PIPS and get nothing I can't live on a hundred pound a month (.) they took it all
away from me=

Example 3: Kathy Mohan Questions Theresa May (longer version of example 1)

KM: Theresa (.) are you going to help people with learning disabilities and mental health
TM: yes
KM: because I stick up for mental health (.) and for learning disabilities and I've been (unclear) by
TM: yes
KM: them because cos they chucked me out the (unclear) cos I got a borderline and not I'm being
serious (.)
TM: Yes
KM: I want you to do something for us=
TM: =we've got a lot of plans for people with mental health [particularly]
KM: [AND] learning dis[abilities]
TM: [and learning]
disabilities=
KM: =because I've got mild learning disabilities (.) and I haven't got a carer at the moment
TM: yes right
KM: and I'm angry and I've got no one to help me write a letter to Nicola I would like somebody to
help me cos I can't (.) I can't do everything that I want to do

Political participation in the UK: why might voters have voted?

Prof Bruce Bimber
UC Santa Barbara
Email: bimber@ucsb.edu

Dr Shelley Boulianne
MacEwan University, Canada
Email: BoulianneS@macewan.ca

Dr Karolina Koc-Michalska
Audencia University, France
Email: kocmichalska@gmail.com

Dr Darren G. Lilleker
Bournemouth University
Email: dlilleker@bournemouth.ac.uk

The term most associated with political engagement and participation is apathy. People do not see the point in voting, nothing changes when they do, a vote does not matter and they do not feel represented. Despite this somewhat negative picture voting is not in decline. The decline from 71% in 1997 to 59% in 2001 was indeed dramatic, but the context of that election was particular (the outcome was indisputable). Since then turnout has steadily increased to 66% in 2010. More importantly the 72% turnout in the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the EU demonstrates when every vote counts voters head to the ballot box. While the youth vote remains problematic, the 64% turnout by 18-24s for the referendum is equally positive. While voting is perhaps the most crucial act in terms of determining a nation's government, it is not the only form of participation. We report the findings of a survey of a representative sample of 1,525 UK citizens to discover how many participate in other forms of political activism and what mobilises them in order to shed some light on what factors might determine voter turnout.

It appears there is increased interest in politics as a result of the EU referendum. 72% say they are fairly or very interested in politics, even factoring socially acceptable answers this is higher than one might expect. The referendum may also have been empowering, 48% suggest that people can influence government. Yet despite the interest and empowerment, still 59% display indications of apathy, suggesting voting makes little difference. These factors suggest other forms of participation may be sought by empowered and interested citizens.

However the evidence for this is not as strong as one might expect. While signing petitions is quite high, the ease in which this can now be done perhaps makes the 52% fairly low. Buying or boycotting products for political reasons is high, but this fundamentally does not go beyond the daily routine of shopping. Promoting a campaign, online or offline, is engaged in by 26% or 15%, few financially support campaigns, less take to the streets to demonstrate the online environment is a far more active participatory space. With numbers joining political parties or campaign organisations even lower, it would seem democratic processes beyond elections do not reflect interest levels.

But what factors mobilise citizens into participatory action? It is quite natural that the two most important factors are when an issue is of personally high importance and if a particular act is seen as part of the duty of a citizen of a democracy. These factors are personal, referred to as intrinsic motivations and drive those wishing to be heard on an issue that concerns them and, in doing so, feel empowered and good about themselves.

Peers and the parasocial effect of 'people like us' are also important. Social media allows citizens to advertise their activities, 'telling your friends' has a powerful mobilising effect. Research also indicates that the larger the numbers of previous signatories (for example) the higher the likelihood that further people will sign a petition. Of course friends and family also mobilise one another face to face, but due to peer to peer networks there are numerous options for mobilisation to occur and that is important for driving political participation.

Campaign and political organisations also have a powerful effect in terms of mobilising citizens. Campaign organisations, as opposed to political organisations including political parties, have the edge. Again, social media acts as a crucial conduit for persuasive campaign communication, utilised by organisations to reach citizens, gain their support and then mobilise them.

What do these data tell us about voting behaviour? Firstly people must feel voting and its consequences are important, and that voting is likely to have an impact, and there must be a sense of duty. But networks can instil a sense of duty and importance, reinforce the importance of voting and can have an impact on voting intentions. Those citizens in a network of voters are more likely to vote and vice versa, so if people do encourage one another more might vote. This mechanism could be crucial particularly among the young. But campaign organisations, even political parties, have a role in mobilising citizens. The modern communication environment can increase or decrease political participation and the turnout in 2017 was a factor of that environment.

Note: The data was collected within Innovation and stability project founded by Audencia Foundation 2016-2017

Motivations	Signed a petition 52%	Promoted a campaign 15%	Donate money 14%	Taken part in a protest 13%	Boycotted a product 25% Buy a product 17%	Shared/Posted political content online 26%
Friends or family also signed	*70%*	*87%*	*79%*	*90%*	*68%*	*76%*
Bandwagon effect	*78%*	*89%*	*82%*	*93%*	*72%*	*80%*
Mobilised by a campaign organisation	*84%*	*86%*	*88%*	*88%*	*70%*	*71%*
Mobilised by a political organisation	*68%*	*84%*	*89%*	*88%*	*61%*	*65%*
Political participation is a duty	*94%*	*95%*	*88%*	*95%*	*94%*	*92%*
The issue was of personal high importance	*97%*	*98%*	*94%*	*97%*	*98%*	*97%*

Moments of accidental connection with the 'Great British Public': because Brenda et al know best!

Dr Richard Scullion

Senior Principle Academic in the Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University.

Email: rscullion@bournemouth.ac.uk

Twitter: @rickmick100

Snap, crackle, pop! The lady changes her mind and there was to be another General Election after all. Paradoxically and bizarrely it was framed as 'the *Brexit election*' by the very same politician who told us to 'move on' and accept the result. Initially the public appeared to accept the label. But then, like humans tend to do, we appropriated it to suit our own agenda.

And so, we were able to enjoy or endure seven weeks of prime-time television coverage of the 'Great British Public' (potential voters) as co-creators of our election news. In a world where everybody's opinion is equally valid the media generated instant commentary from the 'person in the street' and then sought to make news from it – even headlines at times regardless of how unsubstantiated or contradictory much public discourse was. Ouch; these are real people, this is the electorate being referring to, the nub of democracy. Indeed, but if enlightened debate is required for there to be any sense of flourishing in this sphere then mere projection of existing biases and prejudices, voicing of barely thought-through ideas, and verbally haranguing those standing for office, is really not a useful substitute.

What am I talking about?

Brenda from Bristol. Whose instant reaction kick-started the campaign with "Oh my God, your joking, not another one!". I've watched her 14 second contribution over thirty times now and still I can't quite locate its value in the context of division, growing inequality, world uncertainty and the rise of nationalism!

'Women in sunglasses' who disturbed not only Theresa May's lunch (take away chips) but also the dogma of 'strong and stable' surrounding her early weeks in this election campaign. In the process of trying to have a conversation about several issues with the Prime Minister it became apparent, this lady was not for engaging.

Malcolm from Oxfordshire, who'd just turned 65 and liked the sound of his own voice when 'confronting' Tim Farron, accusing him of a variety of things (fake or not it didn't seem to matter) from running the country down to labelling Leave supporters as ignorant. This member of the public was apparently "absolutely sure" what he'd voted for in the EU membership referendum. In his subsequent two minutes of fame, being interviewed for national television, the viewer might have had their doubts.

There must be something in the Oxfordshire water, the next awkward yet revelatory moment, was also in the county. This time Cathy gave the Prime Minister some home truths about life 'on the PIP' (Personal independent payment) a genuine struggle for Cathy. Most poignant in this encounter was the profound sense of different worlds briefly colliding; May appeared to both literally stagger and be staggered that such people exist so close to leafy southern suburbia …. and had no ability to engage with Cathy, instead responding with monotone platitudes as if taken from her now infamous party manifesto.

Such was the centralised control of the main party campaigns that these moments of connection were rare. The authentic qualities of these occasional encounters had 'news value' writ large and so were amplified on and offline; echoing for 24 hours or so after they occurred. Yet overall during this election ordinary voters' un-staged interactions with politicians - usually whilst they were out shopping – did not significantly break into the election mind-set, did not set the agenda and, I suggest, were only *defining* in the sense of reifying the protective status of the 'general public's' opinions, regardless of how informed or not they might have been. Striking was the complete lack of challenge to these public utterances … the notion of empowerment taken too far.

Drawing on these cultural observations, I argue that contemporary democracy, premised as it is on the atomized individual as the legitimate focus point, is being undermined. Disruption is due in part to a shift in our conception of 'self' where narcissistic tendencies are more pronounced and acceptable. This serves to corrode what it is to be civil and alters the nature of the public's engagement with democratic forms of politics. Such politics has to be rooted in discourse ethics where we recognise the value of the other perspectives and are willing and able to be self-questioning. When the 'public' are extolled as sovereign beyond scrutiny by the mainstream media, most notably the national broadcasters, we should, as (whisper this quietly) experts, be concerned, very concerned.

What's to be done?

The main parties clearly need new strategic responses in resisting this fetishisation of the public. Jeremy Corbyn's driver had an unconventional approach; run them over! However, it turned out that the poor guy hit was a BBC reporter who simply held the camera whilst members of the public ranted and raved, and, in other ways, demonstrated just how parochial they can be. Plus, the solution can't be acts of violence (inadvertent or not). Whilst Theresa May's approach was to avoid the general public whenever possible, which rather neatly turned out to be a reasonably reciprocal arrangement. Tim Farron, ever demonstrating his reasonableness, foolishly saw it as an opportunity to have an actual conversation. The result: being shouted down … wagging pointed finger and all.

The outcome of this cacophony of reified noise? Brenda had better get herself prepared as she will no doubt be 'door-stopped' by journalists when the next General Election is called… probably sometime later this year.

When democracy kicked back

To understand power you must first appreciate what powerlessness feels like. To make sense of this General Election we must first turn to the Brexit referendum. Brexit spoke to those who felt cast aside by globalization and forgotten by ruling elites all too willing to stand by and watch communities decimated and social infrastructures weakened. The tag line for the Leave campaign offered the promise of a different future – 'Let's Take Back Control'. It spoke to a disaffection that democracy doesn't work for the majority of its members. That the Conservative Party thought they could win an enhanced majority simply by repeating 'Brexit means Brexit' reveals they never fully understood what people had hoped Brexit could give them: the dignity of making their own history. They did not understand powerlessness.

To begin to appreciate powerlessness requires an understanding of inequality - the fault line that exposes disaffection from a certain type of politics. As inequality has increased so social mobility has fallen. As the poor have got poorer so they have had less and less influence over policies and politicians and been ever more cut adrift.

Global capitalism and democracy vie for opposite conclusions – one creates massive inequality and the other is premised upon political equality. When referendum pledges are shown to be disingenuous, then democracy flounders. When elite interests prevail and the political system no longer works for the mass of ordinary people, then democracy is weakened further. When people feel that they are dispensable and don't need to be listened to, then democracy has failed. The Conservative party weren't just not listening, they blatantly refused to engage in virtually any debate at all. The face of 'Caring Conservatism' that the vicar's daughter tried to wear on becoming Prime Minister was quickly exposed as a poor disguise during the election campaign.

The Labour Party, simultaneously weakened internally felt emboldened externally to present a Manifesto package that stopped pandering to Conservative values in a desperate bid to win over middle England and spoke directly to the felt experience of social need on the ground – investment in people and communities, working rights, better wages, a functioning NHS, free education. They had nothing to lose and everything to gain. And so for the first time since the financial crash there was an attempt to break with the neo-liberal force-field and an acknowledgement that to do this would require a redistribution of wealth via a more progressive income tax. Only an anti-elite candidate like Corbyn could do this.

Some have claimed that the outcome of a hung parliament was so unexpected and so contrary to the majority of mainstream media coverage that it shows the end of their influence. Simultaneously, it is said to confirm the power of the internet to transform politics. But we should be wary of drawing such hasty conclusions. We should seek to appreciate what powerlessness feels like as we struggle to understand where power lies.

Political shifts do not happen as a consequence of mainstream media coverage (although they may help to set the agenda) or even from online networks (although they may help civil society to mobilise). It is not down to Facebook advertising or clever memes that go viral. Shifts emerge from particular histories and the contradictions between how we are told the world works and our experiences of it. We have been told by politicians and media alike that the only way out of an economic crisis is through a politics of austerity, despite the fact that the analysis on which a politics of austerity is based is largely discredited by the vast majority of economists. The more austerity we have had the less economic growth we experience and so the mismatch grows between what the politicians (and often the mainstream media news outlets) tell us and what our experiences show us. The Labour Manifesto spoke to the felt experience of inequality as powerlessness and then dared to proffer that austerity measures will make no difference to the many in the long term; that privatization is decimating long standing institutions of social democracy leaving the vulnerable unprotected and unrepresented; and crucially, that an alternative politics is possible.

Brexit forewarned us of a crisis of the relations of political representation and political parties, what Gramsci called a crisis of authority. But Gramsci also pointed to the 'trenches and fortifications' of civil society as sites where democracy could kick back and power be reclaimed. What made the difference in this election was not mainstream media or social media but people on the ground coming together, walking and talking on the streets, knocking on doors to inform and persuade people as equals in a shared society that their voice counted, that the prospect of democracy may yet be realised. And that's powerful stuff.

Prof Natalie Fenton

Professor of Media and Communications and Co-Director of the Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre.

Email: n.fenton@gold.ac.uk

Twitter: @NatalieFenton1

3

News and Journalism

Conventional wisdom distorted TV news coverage of campaign

It was billed as the Brexit election, but events have influenced a campaign – and result – few predicted. I have been monitoring election coverage with a research team at Cardiff University, comparing TV news across the main UK evening bulletins. The opening part of the campaign began fairly predictably, with the Conservatives tightly controlling their rallies and walkabouts by limiting access to journalists. Brexit negotiations overshadowed the first week of our monitoring, with the Conservatives dominating coverage, particularly on the BBC.

However, the second week coverage become more balanced between Conservatives and Labour, with Corbyn often pictured in front of large crowds of people – notably students – cheering him on in rallies and walkabouts. But in focussing so much on May and Corbyn, the other UK parties received limited attention. Labour and Conservative, at this point in the campaign, made up 81.8% of airtime granted to all parties, yet in the 2015 election they only received 67.3% share of votes.

Broadcasters, of course, may argue they were reflecting public opinion. But in narrowly focussing on the horse race between Labour and Conservative, they gave little airtime to other parties. Indeed, the DUP – who gained 10 seats and propped up the Conservative's minority government immediately after the election – made just one or two appearances on each bulletin over the six week campaign.

Post-election pundits have called for greater media scrutiny of Northern Irish politics, but the lesson should be that all devolved nations that make up UK politics should be better reflected in network coverage. We found the devolved relevance of polices was not always clearly communicated by broadcasters, including the Conservatives' proposal to reform social care, which affected people living in England, not Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

In the opening two weeks of campaign we found a relatively light policy agenda. Most election news had little policy information, with few 'explainers' unpacking the issues between parties. Experts were not used to explore the parties' policies, as broadcasters choose instead to air – between a fifth and almost half of all sources – citizens' views in vox pops. These were often short in length and substance, with the public mostly asked to respond to questions about the horse race, leaders' personalities and, to a far lesser extent, the parties' policies.

Once the parties' manifestos were published – a week later – policy was pushed up the agenda. Close to 8 in ten items were primarily about policy issues, whereas the previous weeks of the campaign issues made less than half of coverage. The Conservative's social care reforms became the dominant issue as many voters and experts voiced their opposition to the policy. This forced a Conservative U-turn and led to a visibly shaken up PM battling it out with journalists claiming "nothing has changed". Clearly it had, but the focus of attention was short-lived. The terrorist attacks in Manchester halted campaigning and the government's response became the focus of attention.

Once the spotlight turned to law and order, many pundits believed Conservatives were on safer territory. It legitimated broadcasters asking the Labour leader about his response to terrorism and led to prominent newspaper headlines – including on election day – about Corbyn being a terrorist sympathiser.

When asked about domestic policy in areas such as health and education, polls showed many voters supported Labour's policies. Yet the focus was often on party leaders – May's 'strong and stable leadership' - rather than not policy detail. Towards the end of the campaign, horse race reporting increased as some opinion polls showed Labour were not far behind the Conservatives. When interpreting these polls, however, a Tory majority was still perceived as the likely outcome.

The conventional wisdom was that, despite the popularity of their issues, Labour would perform badly because of Corbyn's leadership qualities. In live two-ways – which made up nearly a quarter of all TV news items – often political correspondents would cast doubt on Corbyn's ability to appeal to ordinary voters. And, in vox pops, where party political balance was constructed, Labour support was represented but Corbyn's credibility was often undermined. "I still believe in Labour [but not] plonker Corbyn", as one Channel 4 vox pop put it.

The day after the election, Channel 4's anchor, Jon Snow, opened the programme by acknowledging: "I know nothing, we the media, the pundits and experts, know nothing". He was speaking for many journalists who had followed conventional wisdom about Corybn's electoral appeal.

In rethinking election reporting, broadcasters may want to spend less time asking Westminster correspondents for their judgements and more time understanding the issues that made many people vote for one party over another.

Dr Stephen Cushion

Reader at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University. He will publish Reporting Elections: Rethinking the logic of Campaign Coverage in 2018 (with Richard Thomas, Polity).

Email: CushionSA@cardiff.ac.uk

Twitter: @Stephen_Cushion

A tale of two leaders: news media coverage of the 2017 General Election

Prof David Deacon
Email: d.n.deacon@lboro.ac.uk
Twitter: @DNDeacon

Prof John Downey
Email: j.w.downey@lboro.ac.uk

David Smith
Email: d.smith5@lboro.ac.uk

Prof James Stanyer
Email: j.stanyer@lboro.ac.uk

Prof Dominic Wring
Email: d.j.wring@lboro.ac.uk

The authors are all members of Loughborough University Centre for Research in Communication and Culture which has been analysing media coverage of elections and referenda since 1992.

Twitter: @lboroCRCC

The battle for control of the media agenda is a defining characteristic of modern election campaigns to the extent that some argue they can have a pivotal influence in determining their eventual outcome. Conscious of this factor Labour's John McDonnell has claimed his party 'reinvented word-of-mouth as a form of political communication' to counter its many critics, particularly in the press, during the 2017 campaign. And although social media platforms have been invaluable in disseminating information, especially to younger audiences, print and TV still provide millions of voters with their main source of election news.

As such, it is important to provide a critical assessment of the performance of these outlets in order to understand the nature of the campaign coverage available to citizens in the run-up to polling day. Can such analysis help account for the extraordinary result the country woke up to on 9th June?

The Centre for Research in Communication and Culture conducted an audit of election news from 5th May to 7th June. We analysed the main weekday output of five TV bulletins and ten national newspapers (see our blog for more details). Our research focused on the relative prominence of rival parties and politicians, the issue agenda, and the evaluative direction of coverage found in the press.

Figure 1 demonstrates the striking contrast between the 2015 and 2017 campaigns. Two years ago, the Lib Dems, SNP and UKIP featured prominently. By contrast, the 2017 campaign saw a 'two-party squeeze' whereby the Conservatives and Labour both received more coverage on TV and in the press than in the last election (a combined 84% of appearances in the press and 67% on TV).

The respective major party leaders dominated news coverage. Table 1 confirms that Theresa May was the most prominent politician (appearing in approximately 3 out of every 10 news items), while Jeremy Corbyn was second (featuring in roughly 1 in 4 items). In combination, May and Corbyn accounted for over a third of all appearances by actors during the campaign. Other party leaders and politicians appeared with far less frequency: this was a highly presidential campaign focusing overwhelmingly on the two candidates for the premiership.

In terms of the issue agenda, 'process' coverage (i.e. a focus on the 'horse race', party strategies, polling, and so on) dominated the campaign – as it traditionally does. However, as Table 2 shows, this was markedly down on its equivalent share in the 2015 campaign. Brexit/European Union was the most prominent substantive issue, but the focus on this topic was intermittent, and its dominance of the policy debate fell away during the election. In its place subjects like Health, Social Security and Defence/Security came to the fore at key moments. This was largely unfavourable to the Conservatives in terms of their attempts to control the campaign agenda given that issues that have traditionally favoured the party (e.g. Economy, Immigration) were relatively marginalised.

While UK broadcasters are legally compelled to be impartial, the British press are (in)famously partisan. Consequently, we evaluated how positive or negative newspaper coverage was towards the various parties, weighted by the respective circulation figures of the ten daily titles in the sample. Figure 2 demonstrates that the Labour Party received the overwhelming majority of negative evaluations published by the press, largely due to the hostile coverage provided by higher circulation papers such as *the Sun, the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mail.* Newspaper treatment of the Conservatives was broadly more sympathetic but not consistently: during the third week of the campaign, for instance, coverage of the party was more negative than positive, and negativity towards Labour was at its weakest. This was the period in which the Conservatives launched their manifesto and subsequently made a U-turn on what became known as the 'dementia tax'. Although the party subsequently saw improvements in its evaluations by the press, newspaper coverage was mainly characterised by its negativity towards Labour and party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Ultimately, however, this formidable advantage did not help the Prime Minister realise her ambition to win an enhanced parliamentary majority and mandate to negotiate Brexit. Theresa May's claim that anything other than a vote for her would result in a 'coalition of chaos' has come back to haunt her and embarrass once loyal followers among the 'Tory press'.

Figure 1: Party prominence in the 2015 and 2017 General Elections (TV and Press)

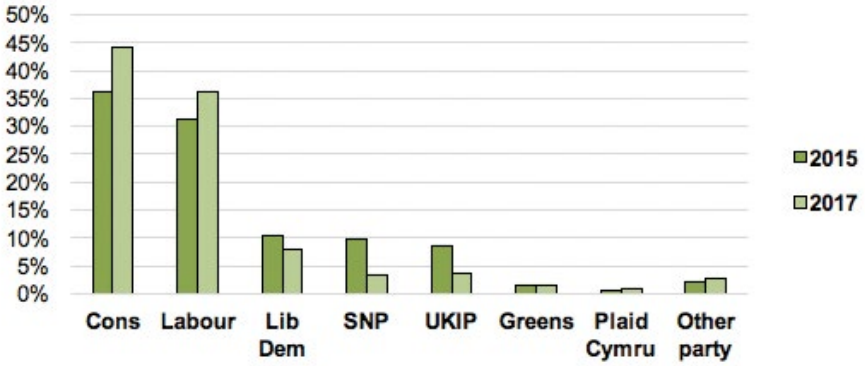


Figure 2: Evaluations by week in newspapers (weighted by circulation)

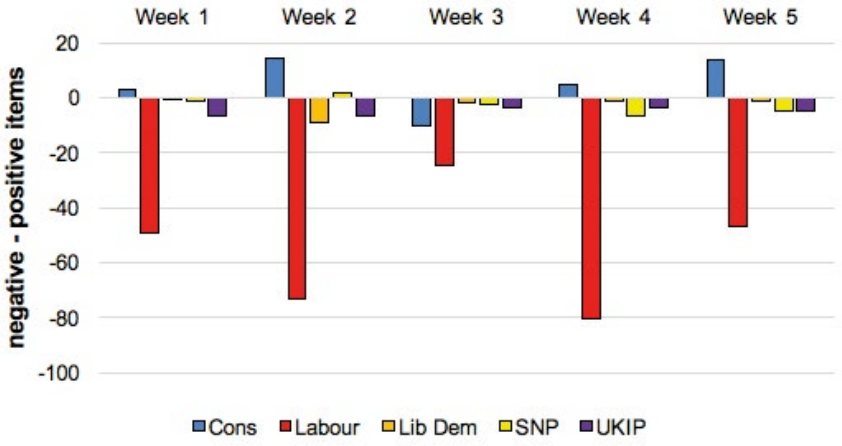


Table 1: Most prominent politicians in campaign news coverage (total news appearances)

Rank	Politician	% items
1	Theresa May (Cons)	30.1%
2	Jeremy Corbyn (Lab)	26.7%
3	Tim Farron (Lib Dem)	6.8%
4	Nicola Sturgeon (SNP)	3.7%
5	Boris Johnson (Cons)	3.6%
6	John McDonnell (Lab)	3.4%
7	Paul Nuttall (UKIP)	3.4%
8	Amber Rudd (Cons)	2.8%
8	Diane Abbott (Lab)	2.8%
10	Emily Thornberry (Lab)	1.8%
11	Philip Hammond (Cons)	1.7%
12	Michael Fallon (Cons)	1.5%
13	Ruth Davidson (Cons)	1.4%
13	Caroline Lucas (Green)	1.4%
15	Jeremy Hunt (Cons)	1.2%
16	David Davis (Cons)	1.1%
17	Leanne Wood (PC)	1.1%
17	Jonathan Ashworth (Lab)	1.1%
19	David Cameron (Cons)	1.0%
19	Angela Rayner (Lab)	1.0%
19	Vince Cable (Lib Dem)	1.0%

Notes: Percentages=(number of appearances/number of items)
*100, rounded. Up to five actors could be coded per item.

Table 2: Most prominent issues in news coverage

Rank	Issue	% (2017)	Difference from 2015
1	Electoral process	32.9%	-12.5%
2	Brexit/European Union	10.9%	+7.8%
3	Defence/Military/Security	7.2%	+4.7%
4	Health and health care provision	6.7%	=
5	Taxation	5.7%	-1.1%
6	Economy/Business/Trade	5.5%	-5.9%
7	Social Security	4.6%	+2.4%
8	Immigration	4.2%	+0.8%
9	Devolution & other constitutional issues	3.3%	-1.0%
10	Standards	3.0%	-0.3%

Notes: Percentages=(number of issues/total number of issues)*100, rounded.
Up to three issues could be coded per item.

Did broadcast stage-management create a vacuum for social media?

Prof Charlie Beckett

Professor in the Department of Media and Communications at the LSE and director of Polis, the LSE's journalism think-tank. He worked at LWT, BBC and ITN's Channel 4 News as a film-maker and programme editor. He is the author of SuperMedia and WikiLeaks: News In The Networked Era.

Email: C.H.Beckett@lse.ac.uk

Twitter: @CharlieBeckett

I described the 2015 election as "the banal theatre of the tightest, most sterile, stage-managed campaign ever". Little did I realise that within two years we would see an even more closed on-screen campaign. But in 2017, did the broadcast clampdown backfire for Theresa May?

The logic of water-tight control was stronger this time for both main parties. The Conservatives' advisors created a 'Maybot' who refused to engage in public debate with journalists, the public or rival politicians. Her appearances were confined to warehouses stuffed with party supporters and her utterances were restricted to the vocabulary of a ten-year-old. Other ministers were only allowed bit parts in the theatre of news. Their thinking was 'why risk a 20-point opinion poll lead in a single-issue election?'

Initially, the Labour Party's approach to broadcasting was to take their leader to safe seats to orate before invited party members. Journalists from hostile newspapers were excluded.

Neither party aimed to win a 'general' election. Corbyn sought to gain enough of the vote share to secure his leadership of the Labour party. May sought to increase her majority to allow her to ignore her party during the Brexit negotiations.

Broadcast journalists from the BBC's Jeremy Vine to Channel 4 News' Jon Snow took to Twitter to lament the failure of the leaders to engage.

This barren broadcast landscape was made even more tedious by the marginalisation of the smaller parties. The reality of the polls and the political agenda meant they were not significant. Media enforced that. Small party leaders such as the Green's Caroline Lucas had perfectly competent campaigns but they were unable to use TV 'debates' or broadcast media in general to intrude upon the main party narrative in the way that Clegg, Farage and Sturgeon had done in the past.

The TV set-piece programmes had diminished audiences and diluted impact. The opinion polls and the general journalistic narrative insisted that there was no contest. If broadcast election campaigns are soap-operas then this one had two weak characters and no plot twist.

And yet, something happened. Theresa May made a number of unforced policy errors: fox-hunting, 'dementia tax', school lunches. That combined with her one dimensional and un-empathetic style meant she lost momentum.

However, the real story was the Labour 'surge'. In a long dull campaign the broadcast media was significant in familiarising the public with Jeremy Corbyn as a character who was far less frightening than the press had suggested and relatively more engaging than his rival. The more they saw and heard of Corbyn, the more voters accepted his legitimacy. Labour's campaign team were clever enough to realise this and pushed him further into the limelight to contrast with May's life in the shadows.

But perhaps the main effect of this sterile broadcast campaign was the space it allowed for social media to have a galvanising effect? While the broadcasters were reduced to carefully balanced platitudes in the absence of any real engagement with the politicians, online a different, much more interesting campaign was happening.

In the past Labour has 'won' the online campaign with no positive impact on the actual result. Media effects are difficult to prove and the data is still being gathered. But qualitatively, the left-wing digital campaign was different to 2015 and it exploited the broadcast vacuum.

Firstly, the 'alt-left' blogs like The Canary and AnotherAngryVoice spent a lot of time critiquing broadcast and other media as well as promoting Corbyn's agenda. They gained as much traffic as many MSM articles and comparable to TV audiences overall.

Secondly, the Conservatives were aiming negative and attack adverts through Facebook at potential swing voters. These may have been effective at saying what broadcast would not allow. However, they were not shared widely.

In contrast, Labour's official and unofficial online videos were widely distributed. This was, I would suggest, partly because they were more 'positive.' They expressed passion about Corbyn and righteous anger at both the Conservatives and the news media. This combination of emotion, social justice and personal identity politics is precisely the editorial cocktail that works so well on networks such as Facebook and YouTube. It is very much the formula that has made Channel 4 News' Facebook videos go viral. The digital native Corbynites understood this intuitively and produced the kind of video and imagery that makes memes.

I had previously thought that this aggressive, polarising discourse would only reach a small echo chamber. I argued that it might even put off potential recruits. So what, if Facebook is full of images of Corbyn talking to huge, enthusiastic crowds?

But in contrast to the lifeless and inorganic Conservative campaign it felt energetic and inclusive. It seems to have had a catalytic effect on Labour campaigners. In a limited campaign it might also have helped reach out to the voters who would go on to form the Corbyn coalition in a way that conventional appearances on broadcast news could not do.

Ducking the debate

From the outset of the campaign the commentariat were united in smug consensus: Corbyn's Labour Party was about to face the mother of all electoral defeats and the Lynton Crosby-directed Conservatives would win a landslide by incessantly incanting Maoist-like slogans. In such circumstances, why bother to go head to head in something as quaintly deliberative as a televised debate, as party leaders had done in 2010 and 2015? As Sarah Arnold declared in the *Independent*, "Theresa May is coasting to a memorable victory on 8 June – taking the time out of a hectic pre-election schedule to debate Jeremy Corbyn live will not benefit her, or any of us". The Conservative line was that May regarded televised debates as a distraction from "a traditional campaign where we can get out and speak to all the voters, so they see people personally" (Conservative spokesperson quoted in The Sun, 31 May, 2017). Not all voters were convinced that this would serve democracy well. Apart from the fact that most of Theresa May's encounters on her trips around the country were stage-managed to a degree that smothered any prospect of spontaneous human interaction, no amount of speaking to or at the voters could provide a substitute for robust and focused confrontation between prospective leaders of a government.

We have shown in our studies of the first ever UK televised election debates in 2010 and 2015 that these media events are watched in significant numbers by people who said that they had little or no interest in politics and followed little else relating to election news during the course of the campaign; that they were particularly appreciated by first-time voters, who not only watched them, but talked about them while they were taking place and in the days after, both via social media and face-to-face; and that most debate-viewers reported knowing more about the competing party policies and the characters of prospective Prime Ministers than they had done before watching. When Sarah Arnold asked "What use is Jeremy Corbyn wailing about Brexit and Theresa May laughing off his anti-austerity measures going to do for actual voters?", she was quite simply betraying her ignorance of research as well as her unfounded complacency. Most voters disagreed with her: a BMG Research survey commissioned by the Independent (25/04/17) found that 54% of the public thought that the leaders of the UK's major political parties should participate in live televised debates during the election campaign, with more Conservative supporters in favour than against. A Change.org petition calling upon the broadcasters to 'empty chair' any party leader refusing to take part in the debates attracted 121,966 signatories.

But surely, a modern democracy in which most people receive their political information from television should not have to rely upon the whims of party spin doctors or the efforts of petitioning citizens to persuade those seeking a mandate to run the country to debate their views before the largest available audience of voters? In our study of the 2015 debates, Jay Blumler, Giles Moss and I argued that "It is now time to move on from the debate about whether election debates are worthwhile. We have now had TV debates in the UK in two general election campaigns and on both occasions the most striking conclusion from research was that they were good for democratic citizenship. We think that the default assumption should now be that debates happen. It is perfectly reasonable for parties to argue about the arrangements for future debates, but that they will happen should now be accepted as a matter of principle". We were right then and now that we have witnessed the consequences of allowing a party leader to veto such a democratic opportunity it is surely time for serious public discussion about the right of the electorate to be exposed to televised election debates. Is it now time to be thinking about an election debates' commission, charged with the public duty of knocking the parties and broadcasters' heads together?

The 'debates' that occurred in May's obdurate absence were strange events. They were a combination of non-debates in which opposition parties said what they would have liked to have said to Theresa May had she been there, interrogations by aggressive interviewers who seemed far too absorbed in their own polemical agendas to engage in anything resembling a reasonable conversation and studio-audience question times – which were good for democracy, but still not leaders' debates. In the end, one of the reasons for the Conservatives' humiliation at the polls was the impression they gave of taking voters for granted. For once, the obnoxious Richard Littlejohn writing in the odious Daily Mail was quite right: "She [May] ran scared of going head-to-head with Jeremy Corbyn. That didn't make her look presidential, it made her look weak. In interviews with Andrew Neil and Jeremy Paxman, she came across as humourless, wooden and slow-witted. The more people saw of her, the less they liked her."

Prof Stephen Coleman

Professor of Political Communication in the School of Media & Communication, University of Leeds.

Email: S.Coleman@leeds.ac.uk

Caught in the middle: the BBC's impossible impartiality dilemma

Dr Martin Moore

Director of the Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power, and Senior Research Fellow in the Policy Institute at King's College London.

Email: martin.moore@kcl.ac.uk

Twitter: @martinjemoore

Dr Gordon Ramsay

Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Study of Media, Communication and Power at King's College London.

Email: gordon.n.ramsay@kcl.ac.uk

Twitter: @g_n_ramsay

"If this doesn't get the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg fired, nothing will"; "Ian Hislop stuns the panel by calling out BBC bias straight to the broadcaster's face"; "The BBC is in hot water again over its bias. And this time the complaint is a biggie".

None of these news headlines from the campaign was published on a traditional right-wing news outlet, or on a new alt-right media site. All three were published by the popular left-wing news site The Canary. These were just three of 75 articles published on the site during the campaign that alleged BBC political bias (from 19 April to 7 June).

There were similar accusations made about BBC election on other alt-left sites including Skwawkbox ("Sky Shames Kuenssberg On #Labourmanifesto #GE17"), Evolve Politics ("The BBC licence fee is now simply a charge to be spoon-fed right-wing propaganda") and Another Angry Voice ("Another astounding display of pro-Tory bias from the BBC"). Novara Media hosted a podcast to discuss Tom Mills book *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service?* that argues the BBC is the voice of the Establishment. Across all of these outlets more than a hundred pieces alleged BBC bias during the campaign.

The allegations ranged from general criticisms of the Corporation, to accusations against particular programmes, to disparagement of individual journalists. BBC programmes such as Newsnight were singled out; "No wonder BBC Newsnight is on its way out," The Canary writes, "after the stunt it just pulled". Individual journalists were accused of deliberate or unconscious bias, including: Laura Kuenssberg, Nick Robinson, Norman Smith, John Pienaar, Kamal Ahmed, John Humphries and Andrew Marr. Kuenssberg was a particular focus for criticism, alleged to be "notorious for her anti Corbyn bias".

The BBC, according to the alt-left media, acted as a filter for the right-wing press. It mimicked their political agenda, followed their stories, and – consciously or unconsciously – adopted some of their political perspectives. Criticisms were often based around the BBC's failure to report on specific events or ask specific questions. The Canary called out Andrew Marr for 'forgetting' to talk about privatisation in a discussion on the NHS with Jeremy Hunt.

These criticisms should be put in the context of parallel attacks on the BBC in the right-wing press. The Sun, The Daily Mail, the Times and the Daily Telegraph have long been critics of the BBC, and their attitudes towards the broadcaster did not change during the 2017 campaign, though there were less critical of the broadcaster than the alt-left media. Their particular ire was directed at the

BBC following the live leaders' debate of 31 May at which the audience appeared notably pro-Corbyn. "BBC's ugly, uninformative and biased debate demeaned democracy" the Daily Mail commented. While the Sun reported that "BBC Election Debate 2017 slammed as 'biased' as stunned viewers react with anger at audience for leaders' grilling".

Further denunciation of the BBC's impartiality came from new right-wing news outlets like Breitbart London and Westmonster, though their disapproval tended to be centred on coverage of Brexit, rather than on election reporting. James Delingpole, for example, in a piece for *Breitbart* on 4 May, wrote that "Kuenssberg was so flagrantly partisan that she might as well have done it to the strains of Ode to Joy while draped in the blue and gold-starred Euro flag and wearing a huge badge saying 'I heart Jean-Claude Juncker'".

In some cases, the language and arguments used by the alt-left media and by the right-wing press about the BBC had noticeable overlaps. Alt-left media would cite issues and questions not asked by the BBC, and suggest the absence as evidence of pro-Conservative bias. Similarly, the Daily Mail asked why, during the BBC leaders' debate, there was barely any mention of immigration. "Was it, as we suspect, because it was helpful to the Tories – with their strong immigration policies – and unhelpful to Labour…?"

The BBC therefore finds itself in the unenviable position of being accused of political bias both by old and new media on the right and by new media on the left. It may be argued that this simply proves the broadcaster is successfully holding a middle path. Alternatively, the criticism could be written off as the self-interested perspectives of hyperpartisan and commercial media locked into an online contest for attention. This would, however, ignore the potential serious implications of the criticisms.

Alternative online news sites have a large and growing audience online. They will be energised – on both sides – by the surprise result of a hung Parliament. As Buzzfeed reported early in the campaign, news stories on alt-left sites "are consistently and repeatedly going more viral than mainstream UK political journalism". Repeated allegations of BBC bias made to significant audiences from the right and from the left will undermine confidence in the national broadcaster, at least among certain audiences. Equally, just because criticisms come from both ends of the political spectrum does not mean they are both wrong. The continued allegations of bias also undermine the principle of journalistic impartiality and will make it more difficult not just for the BBC, but for any news organisation to persuade the public of its objectivity in future elections.

Another astounding display of pro-Tory bias from the BBC as they plant an actual Tory party councillor in the Question Time audience and then invite him to slag off Labour with the very first question of the show!

UK

The BBC just went full North Korea to protect the government from the Corbyn surge [IMAGES]

The BBC appears to have gone full North Korea by censoring clothing supportive of Jeremy Corbyn. Viewers accused the broadcaster of attempting to protect the establishment from Corbyn's unprecedented surge in popularity. The fresh accusations come just after the BBC blocked people from listening to the hit song Liar Liar on its...

Media policy: the curious incident of the dog in the night-time

Prof Jonathan Hardy

Professor of Media and Communications at the University of East London. His books include Critical Political Economy of the Media (Routledge 2014), Cross-Media Promotion (Peter Lang 2010) and Western Media Systems (Routledge 2008). He is Secretary of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.

Email: J.Hardy@uel.ac.uk.UK

Twitter: @jon1hardy

In Conan Doyle's story, The Adventure of Silver Blaze, there was no bark because the villain was familiar to the dog. That may be enough said, for some, to explain why a lapdog, pro-Tory press kept shtum on media policy issues. Yet I will pursue the naivety of asking (as in GE2015) what happened to media policy as an election issue in GE2017?

Not much. But while you climb back onto your chair, it is worth probing further, not least as the party manifestos set out starkly contrasting visions. Labour foregrounded those differences, stating "Unlike the Conservatives, Labour will always support [the BBC] and uphold its independence", and keep Channel 4 in public ownership. Similarly, the Lib Dems pledge to protect BBC independence, maintain World Service funding, keep Channel 4 public and protect Welsh language broadcasters. The SNP seeks devolved powers over broadcasting, greater investment in BBC Scotland and benefits from the relocation of Channel 4 outside London. Likewise, Plaid Cymru seek devolved media policy for "a real Welsh media" that counters being "sidelined and forgotten". Strap in as media performance and policy become key sites of contestation as the turbulence of English nativism, empire revivalism and separatism play out around Brexit.

The only reference to the BBC in the *Conservative* manifesto is its pledge to "place the BBC World Service and the British Council on a secure footing so they are able to promote the best of British values around the globe". For public service supporters that is worrying enough, but the leverage of the DUP will add to concerns, with their call for a review of the BBC to "identify the opportunities for competitive tendering of key services and produce a plan that will either significantly reduce the licence fee or abolish it".

Aiding the creative industries sector looms large, with various nods to copyright reform. The Conservatives pledge pro-business support and deregulation, albeit shrouded in the code of a putative 'level playing field', but also interventions such as online child safety, with new requirements for social media to delete information held when young people turn eighteen. Labour goes furthest in promising policies on pay and employment standards to make the sector "more accessible to all". Amid the mix of platitudes and particularities on offer, *UKIP* offers a curiously embodied apologia: "[e]lsewhere in this manifesto we condemn alien practices that oppress women, but we are not blind to our own failings" and promises to review codes so that "editorial coverage and advertising campaigns will treat men and women with dignity and promote healthy body images". Watching how that party sifts (un)acceptable images might be grimly fascinating if the consequences of hate speech weren't so devastating.

Labour, Lib Dems and Greens call for stronger action on media plurality, led by Ofcom, with oblique references to the Fox-Sky merger, alongside measures to support local commercial radio (SNP) and local news media (Labour). Yet, the greatest policy division is for the oldest medium: print. The Conservatives promise to halt the Leveson process and repeal Section 40, of the Crime and Courts Act 2014 which "would force media organisations to become members of a flawed regulatory system", or risk higher libel and privacy court costs. Labour would implement the Leveson recommendations and "commence part two which will look into the corporate governance failures that allowed the hacking scandal to occur". So, stark differences: how did the media dogs bark? Curiously silent; beyond brief summaries of policy and fleeting criticisms of Labour's 'press witch-hunt' (The Sun 11 May). With the UK press the least trusted in Europe, it is perhaps unsurprising that readers were not led to ponder the merits of Tory complaisance with owners and editors, against the echo of that roar for action that Cameron was unable to avoid.

So, if the beneficiaries of Tory press policy did not bark, what about broadcasting? A scan of BBC output awards Jo Coburn's two-sentence summary of Tory press policy on Daily Politics (19 May) the most significant mention in the entire campaign. Yet something else did occur that bridges the eras of modernity and digitality. Accompanying Corbyn at some rallies were celebrity supporters Hugh Grant (also appearing on ITV's Peston on Sunday 21 May) and Steve Coogan, both at the heart of the Leveson process, with Coogan's address at Birmingham reaching six other rallies via satellite link. Corbyn's quasi-local contact with voters through impartiality-regulated regional TV news has rightly been highlighted as a critical 'success' factor. Local press coverage was significant too, with the calls for Leveson Part Two reported largely without the hostility of the Tory nationals who castigated Labour levies. Mass rallies, local press, celebrities, digital publishing and sharing: the ingredients of three centuries melded to make media, at least fleetingly, the election issue it surely deserved to be.

The use and abuse of the vox pop in the 2017 UK General Election television news coverage

Throughout the first half of the 2017 General Election campaign, that ever-present staple of television news programming – the 'vox-pop' (from the Latin *vox populi* meaning 'voice of the people') – was used in an uncritical manner. Notably, as the campaign became determined by the events of the terrorist attacks in London and Manchester, along with the campaign performances by Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn, the vox pop receded into the background of news reports. There were, for instance, some light news items such as the BBC journalist Steve Smith' supposedly comic tour of non-marginal constituencies in Newsnight.

At the start of the campaign and before the manifesto launches, while politicians were deliberately kept away from the public, the town centres of marginal constituencies appeared to be over-flowing with roving reporters:

"What is truly guaranteed, if you stand in the middle of Hull for around 10 minutes, is an approach from a BBC reporter. The same goes for marketplaces in numerous northern towns: anywhere, really, where the remarks will be pithy, and the passers-by both picturesque and certifiably ordinary, which is to say, they speak with strong regional accents." (Catherine Bennett, the Guardian, 30th April 2017)

For decades, 'ordinary people' have been stopped by interviewers to provide their political views during the campaign. These shades of public opinion have been presented as being legitimate when in reality they have little or no scientific rationale.

In 2017, television news reporters on the BBC, ITN, Sky News and, most especially, Michael Crick on Channel Four News could be seen harassing the electorate for their views. Armed with oversized fury microphones, these journalists pounced upon random members of the public to record their every utterance - however insightful or inane. Conventional vox pops were complimented by the Guardian's John Harris's despairing online reports eponymously entitled 'Anywhere but Westminster' and seemingly designed to show a general public sapped of any political will.

On 18 April, the day upon which the Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May called the snap election, 'Brenda from Bristol' made apparent her disgust that there was yet another chance to go the polls. She informed the BBC reporter Jon Kay, 'You're joking?! Not another one! Oh, for God's sake, honestly, I can't stand this. There's too much politics going on at the moment!' Unsurprisingly her comments were played across the range of BBC News channels, bulletins and its website. Even less surprisingly, as her views reverberated across the social media, 'Brenda' became a news story in her own right.

Subsequently, vox pops formed a significant part of a news narrative which initially focused upon the virtues of May's 'Red Toryism' which resurrected the values of 'flag, family and faith' as advocated by May guru Nick Timothy. In turn, eager news journalists sought out members of the public to reinforce the belief that May would be a 'strong and stable' leader who could deal with the complexities of 'Brexit' in a Canute-like and xenophobic manner. Conversely, the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's political obituary was written as apparently 'honest' voices were fed lines to reiterate the mistaken belief that the Labour leader had no connection to his core voters. As one local put it, 'I still believe in Labour [but not that] plonker Corbyn'.

Consequently, exacting broadcasting rules concerning balance and impartiality in electoral coverage were dropped in favour of journalists exchanging in pithy one-liners with bona fide 'men or women on the street.' Such distortions meant that there was no way to know whether these supposedly ordinary members of the public were in any way representative of wider public opinion. Yet, the vox pop disappeared when May started to fatally make u-turns on the 'worst manifesto in history' making her 'weak and wobbly' while Corbyn's canvassing connected with the public in record numbers.

To conclude, the original over-usage of vox pops indicated how television new channels attempted reinforce the plutocratic values of the elite rather than truly engaging with the public. However, once the issues came to the fore, the populism expressed within the earlier vox pops receded when, perhaps, their usefulness for the news media agenda setters became less obvious and more counterproductive.

Prof Mark Wheeler

Professor of Political Communications at London Metropolitan University. He is the author five books including Politics and the Mass Media (Blackwell, 1997), Celebrity Politics (Polity, 2013) and Public Spheres and Mediated Social Networks: The Western Context and Beyond, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016) (with Petros Iosifidis).

Email: m.wheeler@londonmet.ac.uk

Media bias hits a wall

Prof Des Freedman

Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Goldsmiths University of London.

Email: D.Freedman@gold.ac.uk

Twitter: @lazebnic

This was an election in which Rupert Murdoch's titles finally failed to back a winner. Yes, the Tories may scrape a fragile working majority but no one is calling Theresa May a winner right now. Meanwhile the real target of the media establishment, Jeremy Corbyn, was the clear victor earning Labour its biggest share of the vote since 2001 and its biggest increase in vote share since 1945. It is a delicious thought that, according to John Prescott, Rupert himself stormed out of a Times election party once he had seen the exit polls predicting a hung parliament.

This was an election in which the media's hostility towards Corbyn, nurtured since the very first day of his leadership of the Labour Party, was intense but ineffectual. This was a campaign, in other words, that showed both the determination of powerful gatekeepers in the mainstream media to foster a pro-Tory agenda and the enduring ability of ordinary voters to ignore these voices. It's time now to move on from believing either that it must have been 'the Sun wot won it' or that 'the Sun didn't win it' in relation to political campaigns. Instead, we need a more complex understanding of media power as a phenomenon that distorts democratic processes but that has its own limitations – as something pervasive but also contingent, fragile and unstable.

How do we make sense of this contradiction following the general election?

First, it is undeniable that whole swathes of reporting were hugely biased. Despite their appalling campaign, press coverage of the Tories – measured by circulation – was fairly neutral overall while Labour (widely acknowledged to have run a fantastic campaign) attracted far more negative coverage than any other party. In terms of endorsements, the Tories received support from 80% of the Sunday press and 57% of the daily press with Labour receiving 20% and 11% respectively, hardly proportionate to the final tally. Of course, broadcasters – forced to respect 'due impartiality' – were not partisan in such an open way but they nevertheless happily reproduced memes about Corbyn's 'unelectability', his alleged links to terrorists and his reluctance to send millions of people to their death by pressing the nuclear button.

This was epitomised by Jeremy Paxman's interviews with the two main party leaders where 54% of airtime was devoted to issues pushed by the Tory campaign compared to 31% for issues pushed by Labour. Meanwhile, the BBC continued to circulate a Laura Kuenssberg report on Corbyn's views on 'shoot to kill' that had been censured by the BBC Trust because of its misleading editing; it failed even to acknowledge that the clip was the subject of a complaint that had been upheld until the final day before the election. It would be foolish, in these circumstances, to think that the constant repetition of Corbyn as either dangerous or deficient had absolutely no impact on what the wider electorate was discussing.

Having said this, it's also clear that millions of people rejected the preferences of press moguls and the cynicism of the commentariat and turned to social media for a wider range of sources. When, after years of declining wages, voters were given the chance to punish Theresa May's political opportunism and to vote for a distinctively progressive, anti-austerity programme, some 13 million people took up this offer.

This conundrum about media influence has led to some rather polarised claims. Predictions that the right-wing press have had their day or that media bias is no longer an issue are just as misconceived as Sun editor Tony Gallagher's assertion after the Brexit vote of the continuing power of newspapers. Both miss out on the fact that media influence is connected to the ideas that people hold at any one moment – a consciousness that is not fixed or immutable. During elections, pundits talk about 'volatility' and 'swings' as if these were mysterious processes with logics of their own. They are not. Campaigns, just like media, can change minds but it depends on what the message is, whether voters are actually exposed to it and how it connects to their own experience.

That's why by far the biggest story of the election itself should have been about how voters changed their minds over the course of six weeks – about the 'Labour surge' and the virtual disappearance of the Tory lead in most opinion polls. Survation, for example, reported that a 17% poll lead for the Tories at the beginning of May had dropped to a single point just before election day. It asked a good question: 'What's going on?' Tragically, this was not a question that many commentators bothered to ask. So while Corbyn's energising of the whole election campaign should have been the lead story, this wasn't a 'frame' that the media were prepared to adopt. And so long as the mainstream media fail to recognise just how dramatically politics in the UK has changed, media bias – and the need for media reform – will remain a major issue.

Declining newspaper sales and the role of broadcast journalism in the 2017 general election

The unexpected, 'snap' general election of June 2017 was a pivotal moment in the history of the UK's evolving democracy. Arguably, of course, nobody 'won' it in the sense of getting an overall majority, but the incumbent government remained in power, albeit as a minority administration. An important significance of the event, though, was the inability of *The Sun* and the rest of the right-wing press to sufficiently influence the course of the election to prevent the shock loss of the Conservative Party's majority – and more specifically to enable the party to sustain the massive opinion poll leads it consistently enjoyed until the end of the campaign.

The proud boasts of *The Sun* in May 1992 that "It's The Sun wot won it" and in May 1997 that "It's The Sun wot swung it", following successive Conservative general election victories, were always controversial - and with the newspaper's proprietor, Rupert Murdoch, switching its allegiance in advance of the Labour landslide of 1997 there were suggestions that far from influencing those elections, Murdoch simply had a knack for backing winners. Despite those claims, however, in 2017, neither Murdoch nor his peers in right-wing newspaper ownership seemed to realize until the shock exit poll that they had spent the whole of the election campaign backing losers.

The scale of the Conservative loss in 2017 was amplified by the seismic shifts in opinion polling results over the period. Survation's final poll was the closest to the actual result, but in mid-April, as Theresa May announced she was calling the election, the same company found the share of voting intention to be Conservatives 40% and Labour 29%. As Jeremy Corbyn's campaign gained momentum, the tirade of Conservative propaganda and the smears levelled against Corbyn by the right-wing press failed to halt Labour's unprecedented rise over such a short time to an eventual 40% share of the actual votes cast. That tirade included contributions from *The Sun* in the form of such headlines as "Jezza's Jihadi Comrades" (7 June) and "Don't Chuck Britain in the Cor-Bin" (8 June).

Why, though, have *The Sun* and the rest of the UK press lost so much of whatever influence they once had on the electorate? The answer must surely lie in the dwindling circulation figures for the printed press over time and a failure to reach large enough audiences electronically to mitigate against them. According to ABC, in the preceding ten years the daily sales of print editions of *The Sun* have fallen from almost 3 million to 1.75 million, while the *Daily Mail* has fallen from 2.3 million to 1.5 million and the *Daily Express* from 0.79 million to 0.42 million. In 2016 the NRS survey of audience *size* estimated the audience reach of *The Sun* to be 3.9 million, or 7.5% of the adult population over 15 years old. In total only 23.2% of the UK adult population aged 15 years and older - that is 12.1 million people - were reading national daily newspapers of any political persuasion.

By contrast, audiences for the broadcast media have remained relatively buoyant while newspapers have been in decline. The television audience data supplied by BARB indicate a weekly audience in 2017 of 92.9%, and radio listening measured over a week by RAJAR remains stable at 90% of the adult population. Admittedly, only a small percentage of that viewing and listening may be to broadcast journalism content, but BARB shows a typical edition of the *News at Six* (BBC1) can attract an audience of five million viewers - and of course there are other news programmes at other times of the day and on different channels, meaning the cumulative audience for television news supplied by mainstream broadcasting outlets in the UK is much higher than that. Even music radio stations tend to broadcast news on the hour during daytime, so increasing the reach of broadcast journalism, including its election coverage.

The key difference between newspaper journalism and broadcast journalism lies in the tight regulation of radio and television here, that prevents the kind of partisanship that is commonplace in the press from influencing content in broadcasting. Particularly tight rules in the *Ofcom Broadcasting Code* and the BBC's *Editorial Guidelines* relate to election periods and the impartiality required of broadcasters, including over balance in reporting. Countering the influence of the press even more, there has developed what we might call a "third force" in public discourse around politics and politicians generally through the growth of social media, which allows a much greater dissemination now of alternative information and comment as well as direct communication from parties that are traditionally disadvantaged, such as Labour, to new audiences online.

This relative muting of the press barons, in their attempts to subvert the course of elections in the UK, is very welcome - as in one sense democracy finally comes of age.

Prof Guy Starkey

Professor and Associate Dean of Global Engagement at the Bournemouth University.

Email: gstarkey@bournemouth.ac.uk

Newspapers' editorial opinions: stuck between a rock and a hard place

Dr Julie Firmstone

Associate Professor in Media and Communication and Convenor of the Journalsim Rsearch Group, School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds.

Email: j.a.firmstone@leeds.ac.uk

Twitter: @AccidentalPO

In the eight days before Election Day newspapers made blatant and deliberate attempts to influence readers' votes and, to a lesser extent, shape parties' campaigning strategies. Measurements of salience, tenacity and circulation demonstrate that the weight of opinion within the British press was hugely in favour of the Conservatives. However, the surprise election outcome leads us to look beyond these relatively basic measurements to consider how a more nuanced analysis of editorials can provide a more complete picture.

With only *the Mirror* and *the Guardian* endorsing Labour, and *the Observe*r recommending tactical voting (Table 1), Conservative partisanship was the most salient voice in the British national press (Figure 1). Five Conservative newspapers intervened in 88% of opportunities, totalling 35 editorials, and tabloids published an editorial every day. *The Mirror* and *the Guardian* utilised 87% of opportunities, totalling only 13 editorials and, more importantly, few that explicitly called for a vote for Labour, and even fewer that categorically endorsed Corbyn. Taking account of the creative and persuasive techniques of opinion leading, newspapers' tenacity scores (Figure 2) illustrate that the vigour of opinion in favour of the Conservatives was four times (161) that for Labour (40). As one would expect, tabloids not only 'pimped up' their editorials to maximum tenacity but projected their views through a diversity of content (see Figure 3).

The individualised 'presidential' focus on leaders put newspapers in the proverbial position of being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Both took predictable partisan lines but, significantly for the result, neither side mustered much enthusiasm for the leader of the party they endorsed. Left-wing critiques predictably discredited May's 'strong and stable' claim, with *the Observer* calling for a vote against May's 'feeble plan for Britain' and *the Guardian* decrying her Brexit policy. More importantly although right-wing papers, particularly the tabloids, gave Corbyn a rough time, their continuing absence of direct support for May is of equal note. Here, the Express was alone in its unreserved support, backing her with an appeal to nationalist Brexit sentiments. By contrast, *the Sunday Times* opposed May as "not Tory enough" and their opinion accurately summarises the lukewarm support of right-wing broadsheets – "There are plenty of good reasons for not voting for Mr Corbyn and Labour, but Mrs May has not provided many good reasons for voting Conservative". Support for May in *the Sun* and *the Daily Mail* was conspicuous in its absence due to an all-consuming focus on discrediting Corbyn.

The tenacious opinions of right-wing papers clustered around the dominant claim that as a dangerous "extreme left-wing Marxist" with past affiliations to terrorism, Corbyn must be kept out of government due to his unfitness to govern and his policies amounting to fantasy. The severely hostile Express and Sun invoked notions of violence describing Corbyn and his cabinet as a gang, a mob, and thugs. *The Daily Mail's* anti-Labour discourse was less individualised encompassing critiques of the shadow cabinet. In addition to repeating the claim that a vote for May would "save Britain from the terrorists' friend" *the Daily Mail* focussed on Corbyn as "economically illiterate" claiming that he "would wreck Britain" and that a hung parliament may lead to a "coalition of chaos". The less fierce *Telegraph* stated that Corbyn was "promising what he can't deliver", and criticised Corbyn as incompetent, wrongheaded, dangerous. *The Times* was more reserved, focusing on his policies as fantasy, calling him a protestor not a politician.

Left-wing papers left these emphatic anti-Corbyn discourses unchallenged and added to the dearth of support for Corbyn with reluctant and muted endorsements. Acknowledging their previously expressed criticisms of Corbyn as "ill equipped" to be PM, *the Mirror* hesitantly bridged the gap between the undesirability of Corbyn who is "not all we would wish" and their expression of far stronger support for Labour and its policies. *The Guardian's* editorials not only lacked tenacity, they ignored Corbyn, who became the 'elephant in the room', only mentioned in one editorial five days before the election. In this, the only editorial which claimed that "Labour deserves our vote", *the Guardian* devoted much space to criticising Corbyn "who unquestionably has his flaws" urging him and Labour to become more centre-left. Such disapproval combined with claims that 'to limit the Tories by tactical voting makes sense' undermined their endorsement. On polling day, *the Guardian* was so staggeringly pre-occupied with criticising May and worrying about Brexit that it forgot to endorse any party and didn't mention Corbyn or Labour. Coupled with *the Observer's* strong critique of Corbyn, and papers' comparatively modest critiques of May as feeble, foolish, weak and wobbly, left-wing papers were an unconvincing trio of Labour support.

With newspaper readership and Conservative voters skewed towards older generations, readers may well have responded to the ambivalence of newspapers' endorsements of May. Yet on the same note, Labour's gains defied the determination of right-wing papers' denunciation of Corbyn and the highly qualified endorsements of left-wing papers. A tentative explanation points to the limited influence of left-wing papers due to low readership in comparison to the right-wing press, and to the impact of the new cleavage in British politics – age. The Labour surge has been attributed to young voters who constitute a dwindling proportion of newspaper readership – the young people who voted Labour were not tuned into newspapers' anti-Corbyn editorial opinions. If newspapers' opinion leading roles are to endure they must ask: where were young people and how can newspapers get there?

Table 1: Editorial endorsements

Newspapers	Editorial Endorsement
Sun/Sun on Sunday	Conservative
Daily Mirror/Sunday Mirror	Labour
Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday	Conservative
Daily Express/Sunday Express	Conservative (change from UKIP in 2015)
Times/Sunday Times	Conservative
Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph	Conservative
Guardian/Observer	Labour/ Tactical vote against Conservative (change from x in 2015)

Figure 1: Salience of editorial voice 1-8 June (Number of days editorials published)

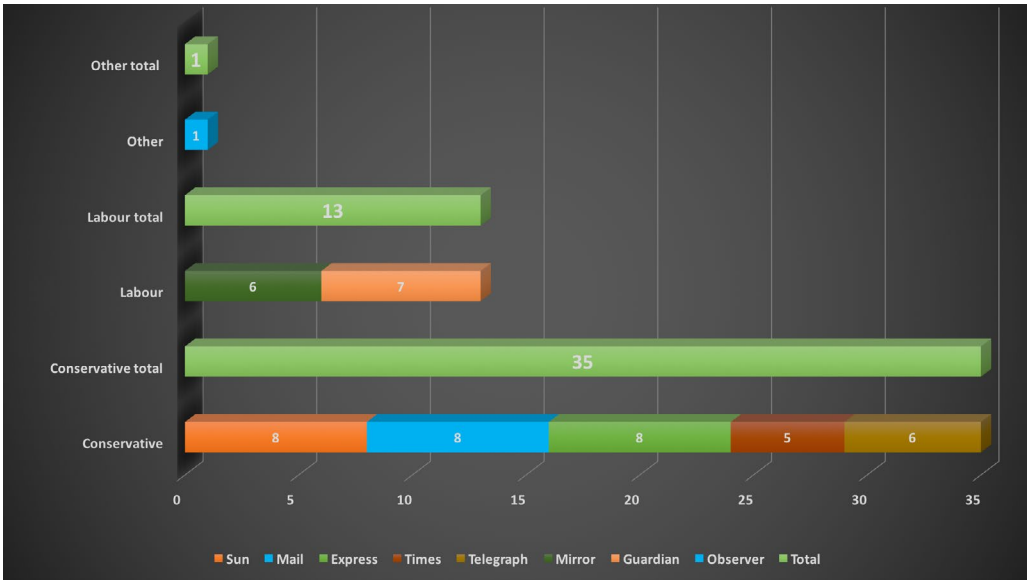
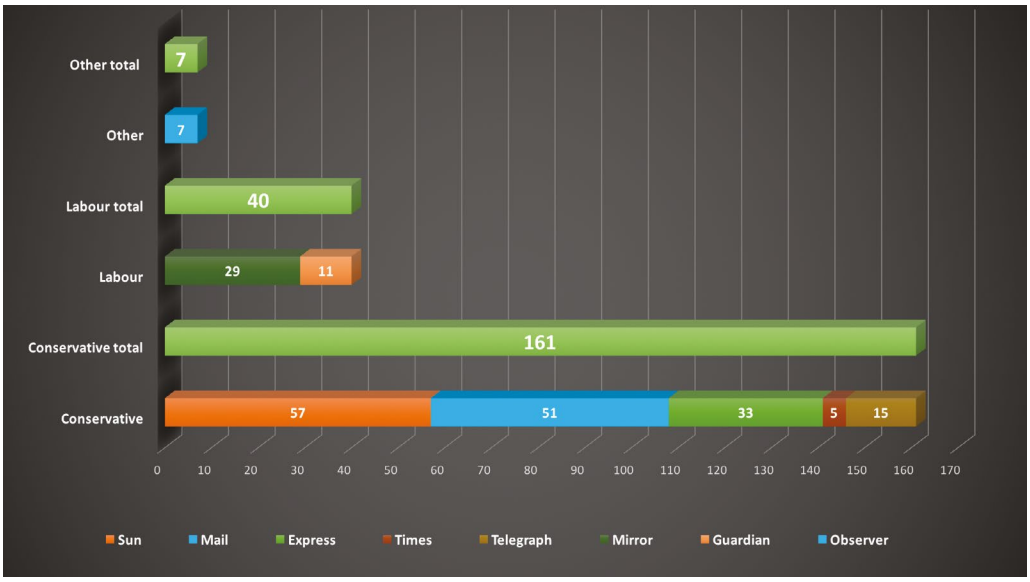


Figure 2: Tenacity score of editorial voices 1-8 June



Key for figure 2:
The tenacity score is the aggregate daily score for each paper with points awarded for each of the following: 1 for each editorial comment; 3 when one editorial took up the entire editorial space; 3 for a full page editorial; 3 for editorial appearing on the front page; 1 for a photo or cartoon.

Figure 3: Examples of maximum tenacity editorials

It's the Sun wot lost it

Prof Mick Temple

Professor of Journalism and Politics at Staffordshire University. His books include The British Press (2008) and How Britain Works: From Ideology to Output Politics (2000). He has published widely on politics and the media, comments regularly on national and local media, and is co-editor of Journalism Education.

Email: M.Temple@staffs.ac.uk

In the early hours of Friday morning, as the results poured in and validated the unexpected broadcasters' exit poll prediction, I came up with the title of this piece. Feeling smug at my originality, it wasn't long before I discovered the phrase popping up all over social media and the blogosphere. Others had also looked at the *Sun* and the *Mail's* extraordinarily nasty coverage of Labour and Jeremy Corbyn and noted the distaste of, particularly, the young electorate.

The tabloid press and the Conservative party ran a campaign concentrating on sustained negativity and personal abuse. Conversely, Corbyn's policy of delivering his party's message of social justice and his refusal to engage in the modern politics of abusing your rivals clearly enthused many young people.

There is little doubt that newspapers have some influence on the issues that people think about, but there is no consensus about just how they influence public attitudes. The press's impact on voting patterns also arouses differences. Did the Sun really ensure John Major's Conservative government in 1992 when they claimed it was 'The Sun Wot Won It'? The argument that there was a late Conservative swing among Tory tabloid paper readers but not among pro-Labour Daily Mirror readers has been fiercely debated. Some assert that if newspapers have any effect it is in the cumulative effect of anti-Labour reporting.

Some research of newspaper preferences, readership and voting patterns in the 2015 general election maintained that the right-wing press won that election for David Cameron. Perhaps. But one thing we can all agree on is that the right-wing press coverage of Labour in the post-Blair years has been uniformly hostile.

In 2015, academic studies had argued that the general election campaign was characterised by a press hostility to Labour not seen since 1992. For this election, the coverage for Corbyn and Co by all sections of the right wing press made the ridicule heaped on Ed Miliband seem positively benign. In general, Miliband was portrayed as a mostly incompetent Wallace with Ed Balls as Gromit. His inability to eat a bacon sandwich gracefully was the inspiration for the *Sun's* election week headline 'Save our bacon'.

By contrast, during this election Jeremy Corbyn was consistently portrayed as a 'shameless apologist for evil', and was nearly always featured wearing his apparently communist cap. That cap became his identifiable feature in political cartoons, like Harold Wilson's pipe. Labour's manifesto, despite wide public support, was described by the *Sun* as a 'Marxist masterplan' which would transform Britain into a 'crumbling ruin', no doubt led by 'Jezza's Jihadi comrades'.

The *Sun's* election-day front page headline, 'Don't chuck Britain in the Cor-bin', accompanied by a mock-up of Corbyn peering out of a dustbin, aroused a considerable backlash on social media. Inside and with no hint of irony, the *Sun* damned his 'fervent followers' who had 'bombarded social media with abuse' to intimidate potential Tory voters.

It would be nice to report that the pro-Labour *Daily Mirror* displayed more restraint, but their election-day headline 'Lies, damned lies and Theresa May', accompanied by a picture of a snarling prime minister, added to the tabloid nastiness.

The Daily Star confounded expectations. After a remarkably even-handed front page on June 8th headed 'Tezza vs Jezza' – although Corbyn was displayed in a somewhat comical pose – a full two-page inside spread's run down of party positions on key policies was a model in popular politic coverage. That said, readers were advised to 'cheer up' and guided to a centre-spread featuring bikini-clad celebrities below the headline 'Ballots to the election, we vote Beach Party'. You can't have everything …

At the beginning of the election campaign, the Sun predicted 'Blue Murder' for Corbyn's Marxist 'madness' and a Tory landslide for the 'impressive' Mrs May. At the end, the women the Mail had called 'Britain's New Iron Lady' in January 2017 became the scapegoat for their failure to engineer her expected coronation.

Of course, the use of the phrase 'it's the *Sun* wot won it' and the seriousness with which academics treated the claim, implies extraordinary power to our newspapers and their hold over their diminishing readership. And the election result is already raising questions about the declining influence of national newspapers who almost all backed Theresa May.

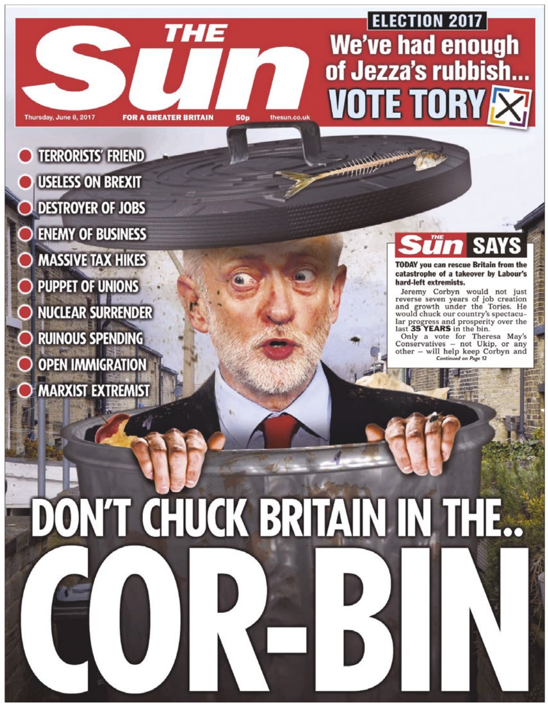
Few go online at the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* for their political news. It may be that falling physical print sales mean their role as political agenda setters is almost over, replaced by partisan blogs such as pro-Labour Another Angry Voice and Conservative Home. In the post-election blame game, Theresa May's co-Chief of Staff Nick Timothy chose to give his reasons for resigning on Conservative Home. The future looks bleak for printed newspapers and, after 2017, perhaps even bleaker for their political influence via any medium.

DAILY Mirror
WE STAND TOGETHER
Thursday, June 8, 2017 70P
JUNE 8 2017
For the many not the few
VOTE Labour
mirror.co.uk

Lies, damned lies and Theresa May

FACE OF FEAR Today's your chance to get rid of Mrs May

Don't condemn Britain to five more years of Tory broken promises


THE Sun
ELECTION 2017
We've had enough of Jezza's rubbish...
VOTE TORY
Thursday, June 8, 2017 FOR A GREATER BRITAIN 50p thesun.co.uk

- TERRORISTS' FRIEND
- USELESS ON BREXIT
- DESTROYER OF JOBS
- ENEMY OF BUSINESS
- MASSIVE TAX HIKES
- PUPPET OF UNIONS
- NUCLEAR SURRENDER
- RUINOUS SPENDING
- OPEN IMMIGRATION
- MARXIST EXTREMIST

THE Sun SAYS

TODAY you can rescue Britain from the catastrophe of a takeover by Labour's hard-left extremists.

Jeremy Corbyn would not just reverse seven years of job creation and growth under the Tories. He would chuck our country's spectacular progress and prosperity over the last 35 YEARS in the bin.

Only a vote for Theresa May's Conservatives — not Ukip, or any other — will help keep Corbyn and

Continued on Page 12

DON'T CHUCK BRITAIN IN THE.. COR-BIN

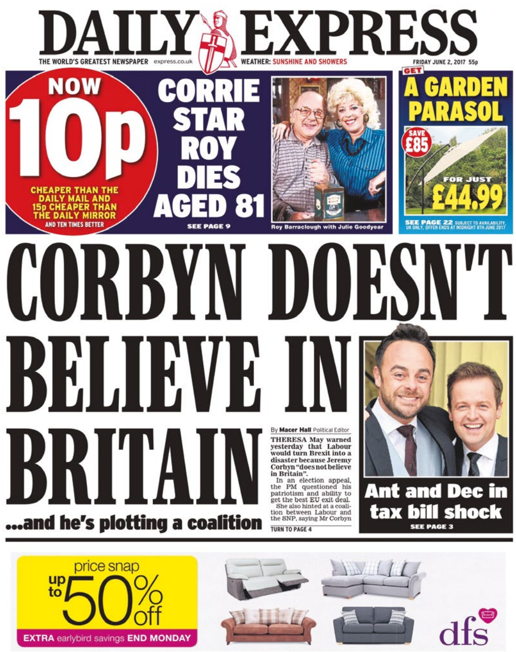
DAILY STAR
20p CHEAPER THAN THE SUN
Love Island Caroline goes topless P9
THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2017 DAILYSTAR.CO.UK JUST 30p

Election day 2017

TEZZA Vs JEZZA

Which one has the BREXIT factor for you?

Ladbrokes
20/1 THERESA MAY
TO BE PRIME MINISTER AFTER THE GENERAL ELECTION 2017
WHEN THE FUN STOPS STOP


DAILY EXPRESS
THE WORLD'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER express.co.uk WEATHER: SUNSHINE AND SHOWERS FRIDAY JUNE 2, 2017 55p

NOW 10p CHEAPER THAN THE DAILY MAIL AND 15p CHEAPER THAN THE DAILY MIRROR

CORRIE STAR ROY DIES AGED 81
SEE PAGE 9

Roy Barraclough with Julie Goodyear

GET A GARDEN PARASOL SAVE £85 FOR JUST £44.99
SEE PAGE 22

CORBYN DOESN'T BELIEVE IN BRITAIN

...and he's plotting a coalition

By Macer Hall Political Editor

THERESA May warned yesterday that Labour would turn Brexit into a disaster because Jeremy Corbyn "does not believe in Britain".

In an election appeal, the PM questioned his patriotism and ability to get the best EU exit deal.

She also hinted at a coalition between Labour and the SNP, saying Mr Corbyn

TURN TO PAGE 4

Ant and Dec in tax bill shock
SEE PAGE 3

price snap up to 50% off
EXTRA earlybird savings END MONDAY
dfs

THE Sun
THE ANGEL OF LONDON BRIDGE
Wednesday, June 7, 2017 WE ARE NOT AFRAID 50p thesun.co.uk

Heroine ... nurse Kirsty Boden, 28, was knifed to death as she rushed to help terror victims

THE SUN SAYS
'Labour leader was at rally with Islamic hate mob... make sure you vote for Tories tomorrow'

TERROR LATEST & ANALYSIS
SEE PAGES 2-13

SUN INVESTIGATES CORBYN

JEZZA'S JIHADI COMRADES

Ranting .. Corbyn at demo. Right, Choudary and Bakri

By HARRY COLE

Fiery speech to fanatics who inspired terror attacks

Daily Mail
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2017 www.dailymail.co.uk NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR 65p
VOTE TO SAVE BRITAIN!

APOLOGISTS FOR TERROR

Jeremy Corbyn John McDonnell Diane Abbott

The Mail accuses this troika of befriending Britain's enemies and scorning the institutions that keep us safe

Daily Mail COMMENT

From Brexit to Corbyn: agenda setting, framing and the UK media - a research agenda

Prof Steve Schifferes

Professor of Financial Journalism at City, University of London, where he directs the MA in Financial Journalism. He has written widely on the role of digital media on political communications. His latest book, The Media and Austerity, will be published by Routledge in 2018.

Email: Steve.Schifferes.1@city.ac.uk

Twitter: @saschiff

The 2017 General Election was a profound shock to the political system and overturned much of the conventional wisdom about the role of the media in the British political system. In this article, I present a research agenda for understanding what changed – and why. I believe we can best understand the changes in the media's role in GE2017 by taking a longitudinal approach, comparing it to the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2015 General Election campaign.

1. Why wasn't it the Sun wot won it? The failure of agenda setting

There is a widespread belief that the right-wing tabloid press (notably *the Sun* and *the Daily Mail*) have an inordinate influence in shaping electoral outcomes. After GE2017, this influence is now called into question. Comparing GE2017 with the Brexit campaign, where the tabloids appeared to have a decisive influence, would be useful. In general, agenda-setting theory would suggest that the press is more likely to be influential where the issues they portray are less well-known and understood by the public; for example EU regulations vs the state of the NHS. Some other specific factors include:

There was not enough time to establish strong narrative frame: The short campaign, and short time May had been in office, made it more difficult to establish a dominant narrative. In contrast, the tabloids had worked for 20 years to establish their anti-EU agenda which was fully deployed, relentlessly every day in the Brexit campaign.

The Tory message was confused: Even within the short time frame, the Tories failed to frame a coherent offer to voters beyond the 'strong and stable' slogan.

Tabloids attacked the Tories' mistakes: It was the tabloids who seized on the 'dementia tax' as an issue which undermined the Tory attempts at broadening their agenda.

The election stayed off the front page: The two terrorist attacks kept the election off the front pages during the key time in the campaign, and blunted Tory attempts to reshape their political message.

2. Television: reframing the debate

Television – still the main source of election news - blunted the tabloid attack on Corbyn's credibility. His performance in the televised debates, and his effectiveness with audiences, contrasted with May's ducking of the party leaders debate, and her awkwardness with audiences. Corbyn's well-staged and televised campaign rallies helped mobilise his supporters. Subsequently, in the final weeks of the campaign the Tory press, especially *the Daily Mail*, launched a fierce attack on the supposed bias of the BBC.

3. Social media and the youth vote: receptive audiences

Both sides attempted to use social media to influence voters. But we need a much more differentiated view of how and in what form social media is effective in campaigns, particularly in targeting young people. Spontaneous organization by young Labour supporters appears to have played an important role in mobilizing the youth vote for Labour and was more effective that the Tory investment in paid Facebook ads. Millions of young people viewed videos such as 'Liar, Liar, Liar' and 'Tory Britain 2030 (Daddy Do You Hate Me?)' and many activists made use of internet tools such as 'My Nearest Marginal.' In contrast, during the Brexit referendum, pro-remainers were slow and late in using social media, and appealed to facts rather than emotions, while the Brexiters targeted different audiences by running two separate social media campaigns.

4. The end of austerity: the frame that disappeared

In marked contrast to GE2010 and GE2015, austerity was no longer the frame that was used to judge the parties' credibility in GE2017. How did this sudden turn in framing of debates come about?

The Brexit referendum was unique in its both in its focus on issues, and its rejection of the remain campaign's message of more austerity to come. The framing after the Brexit vote was of the need to do more for the losers from globalization, not pacify the financiers. This is the key that fundamentally changed the parameters of the political debate in 2017.

The Conservatives abandoned austerity as a dominant theme, replacing it with a largely symbolic group of policies meant to appeal to working class voters.

The effective launch of Labour's manifesto (through a series of leaks) set up an alternative narrative. Labour stayed on message throughout the campaign, repeating its popular pledges on tuition fees and more money for schools and hospitals.

Expert criticism of Labour's economic policies failed to resonate with voters, echoing the distrust of experts that emerged during the Brexit debate.

5. Trust: the missing dimension

The reduced influence of the press in the 2017 campaign also stems from a broader development that is fanning the populist revolt across the Western world – the sharp decline in trust in politicians, the media, and experts alike. The lack of trust in conventional politicians, helped boost Jeremy Corbyn's appeal as an authentic outsider. Many voters were sceptical of the exaggerated media claims of the tabloid press when it did not relate to their own experience. For young people, alternative grass-roots channels of communications mobilized them to vote. It is too early to write off the influence of the mass media, particularly the tabloids, but we must be careful, in future research, to understand the limits of their influence, and to examine the new circumstances that are reshaping political communication in the age of populism.

Is our national press a fading dinosaur? Don't bank on it

Britain's predominantly right-wing press welcomed election day with a wholly predictable barrage of pleas to their readers: give the reigning queen Theresa the mandate she was demanding and administer a bloody good kicking to the socialist terrorist-hugging Corbyn.

Long-term observers of our national newspapers will have recognised the particular style adopted by each of the Conservative Party's four main cheerleaders: for Paul Dacre's *Daily Mail*, a fawning genuflection to the Tory incumbent combined with nasty scaremongering about her opponent. For Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* a light-hearted pun with a profoundly serious undertone (Corbyn peering out of a dustbin below the headline "Don't chuck Britain in the COR-BIN"). While *the Daily Express* confined itself to a simple "VOTE FOR MAY TODAY", *the Telegraph* quoted May's rousing entreaty that "Your country needs you".

Conventional wisdom (though not, of course, academic research) suggested that these blaring front pages and the weeks of propaganda that preceded them would help to deliver May's inevitable coronation.

So when the results confounded commentators, pollsters, politicians and voters alike, some media pundits were quick to pronounce the end of tabloid power. "This election proves that media bias no longer matters" announced Peter Preston, suggesting that while the printed press "has seldom seemed more overwhelming" in its pro-Tory bias, 2017 heralded the final supremacy of social media over the dinosaurs of the printed press. Veteran media commentator Ray Snoddy also proclaimed "the decline in power and influence of the right-wing tabloids".

That, however, is a simplistic conclusion. While social media clearly played a vital role, particularly as a conduit for the Corbyn campaign, there are four reasons why Britain's press still exerts considerable power over the UK's national conversation and its political direction – and will remain a powerful force at the next election.

First, Britain's national newspapers continue to set news agendas for broadcasters. Research from Cardiff University has demonstrated how press reporting of the 2015 general election influenced television news, citing as one example a Telegraph front page splash about a business leaders' letter supporting the Conservatives which led that day's news bulletins (in contrast to a Guardian report of 140 senior doctors criticising coalition NHS policies, which barely featured). Leading TV personalities such as Robert Peston and Sky's John Ryley have both conceded the importance Britain's national press in determining broadcast agendas.

Second, despite the cutbacks and redundancies dictated by a faltering business model, the UK press still commands a high proportion of original partisan newsgathering resources. While broadcast journalism is circumscribed by strict impartiality rules, newspaper editors can and do direct their reporters to find stories that suit their anti-immigration, anti-human rights, anti-Europe political agendas.

Front page stories in pursuit of those objectives – many of dubious provenance and even more dubious accuracy – can create a firestorm which is difficult for even the most robustly impartial broadcasters to ignore completely. Journalistic groupthink will often demand a follow-up to a front page tabloid story, even if it has its roots in deliberate political mischief.

Third, those print headlines make frequent guest appearances across the broadcast media on newspaper review programmes and segments of news programmes. A recent report by Professor Adrian Renton and Dr Justin Schlosberg analysed one month of newspaper coverage across the BBC from the day that Theresa May called the 2017 election. It found that the BBC was giving 69-95% more coverage and discussion to papers supporting the Conservatives compared to other parties.

This problem is exacerbated by pundits working for those same newspapers being regularly invited onto discussion panels of news magazine programmes such as Newsnight, Marr, Peston and Daily Politics. Despite the supposed proliferation of online news sites such as Huffington Post, Buzzfeed and Vice News, writers from those sites rarely feature on TV and radio.

Finally, evidence is emerging that time spent engaging with articles in hard copy is significantly greater than online, with implications for how much emphasis we should be placing on the "new plurality" of internet news sites. In a recent article for the British Journalism Review, Neil Thurman analyses audience data to argue convincingly that "online channels are not attracting anywhere near the levels of attention commanded by print". Newspaper circulation may be declining, but a quarter of the population still read them and their overwhelming bias offline. Their capacity to influence voter opinion may yet be significant.

Thus, despite an emerging consensus that "it was social media wot won it" for Labour (or at least prevented a Conservative victory), it is equally possible that a dominant and loudly partisan right-wing press inhibited either an outright Labour victory or the abilities of other left-leaning parties to be heard at all. The challenge now is to ensure that impartial broadcasters are properly scrutinised for disproportionate dependence on traditional print media (both their stories and their columnists); and to ensure that partisan publishers are held accountable for their own versions of "fake news" which could prove as destructive to informed democratic debate as those that emanate from Macedonian bedrooms.

Note: Since affiliations were based on the 2015 election, classification of Conservative papers did not even include the heavily right-wing Express newspapers which had then supported UKIP. In 2017, they reverted to strong Conservative support. Had this analysis been extended to 8 June, it would almost certainly have seen even more biased results.

Prof Steven Barnett

Professor of Communications at the University of Westminster, broadcaster and writer. He has acted several times as specialist adviser to the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications. He is on the editorial and management boards of British Journalism Review.

Email: S.Barnett@westminster.ac.uk

Twitter: @stevenjbarnett.

A mixed mailbag: letters to the editor during the electoral campaign

Dr Iñaki Garcia-Blanco

Senior lecturer at the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies (Cardiff University). Director BA Journalism and Communication and BA Journalism, Communication and Politics.

Email: garcia-blancoi@cardiff.ac.uk

Twitter: @tweetsresearch

Just as with other aspects of coverage (see the analyses by Loughborough University, both in 2015 and 2017), the letters to the editor published during this electoral campaign signalled the singularity of this election. Whilst in 2015 letters tended to show monolithic support for the party endorsed by each newspaper, letters were more diverse in 2017, and some doubts were cast about the personality, the background, and the performance of party leaders; the feasibility and desirability of proposed policies, as well as about the campaign itself. This article is based on a systematic analysis of letters to the editor on the election published between 19th April and 8th May in T*he Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, the D*aily Mirror*, The *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Express*, and *The Guardian.*

Generally speaking, the views of readers and newspapers coincided. Most letters favoured (or opposed) the same parties and leaders as the newspaper in which they were published. Theresa May, the Conservative party, and its policies were mainly presented under a positive light in all newspapers but the *Mirror* and *The Guardian* (the latter being the only newspaper which did not publish a single letter in favour of May or the Tories). Overall, letters in *The Guardian* and the *Mirror* endorsed Labour and were critical towards the conservatives, but also published letters that questioned parties in the centre /centre-left. Despite its endorsement of Labour, and its opposition to the Conservatives, letters in the *Mirror* were particularly critical of Jeremy Corbyn and his manifesto, which was often portrayed as unrealistic. Diane Abbott's media performances were vitriolically attacked in the *Mirror*, as well as in *The Sun*.

Theresa May received her share of criticism in the letters published in the newspapers favouring her. Her decision not to participate in TV debates generated mixed reactions: some readers criticised it (mainly for her unwillingness to defend her policies), whilst others embraced her determination to stay away from these events, often characterised as an American import, or as a media circus. What has come to be known as the 'dementia tax,' means testing the winter fuel allowance, and abandoning the triple lock for pensions were – by far – the most controversial policies in May's manifesto, to the extent that many letters published in newspapers supporting the Tories declared they would no longer vote for them. The proposal to vote on the fox hunting ban was also met with controversy amongst readers.

There was a surprising consensus amongst readers in the *Sun*, the *Mail* and the *Daily Express* with regards to Britain's foreign aid budget, which, according to these readers, should be slashed and invested in the UK. Some readers in *The Guardian* were also proactive, but focused essentially in the need to protect the environment instead. Similar to general coverage in this election, letters to the editor mostly focused on the two main parties (and their leaders). In addition to party leaders, Diane Abbott, John McDonnell, and Tony Blair received some criticism too, as well as Boris Johnson. Occasionally, readers questioned the presidential nature of the campaign, and the need to incorporate more voices into the electoral campaign.

For many reasons, letters to the editor should not be taken as a fair representation of the views of the electorate. Newspapers select the letters they publish following their own editorial line, and the perceptions they have about their readers' views and preferences (which are not always coincident with the parties endorsed by newspapers). On this occasion, however, letters to the editor help to understand how citizens reacted to some policies in the Conservative manifesto, particularly amongst its supporters. Following the consistent and continued negative portrayal of Jeremy Corbyn across all media (which has been largely documented, and was censured in a number of letters published in *The Guardian)*, it is not entirely surprising that letters to the editor failed to capture the surge of the Labour party amongst the electorate, as well as the growing popularity of Jeremy Corbyn.

Similar to what happened in 2015, letters to the editor did not constitute a vibrant platform for citizens to debate policies and political options. Letters were often used to attack certain politicians (mainly Jeremy Corbyn), and to undermine their credibility by presenting their policies as impracticable. On this occasion, however, letters displayed a slightly more diverse range of options and voices than in the previous election, particularly in the newspapers that endorsed the Conservatives. In these newspapers, letters also helped to raise concern about certain policies that did not go down well with some citizens, contributing to diversify the range of views readers get exposed to. Although very limited in scope, it could be said that letters to the editor contributed to enrich the political debate (at least in the Tory press).

Long live the wisdom of the phone-in crowd

There are many ways of following an election – through the newspapers, the TV bulletins, online or any combination of the three – but as a result of being confined to a sick-bed for the past five weeks, I gave perhaps more attention than is healthy to the phone-ins on the talk radio shows. Whatever negative effects I might have incurred as a result of all this radio listening, it did give me some insights about the media, the polls and politics that until now had eluded me.

Having been involved in covering elections for ITN and the BBC for the past forty years, this was a very different way for me to follow a campaign. Listening to the campaign conversation being played out on talk radio was initially a little more than a mild distraction and then suddenly assumed a greater significance following the launch of the Conservatives' manifesto. It contained a series of measures that, to put it mildly, were unlikely to appeal to their core older demographic – reducing the worth of their old age pension, means-testing their winter fuel allowance and most importantly of all the so-called dementia tax on social care.

Listening to Veronica in Stockton or Edward in Stourbridge, I was genuinely taken aback by the ferocity of the backlash about the dementia tax in particular, among older people calling in who described themselves as 'life-long Conservatives'. I thought this would be a very big story the following day and this would soon be reflected in the polls, but in the immediate aftermath of the manifesto launch nothing much appeared to change.

But the rage of the phone-in callers continued, so I tweeted about Veronica and Edward and predicted that something was stirring in the Tory undergrowth – only to receive a series of gentle rebukes from my fellow academics and journalists, reminding me that phone-in contributors were anything but typical of the population at large. They might not be, but there is a well-established theory of media effects – the two-step flow - that suggests that Veronica and Edward's views should be taken more seriously than is normally the case.

This theory, first developed by Paul Lazarsfeld in his landmark study of the 1944 US presidential election suggests that one mechanism of media influence on voting behaviour can be found by looking at so-called opinion-formers in society. They monitor political news more closely than most and the convey their version of events, and their opinions, to whoever is available to listen.

These opinion-formers might be the obvious people in positions of community leadership, local politicians and teachers, for example, but can also be the person in the bar or staff room who speaks most authoritatively, or simply most loudly. Today, perhaps their ilk is the phone-in contributor. They might not be particularly knowledgeable about politics but it is not what they know that counts, but their determination that everyone else should also know what they know and think, and that is the decisive factor.

And sure enough, after two or three days, as the full import of the Conservatives' proposals sank in, the media picked up on the story, the polls began to shift and then, five days later, so did Theresa May.

The second 'insight' I gained was the relevance of other media theories - the notions of dominant narratives, framing and indexing – in understanding the political communications process.

During the campaign, I heard countless radio and TV vox pops of 'staunch Labour voters', in what were considered to be safe seats in the Midlands and the North of England, saying that they couldn't vote for a Corbyn-led Labour party. Presumably these packages had been based on editors responding to the dominant narrative that Corbyn was 'unelectable' and then assigning journalists to head out into these constituencies to produce radio and TV packages along these lines.

The basis of framing is, as defined by Robert Entman, that the media "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text". In this case, the overall frame was that the Labour vote was 'soft' in its safer seats and this was due to the 'Corbyn effect'.

It takes a courageous journalist, sent out to cover one story, to come back saying: 'It's not like that, I've done a different story.' Hence we avid radio listeners and television viewers were left with the impression that Labour's support in its core seats was collapsing.

Dominant narratives come to dominate, sometimes because they reflect a reality but sometimes because they reflect something else: prejudice, political bias or just plain ignorance. Echo chambers can affect not just 'them out there' but journalists, politicians, even pollsters. This is the so-called Indexing Hypothesis, which argues that the narratives of elite groups in society - politicians, journalists and pollsters for example - will tend to dominate conversations within the public sphere.

When I heard these packages, I took what they were telling me seriously because of what appeared to be represent the overwhelming consensus – but, along with my fellow pundits, I was wrong. I should have put more faith in the phone-ins.So, the lesson of my election campaign monitoring is that the wisdom of the crowds can't always be divined via an online poll or phone interview – and that a little listening can go a long way. Treat dominant narratives with scepticism and long live the wisdom of the phone-in crowd.

Prof Ivor Gaber

Professor of Journalism at the University of Sussex and a former Westminster-based broadcaster and Independent Editorial Adviser to the BBC Trust.

Email: Ivor.Gaber@sussex.ac.uk

Twitter: @ivorgaber

Fact-checking the election

Dr Jennifer Birks

Assistant Professor in Media at University of Nottingham and author of News and Civil Society (Ashgate 2014).

Email: jennifer.birks@nottingham.ac.uk

After an EU referendum campaign riddled with dubious claims on both sides and a certain cynicism toward experts, not to mention the US election and Trump's 'alternative facts', the press raised concerns early in this election campaign about the need for fact-checking. Interestingly, these concerns seemed to pertain chiefly to 'fake news' articles shared via social media rather than their own inadequate systems of verification. Of 33 election-related articles mentioning 'fact-check(ers/ing)' from the start of the campaign to election day, nine were about fact-checking rather than conducting it, seven of these related to Facebook's efforts to flag 'fake news' in partnership with third-party fact-checkers, and only one referred to its role to "discern spin from falsehood, and political manoeuvring from sinister manipulation" by politicians. Probably not coincidentally, this appeared in the i-Independent (8th June) one of the two newspapers (with The Times) to run their own 'fact-check' articles.

With limited space, I will focus on the three main fact-checking blogs, Channel 4 News' FactCheck, BBC Reality Check and independent charity Full Fact. As you might expect, BBC Reality Check was scrupulously fair in checking an even number of claims from both main parties, though both FactCheck and Full Fact checked more Labour claims. However, the subject of the claims was far more often Conservative policy (30) or their performance in government (61), perhaps inevitably as the incumbent party. Accordingly, the Labour claims selected for scrutiny tend to be criticisms of the Tories record in power since 2010 (63.6%) rather than their own policy (24.2%), whilst Conservative claims were mostly on their own policy claims (53.3%) or performance (46.7%), but significantly, none of the Tories' criticisms of Labour were fact-checked.

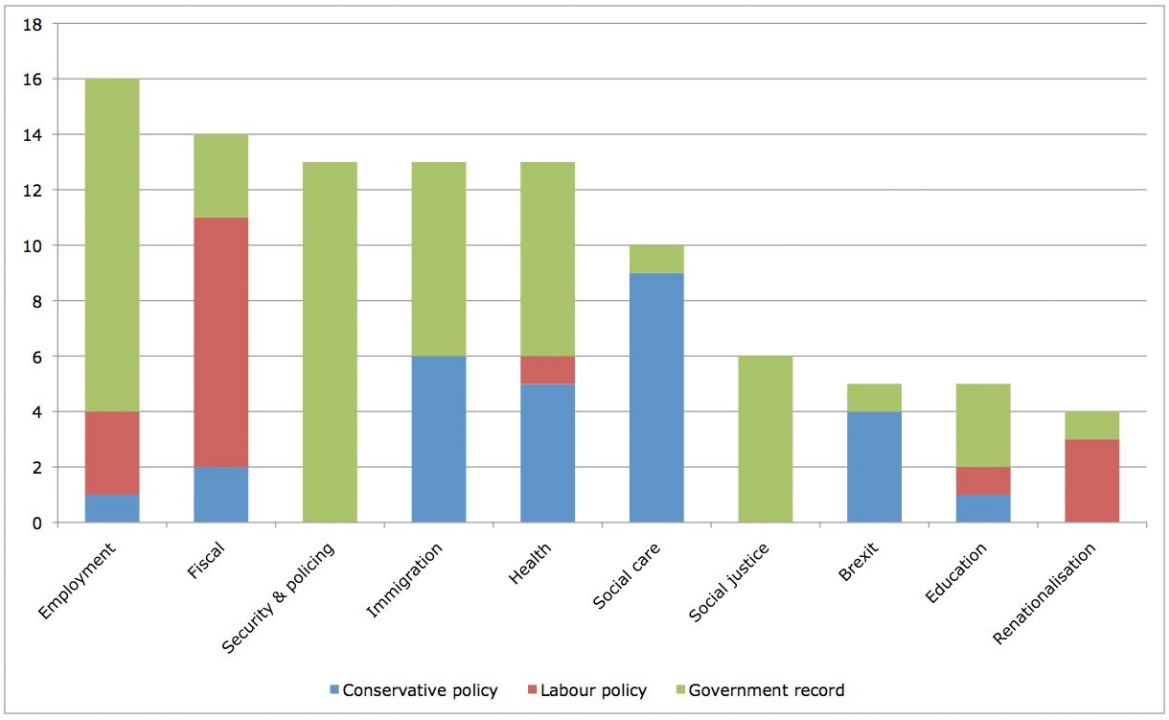
The issues that dominated were not wildly different from the patterns in overall coverage indicated in the Loughborough University research, with fiscal/tax, health and policing/security all featuring prominently, but Brexit-related claims appeared to receive less scrutiny, though immigration a little more. One surprise, though, was that the top issue was employment, three-quarters of which checked (mostly Labour) claims on the Conservatives' record on low pay and stagnant wages. However, given that the Tories claimed to promise the "biggest expansion of workers' rights by any Conservative government", we might have expected to see some scrutiny of those policy proposals. Labour, in contrast, were primarily scrutinised on the costings in their manifesto and whether their 'sums added up', with the IFS the most common source. In contrast to their broad judgements about the scale of interventionism quoted in the right-wing press, the fact-checks focused on the IFS's specific arguments, but much was still taken on trust in their expert judgement. For instance, it's not clear why they judged insufficient the amount that Labour had earmarked to take account of behavioural change reducing the amount raised from increasing tax rates.

One shortcoming of fact-checking is that they rarely scrutinise claims made by news media. Only Full Fact fact-checked a tabloid scare story (the Express on replacing council tax with land tax, which they characterised as a 'garden tax'), though FactCheck and Reality Check did obliquely addressed the personal attacks on Corbyn as a 'terrorists' friend', with checks on his voting record and statements condemning violence.

Examination of how these fact-checks have informed the general news reporting, however, still finds journalists outsourcing scrutiny of factual challenges to other interviewees, generally opponent politicians, 'balancing' truth claims rather than adjudicating. One illustrative example: Labour talked about a schools funding crisis whilst the Conservatives argued that they had protected or even increased funding. C4 News FactCheck concluded on 10th May that the total schools budget had been protected in real terms since 2010, but with pupil numbers and staffing costs rising, the IFS calculated the impact to be an 8% real terms cut in spending per pupil.

On Channel 4 News that evening, Cathy Newman did challenge Conservative Neil Carmichael on his insistence that education spending was the highest of any government in history, interjecting "not in real terms", which he conceded, with another dubious caveat. Although the reduction per pupil was not mentioned, this shows a willingness by a presenter to press a politician on factual truth claims. In contrast, two days later on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, a presenter shut down Labour MP Karen Smyth's challenge to Conservative Mark Harper's claim to have "increased education funding". When she objected "not per pupil", Justin Webb interjected "Let's park that there, they say they have, you say they haven't", the very epitome of he-said, she-said journalism.

None of this is to say that audiences will be convinced by expert fact-checks, since research indicates that other heuristics such as ideology have a strong role, as well as a general persistence of belief in the face of contradictory evidence, but swift, prominent and specific correction can only help overcome the lack of trust.



Top ten issues in C4 News FactCheck, BBC Reality Check and Full Fact fact-checks 3rd May - 8th June

Should we worry about fake news?

Prof Susan Banducci

Professor and Director of the Exeter Q-Step Centre, University of Exeter.

Email: s.a.banducci@exeter.ac.uk

Twitter: @femalebrain

Prof Dan Stevens

Cornwall Professor of mass political behaviour, University of Exeter.

Email: D.P.Stevens@exeter.ac.uk,

Dr Travis Coan

Lecturer in Quantitative Political Science at the University of Exeter.

Email: t.coan@exeter.ac.uk

The prominence of fake news as an issue in election campaigns, as a topic in news coverage, and as the subject of academic and public enquiry is on the rise. Newspapers and broadcasters have covered how to spot it, the House of Commons launched a 'Fake news' inquiry in January 2017, and Google Scholar—a rough indication of scholarly attention—returns over 2,000 results published in 2017 with 'fake news' in the title. If 'information is the currency of democracy,' fake news has the potential to disrupt our usual mechanisms of political accountability, representation and legitimacy. The term fake news is not new and the study of misinformation has a long history within academic literature. Surveys also have a long history of documenting that the public often holds incorrect beliefs—that is, they are misinformed. Yet, today, misinformation is easier to spread and share on social media: fake news is used to attract clicks to generate traffic to sites, and bots can amplify a story without actual humans having to share.

What is the extent to which potential voters are misinformed? During the GE2017 campaign, we assessed the extent of a misinformed public and what might lead to certain statements being more believable than others. In an online survey, we asked respondents if they had heard of a number of claims that had been corrected or verified on the FactCheck.org website and whether they believed each claim. The most commonly heard claim was that the NHS was under pressure due to immigration with an additional 1.5 million extra patients in the last three years. The next most often heard claims were about an increase from 'thousands to millions' in users of foodbanks and that the number of people in employment is at an historical high. In each case, these claims have been fact checked and corrections either to the statistics or the explanation were made. Yet over 50% of the respondents felt the first two claims were believable, while approximately 40% found the latter believable. The most believed statement was that the Treasury loses £40 billion a year due to tax avoidance, with almost 60% reporting they found the statement believable (while the correct figure is closer to £10 billion).

Who is likely to embrace claims that are wrong? Some early research on information effects confirmed that information from trusted sources is more believable. Traditionally, the news media has played this trusted role; however, trust in the media has plummeted over the past several decades. According to the British Social Attitudes annual survey, the proportion of the British people reporting that the press is well run declined from 53% to 27% over a 30 period (between 1983 and 2012). In the ICM Litmus survey, 51% did not trust general election coverage on social media, whereas trust in the BBC was 45% and only 27% say they trust UK newspapers. Therefore, fake news is injected into an environment in which people distrust information. Without a clear set of trusted sources, it is increasingly difficult to minimize the persuasive power of fake news

Can these misperceptions be corrected? Fact checking from organizations such as FullFact.org, as well as fact checking units embedded in major media outlets, were working to issue corrections or further explanations when necessary during the 2017 campaign. We examine whether this independent fact checking outlets succeed in correcting misinformation in the context of the 2017 campaign. After asking respondents about the believability of the claim concerning immigration placing pressure on the NHS, we randomly assigned respondents to either receive a correction explaining that an ageing population, increases in wages, and health technology were larger cost burdens on the NHS, or to receive no correcting information. The good news is that there was a significant decrease in the believability of the claim after the correcting information, compared to individuals that did not receive correcting information. Moreover, we observe this tendency to correct misperceptions when focusing fact checking information provided by both independent organizations and traditional media sources.

Because news media are often portrayed as biased or purveyors of their own misinformation, independent fact checking organisations such as Full Fact, or attempts by social media platforms to provide their own fact checking algorithms, may appear to be the credible alternative to correct incorrect statements. In our experiment, we also varied the source of the correction and actually found that newspapers were slightly more effective at correcting information than the independent organisation. Even in an age where newspapers are distrusted and readership is on the decline, these traditional media appear to retain a capacity to correct misinformation.

Tweets, campaign speeches and dogs at polling stations: the election on live blogs

Although live blogs are a regular feature of large mainstream news websites, reporting on a range of news stories 'as they happen', elections are probably some of the longest events they cover. *The Guardian*, the BBC and *the Daily Telegraph* websites, for instance, reported on the campaign live on a daily basis, except when the campaign was suspended due to the terrorist attacks in Manchester and in London. The regularity of updates varied between 3 or 4 per hour on quiet days and several per minute when developments culminated on the evening of the election results.

Different types of content made up this constant steam of coverage: live updates from unfolding events in the campaign, such as politicians' rallies; links to and reports on content appearing on other mainstream media; social media posts by politicians, journalists, experts and ordinary people; short features on different aspects of the election; journalistic commentary and analysis; pictures by readers and photojournalists.

This constant 'real time' updating gave a sense of immediacy to the campaign both when events were unfolding and when they were not. As with rolling news on television, time - or space in this case - had to be filled even when nothing major was happening. For example, in the morning of the election the BBC website live election feed featured several pictures of dogs at polling stations (following the relevant social media hashtag), a tweet by a cricket commentator, stills of BBC election night presenters from previous decades and weather updates for different parts of the country.

Indeed, neither the liveness of the coverage of the election was something specific to the digital platform (although perhaps its length was, as television live coverage could not have stayed on the same event for the whole duration of the campaign), nor the need to fill in time/space when little was happening. Arguably the contribution of live blogging to the election debate was the aggregation and curation of information and views from a wide range of old and new media sources. With the exception of the websites' own journalistic analysis, all the other content in the live feeds involved links and summaries of material freely available on other platforms like Twitter or other newspaper and television websites. What the live blogs offered was to pull everything together and to present it in a coherent narrative structure. The editorial perspective of the website was a little more discernible on the newspaper websites than on the BBC, as would be expected, but overall the role of the live blogs was to provide a narrative of the campaign as this evolved.

During the night of the election results, all three live blogs intensified their coverage, and particularly the BBC blog added new content every few seconds. Seat declarations, commentary, statements by politicians and experts on BBC's and ITV's live television coverage, social media content, and result summaries made up the majority of the updates.

Live blogs found their early application in the coverage of sports, particularly cricket and football, allowing users to keep up with developments in the game without watching it constantly. They are also routinely used in the coverage of unfolding, unpredicted, 'breaking' events, like natural disasters or terrorist attacks. On the night of the election results their role was more akin to these uses, providing readers with updates on the 'score' and reactions from the two camps in the game of the election, and minute-by-minute information on an event whose outcome was not easy to predict. Even if readers had simultaneous access to alternative live coverage on television, the live blogs complemented this by integrating digital, social and mainstream media in a circular relay of narratives. Often the content on the live blogs was a direct commentary on something said in the television live coverage and this was the case as much on the newspapers' live blogs as on the BBC's. At a time of ongoing debate around the continuing relevance of 'old' media in the political public sphere, live blogs demonstrate that no news platform, old or new, operates in isolation and that digital and traditional media feed off each other and can work in a complementary fashion.

Dr Marina Dekavalla

Senior Lecturer in journalism at the University of Sussex. She was principal investigator of the research project 'Television framing of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum' (ESRC, 2015-2016).

Email: M.Dekavalla@sussex.ac.uk

Process, personalities and polls: online news coverage of the UK General Election 2017

Dr Emily Harmer

Lecturer in Media at the University of Liverpool. She is also co-Convenor of the PSA Media and Politics Group.

Email: E.Harmer@liverpool.ac.uk

Twitter: @Harm365

Dr Rosalynd Southern

Lecturer in Political Communication, University of Liverpool.

Email: R.Southern@liverpool.ac.uk

Twitter: @rv_southern

Deswpite disproportionate support for the Conservatives in the highly partisan British press, the election was much closer than anybody was expecting, resulting in a hung parliament. Just days after the result, there has already been much commentary that the result shows the power of the right-wing press over the political process is waning. Coupled with the decline in newspaper circulations and rise of online platforms, it is pertinent to analyse the kind of news stories and information available in the online environment during the election. To this end we conducted an analysis of five online news sources to examine the agendas, perspectives offered by the most prominent digital news providers in the UK. We analysed BBC Online, Mail Online, Guardian and Huffington Post UK because these digital news providers represent the top four outlets for UK users, according to research by the Reuters Institute, and we included Buzzfeed UK as the next most popular online-only provider.

May called the election with the aim of gaining a substantial majority before the potentially catastrophic Brexit negotiations began by establishing the contest as a highly presidential campaign, emphasising her own competence and leadership credentials in an effort to contrast herself favourably with Jeremy Corbyn. She also sought to emphasise that whoever won the election would be negotiating Brexit. Our analysis shows that online news largely followed this lead, with its attention on the two leaders and the prominence of Brexit as a theme, however not necessarily in the way the Prime Minister would have liked or expected.

Online news outlets tended to focus on the electoral process itself, accounting for almost 43% of the themes recorded (Table 1). This was by far the most prominent theme and indicates the appeal of the 'horse race' for online news. Moreover, 'media' was the third most prominent theme. In this case, online news seemed particularly interested in responding to what legacy media were reporting, featuring an abundance of stories about accusations of media bias, or stories assessing the public reaction to key interviews such as the BBC Leader's Question Time specials and Jeremy Corbyn's difficult interview on Women's Hour by examining social media trends.

The next most salient policy theme was Brexit, which regardless of its seriousness only accounted for 7%. This is perhaps lower than might have been anticipated given the efforts from certain sections of the media labelling this the 'Brexit Election' and despite the glaring lack of detail about the planned agenda for the negotiations. Beyond this the substantive issues which arose most frequently were social security, the NHS and taxation as a result of parties announcing their manifestos. The prominence of health and social security mainly referred to the Conservatives' disastrous 'dementia tax' policy and subsequent U-turn. Much attention was also given to Labour's increased tax rate for those earning over £80,000. Other prominent themes followed on from broader political events, with law and order stories increasing in the days following the Manchester and London Bridge Attacks.

The two most prominent campaigners were the only realistic candidates for Prime Minister, Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn (Table 2). They appeared almost as frequently as each other, with May appearing in 37.3% of news items and Corbyn in 36.4%. This illustrates the highly presidential nature of the campaign and reflects May's attempts to frame the campaign as a choice between herself and Corbyn. The presidential nature of the campaign is also reflected by the fact that the leaders of smaller parties made up the majority of the top ten.

The most prominent parties featured in the coverage were the Conservatives and Labour, the two largest parties (Table 3). The Conservatives were slightly ahead in terms of the proportion of coverage, on 27.5% compared to 25.3% for Labour, perhaps reflecting that they were the incumbents. The smaller parties gained much less coverage and gives some credence to the notion that this election indicates a return to two-party politics - at least as far as online news coverage is concerned.

There is marked variation between the online news outlets studied which there is no space to discuss here, but overall it is striking to what extent online news displayed very similar characteristics to mainstream media, in terms of the issues they covered and the persons they focused on. The only major difference detected was the sheer volume of process coverage and stories about other media that online news which seems to have outstripped equivalent sources in broadcasting and the press. Whilst online news could potentially offer an important counterweight to mainstream news agendas, as some academics have argued, this must be qualified in relation to our evidence suggesting a lack of diversity and issue-based content in the news that people actually access online.

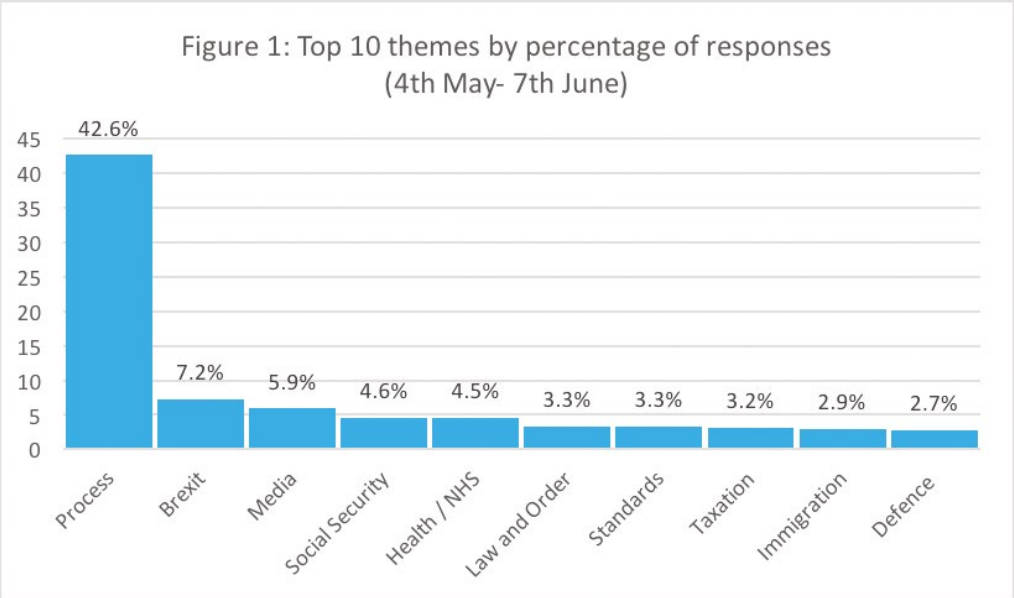


Figure 1: Top 10 themes by percentage of responses
(4th May- 7th June)
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
42.6%
7.2%
5.9%
4.6%
4.5%
3.3%
3.3%
3.2%
2.9%
2.7%
Process
Brexit
Media
Social Security
Health / NHS
Law and Order
Standards
Taxation
Immigration
Defence

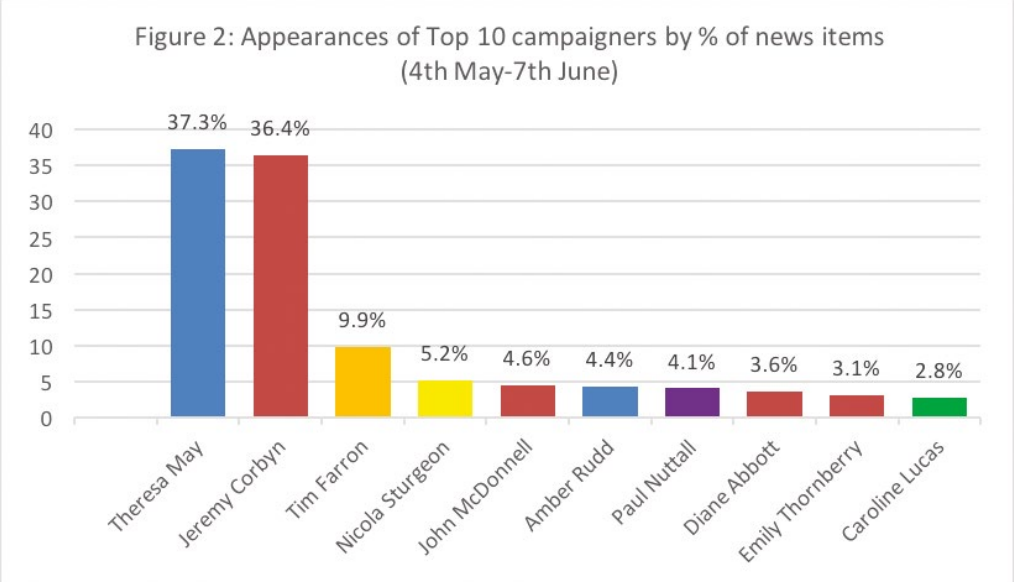


Figure 2: Appearances of Top 10 campaigners by % of news items
(4th May-7th June)
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
37.3%
36.4%
9.9%
5.2%
4.6%
4.4%
4.1%
3.6%
3.1%
2.8%
Theresa May
Jeremy Corbyn
Tim Farron
Nicola Sturgeon
John McDonnell
Amber Rudd
Paul Nuttall
Diane Abbott
Emily Thornberry
Caroline Lucas

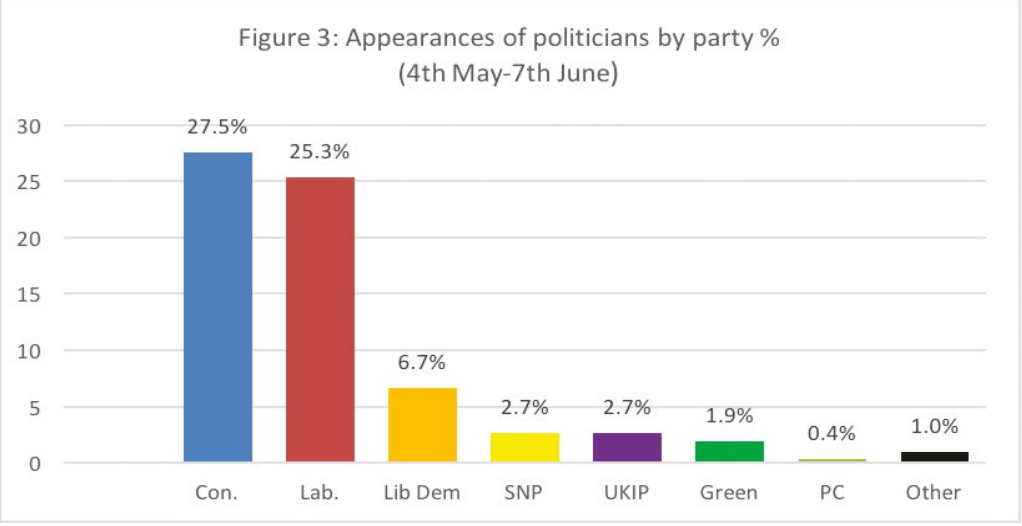


Figure 3: Appearances of politicians by party %
(4th May-7th June)
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
27.5%
25.3%
6.7%
2.7%
2.7%
1.9%
0.4%
1.0%
Con.
Lab.
Lib Dem
SNP
UKIP
Green
PC
Other

Online election news can be bloody difficult (for a) woman

Dr Emily Harmer

Lecturer in Media at the University of Liverpool. She is also co-Convenor of the PSA Media and Politics Group.

Email: E.Harmer@liverpool.ac.uk

Theresa May's unexpected accession to the Tory leadership after the historic EU referendum means that for the first time since 1987, the next General Election was called and contested by a female Prime Minister. Despite repeated assurances to the contrary, May called the election after formally triggering Article 50 and just eight weeks prior to the opening of negotiations to establish the manner in which the UK would extract itself from the EU. May sought to present herself as a strong and competent leader who would make use of her reputation as a 'bloody difficult woman' to negotiate the best deal possible.

Despite the highly presidential nature of the campaign and the extent to which the news coverage reflected this in terms of its focus on the two main party leaders (see Harmer and Southern in this volume), the online coverage of this election proved to be difficult for any women who were not politicians (particularly leaders) to receive any news coverage at all. My analysis of five online news sources (conducted with Rosalynd Southern) demonstrates that women accounted for 36.8% of all individuals featured in the news coverage (Figure 1). Given the fact that the most prominent politician in our study was the Prime Minister (who appeared in 37.3% of all items in our study) it seems surprising that women still cannot reach parity with male campaigners in news coverage of elections.

Looking in more depth at our findings demonstrates that although there were a variety of women politicians who received a good deal of attention, the traditional struggle for other women to be heard was exacerbated by this highly-presidentialised campaign. A breakdown of all political parties and other groups of people who are called upon to comment in news coverage shows which political parties or which groups of sources received higher levels of mediated representation.

For the Conservatives, 60.7% of all individual appearances were by a female politician – the vast majority of these were, of course, the Prime Minister herself. Other political parties whose female leaders dominate their parties' appearances were the Scottish National Party (with 71.4% of their appearances being made by women representatives), Plaid Cymru (77.8% - mostly made up of appearances by Leanne Wood) and the Green Party, for whom 66.7% of outings in the news were made up by women (mainly joint leader Caroline Lucas). Labour Party sources instead tended to be dominated by men (mainly Corbyn, again reflecting the presidential nature of the campaign) as Labour women only accounted for 22.6% of all appearances by Labour sources. UKIP and the Liberal Democrats managed the fewest women campaigners in online news, accounting for 12.9% and 10.1% respectively (Figure 2).

Ordinary women also received lower representation than might be expected given how accessible members of the public are to journalists. Women accounted for 39% of all citizens featured in our study of online news. Women in non-political roles were very marginal in the coverage. Despite the presence of a reasonable volume of voices from other media and online platforms in online news coverage, just 29.7% of media sources and 20.8% of bloggers referred to were female (Figure 3). Other kinds of sources were completely absent. Every individual pollster or other kind of expert who received any mention or reference in the news was male. This dearth of women's expertise is also reflected in the authorship of online news items. Just 31.8% of all items with a single author were authored by women. This shows, as with studies of offline news coverage, than online political news is still dominated by male authors.

It remains to be seen whether these patterns are a quirk of online news, and whether women experts fared any better in mainstream broadcasting and print coverage will be revealed in time. However, given the increasing importance of online news, this complete erasure of women's political expertise from the coverage is discouraging. Ignoring women as experts limits the perspectives and range of ideas that are deemed to be relevant to the political realm and serves to reinforce the male dominance of politics, but also impoverishes our understanding of the political process. Although we have a good level of representation of women in key political leadership positions, other women continue to find it difficult to gain access to the news.

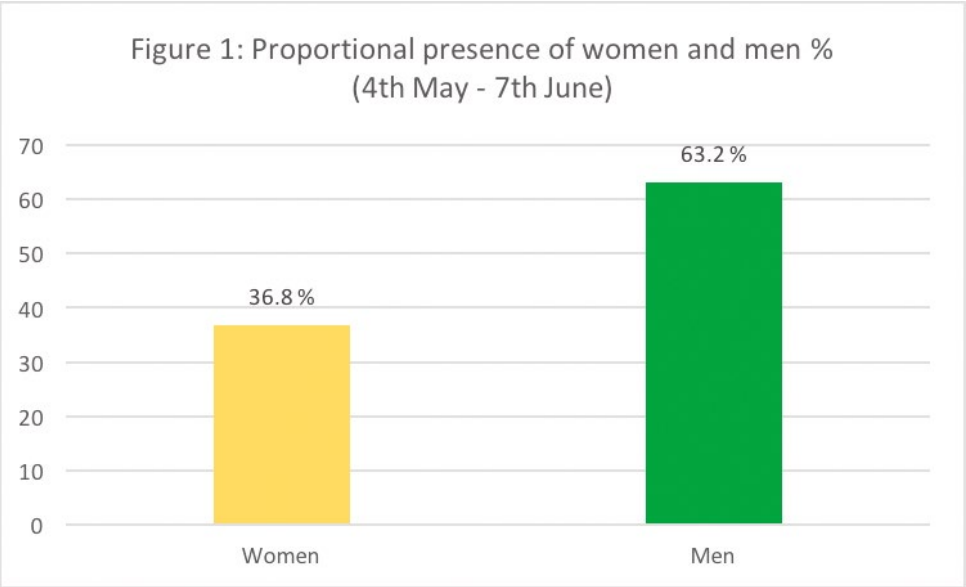


Figure 1: Proportional presence of women and men %
(4th May - 7th June)
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
36.8 %
63.2 %
Women
Men

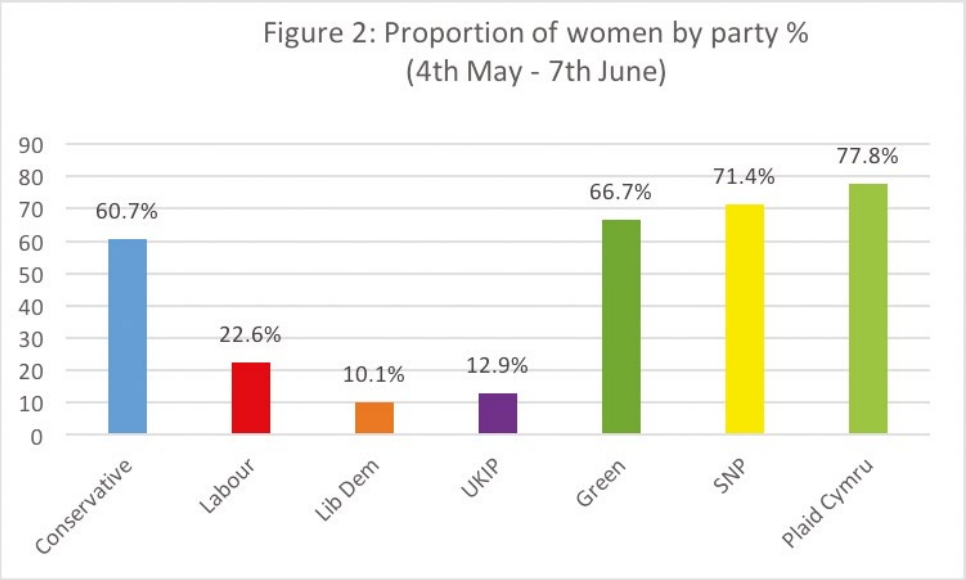


Figure 2: Proportion of women by party %
(4th May - 7th June)
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
60.7%
22.6%
10.1%
12.9%
66.7%
71.4%
77.8%
Conservative
Labour
Lib Dem
UKIP
Green
SNP
Plaid Cymru

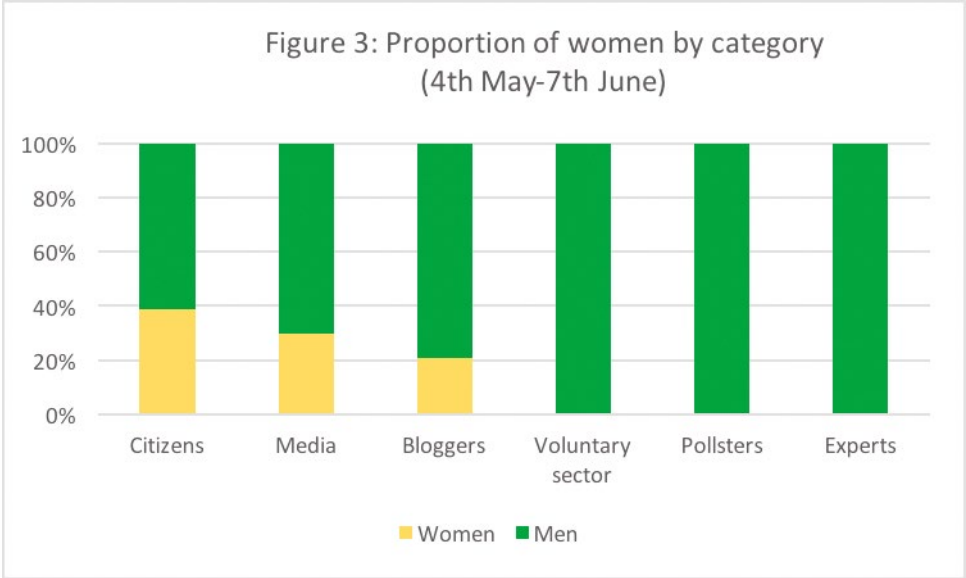


Figure 3: Proportion of women by category
(4th May-7th June)
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Citizens
Media
Bloggers
Voluntary sector
Pollsters
Experts
Women
Men

Not just swearing and loathing on the internet: analysing BuzzFeed and VICE during #GE2017

Dr James Dennis

Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Portsmouth.

Email: james.dennis@port.ac.uk

Twitter: @jameswilldennis

Dr Susana Sampaio-Dias

Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Portsmouth.

Email: susana.sampaio-dias@port.ac.uk

Twitter: @ssampaiodias

In the hours that followed the shock of the exit poll, a narrative quickly emerged amongst political pundits to help explain the unexpected surge in support for the Labour Party: "It Was the Young Wot Won It". Youth engagement has been a key factor throughout this election. From musicians JME and Stormzy spearheading the #grime4Corbyn campaign, to a massive voter registration drive that resulted in over one million applications from 18-24-year olds, young people have been consistently touted as potential difference-makers in the outcome of #GE2017. While our understanding of precisely who voted will remain somewhat sketchy until the publication of the British Election Study later this year, early indications point to a significant and substantial growth in youth engagement.

This leads us to ask, what information sources did these young people draw on when deciding how to cast their vote? Although the robust media analysis conducted by Loughborough University covers broadcast and print media, the outcome of this election highlights the pressing need to also explore those digital news sources that directly target younger voters. We analyse how this election was reported to younger audiences by two new-media organisations, BuzzFeed and VICE.

Founded in 2006, BuzzFeed is renowned for its cat memes, quizzes, and listicles. While initially focusing on light-hearted content, over the past four years the company has invested significantly in its news operation. Under the stewardship of editor-in-chief Janine Gibson, BuzzFeed News commands an online news audience comparable to The Mirror and The Telegraph. Despite their growing reach, some cast doubt on whether the tone and style that BuzzFeed adopts is suited to rigorous journalism.

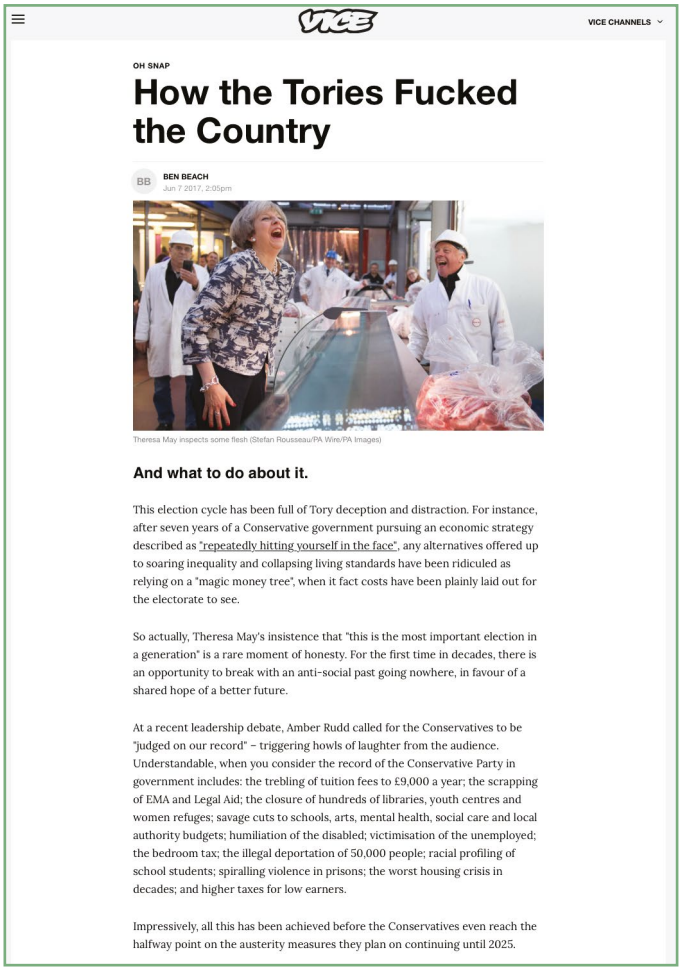
As expected, BuzzFeed maintained a journalistic style that blurred the lines between information and entertainment. From illustrating their readers' surreal dreams about the election, to a compilation of the best reactions to Theresa May's confession that the naughtiest thing she had ever done was to "run through fields of wheat", humour was a constant feature. However, this approach belies the sophistication and depth of their election reporting. BuzzFeed were at the forefront of coverage on the digital campaign, identifying how political parties were using micro-targeted adverts on social media to bypass election spending limits, flagging up misinformation shared online, and producing detailed analysis of the growing influence of left-wing political blogs. Alongside pieces on the daily developments of the campaign, they also focused on LGBTQ rights, race, and those working in the gig-economy. While evidently many of these stories reflect the interests of their target demographic, what is striking about their coverage is its form, language, and style: BuzzFeed taps into a particular digital vernacular to connect with its audience. The use of quizzes, dank memes, and cute photos of dogs at polling stations represents a new form of digital storytelling, one that can act as an important entry point for younger citizens into a range of complex political stories.

Emerging as an underground counterculture magazine in Montreal in 1994, VICE's current editorial style chimes with its abrasive and controversial CEO, Shane Smith. Launching its UK arm in 2002, VICE strongly oppose conventional orthodoxy in journalism, seeking to offer hip, edgy, alternative perspectives to the legacy media agenda, such as their behind the scenes look at the Syrian conflict, or their guide to North Korea. With an average age of 27, their staff speaks to—and for—their target audience.

VICE organised much of their coverage under two sections, Oh Snap and Tory Week, setting the overarching tone of the election coverage: either in dismay to be dragged to the "hell's waiting room" of yet another election, or in merry enjoyment, provoking Conservative voters and blaming them for the catastrophic state of things. Like an amused biologist hiding in the bushes, VICE described the Tory as a unique species and scrutinised "Toriness" as a mode of life. If the tabloids were biased against Jeremy Corbyn, VICE attacked the Conservatives with comparable levels of fearless partisanship. With a fierce conviction that the election result would depend on youth turnout, VICE explained to their young readers the importance of strategic voting and peer-mobilisation, and urged them to not vote for the Conservatives under any circumstances. The language was witty and sarcastic, comfortable with swearing, and chose to hover between the othering of Conservative supporters and pushing a serious news agenda. Their Gonzo-inspired political coverage is as familiar as a pub discussion with your hilarious — maybe already tipsy — but still well informed mates.

Both publications are examples of digital disruption in election reporting. More than distributing content, BuzzFeed and VICE embrace the culture of social media. They draw on the ideas, language, and behaviours of the social web to connect with their audience. In doing so, they challenged the traditional values and norms of news making during this general election.

BuzzFeed screenshot: https://www.buzzfeed.com/jimwaterson/the-rise-of-the-alt-left



VICE screenshot: https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/how-the-tories-fucked-the-country

4

Parties and the Campaign

The battle for authenticity

When the dust settles, one of the key lessons of the 2017 General Election may be a simple yet enduring one: to win the battle for hearts and minds, you must win the battle for authenticity.

And in this election season's race for authenticity, Jeremy Corbyn came out miles ahead. But what does it mean to be an authentic politician? Scholars have grappled with this question for decades, and if anything, it has become more urgent than ever at a time where populist politicians across the political spectrum – from Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders to Donald Trump and Nigel Farage - have garnered support for their supposed authenticity.

The discourse theorist Martin Montgomery has argued that authenticity is characterised by natural and spontaneous talk which captures the experience of the speaker and is true to their core self. For media scholar Gunn Enli, a politician is perceived as authentic when they come across as trustworthy, likeable and genuine.

My analysis of UK national newspaper stories on Jeremy Corbyn's authenticity shows that he was seen to be authentic in exactly these ways, amongst journalists across the political spectrum. First of all, journalists acknowledged Corbyn's *sincerety*. Charles Moore, writing in the Telegraph on June 3, linked Corbyn's authenticity to that of other populist political leaders:

Over the last decade, the restless global quest for authenticity has lighted upon figures as various as Donald Trump, Alexis Tsipras, Marine Le Pen and now Mr Corbyn. In his television debates and interviews, he has projected some small symptoms of humour, modesty and sincerity.

Another *Telegraph* writer, Tom Harris, described Corbyn's authenticity as expressed in a *spontaneity* that could never be matched by the Prime Minister: "The Islington MP, perhaps understanding he has nothing whatever to lose, is risking face-to-face meetings with the general public in an unrehearsed way that May has not yet had the courage to copy."

Indeed, Corbyn's authenticity was frequently contrasted to the perception of the Prime Minister as a cold and heartless control freak. Writing in *The Times* on June 3, Janice Turner observed:

"He's so authentic," people cry, as he presents homemade jam to The One Show while condemning the low-wage economy, calmly, without artifice or spin. "Bless! He seems so real!" And so he does, compared with Theresa May, a broken pull-string doll who can't even utter her five pre-programmed phrases.

Similarly, Marina Hyde, writing in *The Guardian*, argued that May's "primary means of showing solidarity with workers is to deliver answers so robotic that they suggest even her own job has already been automated."

Hyde's observation highlights the ways in which understandings of authenticity are tied to *emotional qualities* – an "authentic" politician is someone who is able to feel *compassion* for voters, to be able to deliver the policy changes they need. The contrast between Corbyn's perceived emotional empathy and May's cold and remote performance was a common theme throughout the election. It gained momentum after May's performance on a BBC Question Time Election special. Here, she dismissed the concerns of an NHS nurse who had not received a pay rise since 2009, stating "there isn't a magic money tree that we can shake that suddenly provides for everything that people want."

As Brian May wrote in *The Mirror*, now "that the blinkers are off, we see Theresa May in her full glory - a ruthless insatiably ambitious woman with not a shred of compassion for man or beast." Miranda Sawyer suggested in *The Observer* that Corbyn's "appeal is not in his grasp of numbers but his understanding of emotion."

The fact that candidates for office must show themselves to be "ordinary folks" who can empathise with citizens is nothing new. It has, for example, been a long-standing theme in writing on American presidential rhetoric. But it would be wrong to see the election results as determined by the personality of the main party leaders. Public debate around the campaign was, in fact, strongly focused on issues. This was particularly true as debates over the party manifestos unfolded and led to a significant backlash against the Conservative Party's 'dementia tax' and a rise in public support for the progressive policies of the Labour Party.

But given the presidentialisation of British politics, these policies were seen to be underwritten by the trustworthiness and likeability of the party leaders. Rather than viewing an emphasis on personality and policy as mutually exclusive, we should understand the two as inextricably interlinked in contemporary politics, and the relationship cemented through the discourse of authenticity.

Methodological note: I carried out a Nexis UK search for the period April 18-June 9, 2017 in UK national newspapers, using the search terms "Corbyn" AND "authentic" OR "authenticity" anywhere in the story. This yielded a total of 62 stories, out of which 52 reflected on the perceived authenticity of the Labour leader.

Prof Karin Wahl-Jorgensen

Professor in the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. She is the author or editor of seven books, and has written more than 50 journal articles and 40 book chapters. She is completing Emotions, Media and Politics (Polity), and writing Digital Citizenship (Polity, with Arne Hintz and Lina Dencik).

Email: Wahl-JorgensenK@cardiff.ac.uk

Twitter: @KarinWahlJ

Was it the Labour doorstep or the Labour smartphone that swung it for Jeremy?

Prof Tim Bale

Professor of Politics at Queen Mary University of London, where he co-directs an ESRC-funded project on party members.

Email: t.bale@qmul.ac.uk

Twitter: @ProfTimBale

Although we need more research before we can categorically confirm that it was 'the young wot swung it for Labour' at the General Election, it looks more than possible. And, although their support for Jeremy Corbyn was rooted in more than just tech-savvy campaigning, we can't afford to dismiss its role in converting youthful enthusiasm into actual votes on the day.

One of the fascinating things about what happened on 8 June is that very few people saw it coming. Election analysts, going on past experience, figured that the young people pollsters managed to sample either wouldn't bother to turn up on the day or, if they did, would end up simply adding to Labour's support in seats it would win anyway.

Even more interesting, however, is that the parties and their candidates themselves had no more idea than the rest of us of what was about to hit them. Conservative campaigners on the ground only began to get worried a few days out – if they were lucky: many didn't wake up to the wave that was about to break over them until groups of young voters began rocking up to polling stations on the day itself. And many Labour activists will admit privately that they didn't have much more of a clue than their opposite numbers: just as pollsters find it notoriously difficult to get hold of young people – no landlines, not in (or awake) in the day, out in the evenings, not into party politics, etc. – so, too, do canvassers.

But this poses a puzzle. If canvassing didn't ID these young Labour voters, then they weren't brought to the polls by traditional means like 'knocking up' (i.e. by their names appearing on a list of promises, that list being checked against records taken by tellers at polling stations, and then, if they weren't down as having voted yet, them being contacted and urged to do so).

That doesn't mean, however, that Labour activists had no role whatsoever in getting the youth vote out. Rather, it means that we probably have to adopt a broader view of what constitutes activism nowadays – and adopt a slightly less sceptical view of the utility of online rather than offline campaign activity.

As part of an ESRC-funded project on party members run by me and Monica Poletti at Queen Mary University of London, along with Paul Webb, from the University of Sussex, we surveyed thousands of members of six UK parties: the Conservatives, Labour, Lib Dems, SNP, UKIP and the Greens. Most of them were questioned just after the May 2015 general but, in Labour's case, because of the huge influx of new members, we sent out an additional survey after the 2016 local elections.

Those surveys give us some idea of how Labour members compare to Conservative and other party members when it comes to different campaign activities. Cutting to the chase, what it reveals is that Labour is some way ahead of the Tories when it comes to online if not offline activities.

If we take offline activity first, then the two parties' memberships are fairly evenly matched: leaving aside the thorny topic of over-claiming (which, importantly for our purposes, is no more likely to affect one party's members more than the other's), some 43% of Tory members claimed to have delivered leaflets at some stage during the 2015 general election, compared to 42% of Labour members. The proportion saying they did a bit of canvassing (either by phone or in person) was 36% for both parties.

If we then look at online, however, there are big differences. Some 40% of Tory members claimed to have liked something from their party or one of its candidates on Facebook at the 2015 election; but the figure for Labour members was 51%. As for tweeting or re-tweeting messages supporting their party or its candidates on Twitter, the figures were 26% and 37% respectively.

When we asked Labour members who joined the party after the 2015 General Election, many of them, no doubt, to vote for Jeremy Corbyn, we found they were much less likely than pre-2015 members to have leafletted or canvassed, although whether this was because they were less inclined to go 'on the doorstep', or because they hadn't yet been asked to or because no-one gets as excited about local elections as they do about general elections, we don't really know. But the proportion who'd campaigned on Facebook (54%) and Twitter (34%) was very similar to the one we found in 2015.

Could it be that it was this sort of activity, rather than the traditional kind, that mobilised younger voters to come out for Corbyn (and not May) on 8 June, explaining why their imminent appearance at polling stations wasn't picked up beforehand? If so, 'clicktivism' is something we should take much more seriously from now on.

The election at constituency level

Taking part in a local constituency election campaign is a good way to revisit many issues about political communication that one finds in the literature. Of these, one keeps repeating itself, namely: where is the election campaign actually taking place?

When you knock on someone's door, you quickly become aware of the fact that their response to you – if they open the door, that is – is made up of a whole host of accumulated bits of information that they have acquired over the years, and more recently. The simple question, 'will you vote for us?' is unlikely to be answered by anyone who has actually read the manifesto, met the local MP and/ or the party leader. The response is most likely to be drawn from a combination of personal experiences, impressions, received knowledge, things heard or read about the election, and so on (activists have also been known to come across members of the public who were unaware that an election was taking place!).

The point to note here is not that voters do not inhabit the same world as the activist or the 'politically informed'; the point is that the interaction at the doorstep reveals the activist's inability to penetrate the reality that produces the decision to vote and the direction of that vote. In this respect, it is still appropriate to ask where is the contest actually taking place: is it on television, in the press, on social media, the leaflet handed out, the garden sign, at the doorstep? What part/s of this mixture of intermingling messages and influences is/are open to change? How do they impact on the texture of the campaign and the shifting fortunes of individuals and parties?

Students of political communication should also be humbled by their inability to precisely identify how decisions about who to vote for are made and, by extension, how activists – and others – should then intervene in that process so as to produce the desired outcome. Should the emphasis be on door knocking, leafleting and garden signs, i.e. the 'ground wars' strategy? Should the effort be on Facebook or Twitter, i.e. the 'digital' targeting strategy? Are these of lesser or more importance than appearances on BBC1s *The One Show* or *Question Time*, i.e. the 'television' election? What of May's 'bad press' after the 'Dementia tax' policy U-turn (or not, according to May), i.e. old fashioned journalism at a manifesto launch? Which of these should the party and party activists focus on in order to sway voters? The answer: probably all of them as each contributes something to the texture of the campaign (and we don't quite know in what proportions!).

In fact, students of political communication will have become only too aware that the mysteries of the electoral process and voters' decision-making have deepened over the years as digital electioneering has increased its profile and utility (although there is an upside here in that it has opened up a whole new vista for research. The adage that 'more research is needed' has never been truer). Consequently, we now need to add social media and targeted communication (forms of psychological profiling and analytics) to the analysis of newsprint and broadcast output. The addition of electioneering behind closed doors and straight to people's screens has made it more difficult to get a full and measured sense of all the influences that are likely to have a bearing on voters. It is no longer the case that every communication is as open, as public and as shared as it might have once been. This introduces challenges to researchers but also to political parties and to activists.

All this makes elections and electioneering a complex and puzzling affair, perhaps more so at the constituency level. As the activist delivers yet another leaflet, she can but wonder whether she is having any impact on what is going on. She may be feeling good about what she is doing – in Nielsen's words: 'How campaigns are waged matters, not only for electoral outcomes but also for what democratic politics *is*.'(2012, 7. Emphasis in original) - but the puzzle still remains.

Prof Ralph Negrine

Professor of Political Communication in the Department of Journalism Studies, University of Sheffield. His publications include The Transformation of Political Communication (Palgrave, 2008) and The Political Communication Reader (with James Stanyer, 2007. Routledge). His website exploring British Party Election Broadcasts (1951-1964) can be found at www.sheffield.ac.uk/journalism/pebs.

Email: r.negrine@sheffield.ac.uk

Twitter: @polcomprof

Over-managing the media: how it all went wrong

Prof Suzanne Franks

Head of the Journalism Department at City, University of London. She is a former BBC broadcaster who has published widely on international news and women in the media.

Email: suzanne.franks.1@city.ac.uk

We have seen orchestrated and controlled election campaigns before, but the 2017 one reached a new level of media management. Whatever happened to the days of campaign rallies and politicians confronting noisy hecklers? There are many famous clips of politicians (from Quintin Hogg to Harold Wilson) dealing with unruly crowds and delivering their message to a mixed reception at best. In this campaign we saw nothing like that. #GE2017 was simply a process of carefully controlled appearances both before the media and the chosen publics.

Forget the lively morning election press conferences where journalists could lob all manner of tricky questions to a panel of senior politicians. Forget too visions of the soapbox – famously reinstated in 1992 by John Major – in town squares across the land to an assembled crowd of whoever wanted to turn up and listen. Any chances of senior figures meeting with a real voter were minimised and sanitised. Each side preferred well controlled encounters with true believers. The Corbyn rallies were rousing appearances before the faithful – creating the same vibe that we saw in the recent Labour leadership contests. And the effect was an almost pop festival like atmosphere, where week by week the attendances rose so that by the end huge crowds were thronging to hear their beloved Jeremy.

On the Tory side only a few times did the Prime Minister venture out and face unscripted unvetted encounters. Her media appearances were similarly curtailed. Aside from the famous and toe curling 'One Show' with Mr May, there were a few set piece broadcast interviews and minimal encounters with real people. Some of the most memorable occasions in past elections have been when politicians face unvarnished probing by normal voters. Both Tony Blair and John Prescott had such experiences. In 1983 the highlight of the campaign was Bristol voter Diane Gould asking Mrs Thatcher about the Belgrano. Or remember the Election Call phone-ins of the Robin Day era where every day a senior politician (including party leaders) was grilled by questions from the ordinary voting public. Not much of that happened in 2017. In fact there were no Radio 4, Channel 4 or even (Mrs Thatcher's favourite) Radio 2 outings for the PM. John Humphreys, Jon Snow and Jeremy Vine were all rebuffed.

A high point of Jeremy Corbyn's campaign was his last minute decision to attend the televised debate in Cambridge. Theresa May only further damaged herself by declining to participate – and then refusing even to appear on Women's Hour. The campaign was a monotone and monochrome series of well organised photo opportunity encounters – where the PM was shown speaking to carefully curated groups. By excluding much of the media and restricting real people, it became a sanitised and even cynical operation. Spontaneity and nimbleness of response are crucial in effective politician campaigning. This was rarely in evidence.

Several times during the Trump era selective media (variously the BBC, CNN, *New York Times etc)* have been excluded from events as a 'punishment' for being over critical or telling a story that the administration disliked. And there were even echoes of such high handed behaviour in the UK campaign. Local media in Cornwall were told that they could not question Theresa May when she visited there and apparently were locked out of the event. International media encountered obstacles when they tried to question the Prime Minister on the campaign trail. Even Sky News (part owned by Mrs May's friend Rupert Murdoch) was apparently denied access to cover the campaign properly - and shunted off the bus.

The overwhelming impression was of an operation which disdained and disparaged much of the Fourth Estate. Maybe it is appropriate in a period where the UK fell back to a pitiful 40th place in the Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, that the media were seen to be constrained and limited in reporting on a crucial democratic process.

Aristotle and persuasive copywriting in the 2017 General Election

Dr Nigel Jackson

Reader in Persuasion and Communication, Plymouth University.

Email: nigel.jackson@plymouth.ac.uk

In an election campaign lasting six weeks what Party's say on policy has limited effect on changing voting behaviour, that is done in the months/years preceding the campaign. Rather, campaigning helps parties identify, reach and mobilise those already sympathetic to them. The 'air-war' is dominated by advertising and increasingly social media, however, the Cinderella of online campaigning, e-newsletters, can play a narrow but important role. The attention in the 2017 online campaign has been on the high profile use of social media, but email has a role by imparting complicated information and enhancing existing relationships. E-newsletters are sent to those who are 'warm' to a party and can remind the receiver of important events, such as Manifesto launches. More importantly, they can make appeals for money and volunteers to enable 'colder' supporters to be reached by other means. E-newsletters prime purpose is to mobilise resources that can be used elsewhere.

Professional copywriter Andy Maslem (2015) applied psychology to writing persuasive copy. He suggested that Aristotle's Rhetoric provided a usable framework. Aristotle identified three components to being persuasive:

Ethos – the credibility of the source;
Pathos – creating an emotional link;
Logos – offering a rational argument.

While most of us might think the argument is key, Aristotle stressed the source whereas Maslem believes copywriting is essentially about emotions.

During the election campaign the public e-newsletters of four political parties (Conservatives. Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Greens) were analysed to see whether they applied Aristotle in constructing persuasive copy.

Ethos plays a fairly limited role, possibly because all subscribers opted to sign up to receive the emails and so knew the parties. Early on in the campaign the credibility of the message sender was stressed. In the Conservatives first e-newsletter, which was from Theresa May, she said "Last week I stood on the steps of Downing Street", emphasising she was more credible as the incumbent. She went on to say "Every vote cast for the Conservatives will strengthen my hand in the Brexit negotiations", highlighting her role. Even though the UK is not a presidential system, this was a clear attempt to contrast her credibility to be Prime Minister with that of Jeremy Corbyn. Labour's first email sought to establish Jeremy Corbyn's credibility in a different way, "Today at PMQs, Jeremy Corbyn raised the concerns of people struggling under this Tory Government." It then went on to list questions asked on behalf of named citizens. May's Ethos was based on her position and unique ability to carry out her responsibilities, whereas Corbyn's was that he represented every-day people.

Pathos was central to the parties' copywriting, with emotional appeals being a common tactic in most emails. Emotional arguments were used in five different ways. First, appeals for money sought to create a belief the individual could make a difference. For example, the Liberal Democrats said 'We want you to be able to say "I helped make that happen."' All of the parties made reference to the amount of money they had raised, and why they needed more. Second, appeals to specific groups, so the Greens highlighted LGBT rights worldwide were under threat. Labour's most common theme that they represented the many not the few is also an emotional appeal to groups of people. Third, social norms were invoked, so in launching their Manifesto the Labour Party said "We're been joined by thousands of you rallying to action", in other words you are not alone supporting us. Similarly, several financial appeals stressed how many people had donated, again emphasising supporter numbers. Fourth, a sense of urgency was attached to several appeals. The Labour Party gave a free tote bag to donors, but pointed out there was limited supply, so the message was donate before they run out. The Conservatives started one appeal for donations with "This is urgent". The rest of the message explained that time was short for people's donations to make a difference. Lastly, one tactic from the Conservatives and Greens was the use of a signature from the sender, implying a personal touch to make them more likeable. Emotional appeals are central to how the parties used their e-newsletters.

Logos was less frequently used, but was linked to the launch of the Manifestos. The Greens stated "Today we set out policies which don't just defend our rights, but celebrate and extend them." Indeed, in several emails the Greens highlighted reasons why the environment should be protected. Similarly, Liberal Democrats several times outlined briefly their position on Brexit. Labour made reference to the Dementia Tax, and then linked this to a fundraising appeal. However, the e-newsletters were not primarily used to persuade on policy.

Overall, e-newsletters tended to use emotional appeals, though there were slightly different approaches. Ethos was the Conservatives' main approach consistently using "strong and stable leadership", suggesting Theresa May was more credible. The opposition parties were much more likely to stress emotional messages, and to a lesser extent logical argument.

Applying Aristotle we can suggest that persuasion is about offering a credible source, engaging with the brain and stirring the heart. However, this is not the case with e-newsletters where copywriting was more likely to support Maslem's view that emotion drives action. Party e-newsletters are used as a mobilising tool, whereas flyers and leaflets fulfil different, more policy led, purposes. The parties' e-newsletter copywriters primarily applied Pathos by appealing to the heart, not the brain.

Rhetoric of the 2017 General Election campaign

Dr Andrew Crines

Lecturer in British Politics at the University of Liverpool. Researches political rhetoric/oratory.

Email: A.S.Crines@liverpool.ac.uk

Twitter : @AndrewCrines

When the House of Commons gave Theresa May the required majority of votes to call a snap election she appeared to be in a commanding position to increase her number of MPs. In contrast to this Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party seemed set to lose the election dramatically, with some pollsters suggesting Labour may return with as little as 185 seats.

As is well documented elsewhere, the election was called to strengthen May's hand in the Brexit negotiations as a way of showing the European Union negotiators that the British electorate were behind her. In the event, the Conservatives went on to suffer a major defeat. Such was the scale of the defeat that May not only failed to secure the landslide demonstration of support she wanted, but lost MPs to the point where the Conservatives no longer had a Parliamentary majority. As a rhetorical show of strength to the EU this was a spectacular failure. But why did the campaign fail so dramatically?

In the academic study of political rhetoric there are the Aristotelian modes of persuasion. These are *ethos, pathos, logos*. The first refers to character/credibility; the second refers to use of emotion; the third refers to empirical evidence. These represent an analytical framework around which it is possible to deconstruct political speech as a means of highlighting how an audience can be (de)motivated by a rhetorician. In terms of the General Election, May's *ethos* was as a strong and stable leader who would push hard for a right deal for Britain. Her *pathos* was patriotic, insomuch as she sought to instil national pride in the electorate, and her *logos* was one of economic prosperity. In contrast, Corbyn's *ethos* was compassionate and caring, his *pathos* was one of anger at social inequality, and his *logos* was economic investment and fairness. These two leadership positions contrast sharply and so offered very different trajectories for the United Kingdom.

However, as the campaign progressed May's *ethos* (character) began to shift. Although the message of strength and stability was repeated often, her level of engagement with the campaign prevented her from expanding on what those points meant or how they would be of benefit in the Brexit negotiations. For example, the rhetorical *ethos* of leader is communicated to audience's via media engagement. Yet May made it clear she would not participate in debates, her public meetings were largely stage managed, and her speeches tended to be to pre-existing supportive audience. Consequently she rarely spoke to audiences who did not agree with her. By avoiding the voters in this way May was unable to convince doubters to lend her their vote, or even to confirm to sympathetic audiences that she was indeed strong and stable. By not growing her *ethos* in a way that would instil confidence in her leadership, the audience rarely listened to the *logos* of her argument.

In contrast to this Corbyn's rhetorical strategy was one of mass audience engagement. He often pulled in large crowds in safe Labour seats that were then transmitted by mainstream and social media towards undecided voters. By doing so Corbyn was able to communicate his message in a way that May was incapable of emulating.

Ordinarily in a Parliamentary system we would not be simply looking at the leaders, however given May sought to run the campaign in a largely presidential manner the leaders of the two parties became focal points for the performance of their respective parties. Indeed, the branding of the Conservatives election literature revolved firmly around May whilst Corbyn became a firm figurehead of Labour's campaign.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on why both May and Corbyn performed as they did. Put simply, May was untested in a campaign where she would be the focus of attention. For example, she did not campaign beyond the Parliamentary Conservative Party in the 2016 leadership election, nor was she prominent in the EU referendum. Had she been so she may have gained some of the necessary skills of defending an argument to an unsupportive audience and, by doing so, growing her *ethos* and personal confidence. In contrast Corbyn has had a political life of campaigns. As well as a lifetime of campaigning he fought for and won the leadership twice. His experience as a campaigner shone through in this General Election. Consequently, whilst Corbyn was able to grow his *ethos* to every growing crowds, May's *ethos* slowly declined thereby leading the Tories into a major defeat right at a time when she wanted to strengthen her hand in the Brexit negotiations.

At the time is writing it is unclear whether May will remain leader, but whoever leads the Tories into the next election will need to be a seasoned campaigner if they are to defeat Jeremy Corbyn.

When is an electoral 'bribe' not a bribe?

As I have been consistently reminded these last few days, 'we' did not win the election, so why does it feel like 'we' (non-Conservatives) did? What can account for this feeling of (slight) hope? What can account for the fact that I am heartened by the result of the latest General Election? This feeling is not through any particular party loyalty ('my party' continues to have only one MP, in Brighton Pavilion) but is perhaps best explained by the fact that in securing a 40% share, a 9.5% rise on the previous election and with 12,878,460 votes in total the Labour Party under the leadership of the much maligned Jeremy Corbyn, demonstrated that running on an explicitly social democratic platform, contrary to some predictions is not necessarily the road to electoral oblivion.

After 7 years of the (always ideological) and now seemingly abandoned austerity, the Labour Party under Corbyn's leadership, launched a manifesto that promised not only to end austerity, but to govern unashamedly in the social democratic (not socialist) tradition.

The Labour Party manifesto was in direct contrast to that of Theresa May's (yes, it was hers, if you run an election on an explicitly presidential platform, then Theresa May gets to 'own' the result). Pitched to a population still suffering fully 9 years after the global financial crisis, a public exhausted and impoverished by austerity, the Tory manifesto promised nothing but more 'tough decisions', it was bereft of hope. Where Tories offered more pain, Labour offered a positive vision for the future.

Although reliable data is not yet available, this vision of the future certainly seems to have captured the imagination – and the votes – of the younger generation. It is not difficult to see why. Contrary to the story of 20th century capitalism - where each new generation is materially richer than that which preceded it - this next generation are likely to be materially worse off than their parents. If you're between the ages of 18 and 30, with possible student debt; precarious labour; a zero hours contract; perhaps in a job but with contracting wages; collapsing health and social services; increasing rents; average house prices now 7.6 times the average salary; little or no chance to save for a deposit; then why would (m)any of that generation vote for the status quo? The status quo has not delivered for them, for 'the many'. Is it any wonder then, that 40% of the population fancied something less painful, more hopeful, with a positive vision of the future?

Of course, still amazed by the result, it was not long before some commentators and even politicians complained that Corbyn had essentially 'bought' the youth (particularly student) vote with 'bribes' over tuition fees). Two points about this: Between 2013 and 2017, the Labour Party increased its membership from 189,000 to (at least) 517,000. Many of this membership base are young, newly engaged and were energised way before any policy on tuition fees was announced. This young voter base - repeatedly told they're naive and stupid for supporting Corbyn – have been there campaigning and supporting for two years, not because of bribes but because they believe in something. Secondly, why, when it's a policy on tuition fees is it a 'bribe', but when it's a policy of 'triple-lock pension guarantee' (shoring up the grey vote) is it not a bribe? You could say the same of any popular policy with a likely voter base: Tax cuts for the rich? A bribe? Or 'trickle-down economics'? Cuts to corporation tax? A bribe? Or 'encouraging investment'?

Regarding 'investment', we are often told by the neoliberal hawks that cutting corporation tax encourages investment. However, despite cuts over the last 7 years, this race to the bottom has, thus far, not produced particularly compelling results. The UK is among the worst performers in terms of investment as % of GDP (ranked 124th in the world). With the pledge to raise corporation tax (gradually) to 26%, the press ran numerous scare-stories about the 'Marxist Corbyn'. But the last time Corporation tax was as 'high' as 26%, was under the Coalition Government in 2011. When Thatcher left office, Corporation Tax was 32%. Does that make Thatcher a Marxist, a socialist or a social democrat? Further, how do 'our competitors' measure up? The most successful European state many would argue is Germany. Is anyone seriously suggesting that Germany is not among the most innovative and dynamic economies in Europe (or even the world)? Germany has a range of industries: heavy, light, innovative and digital. Their corporation tax? Currently 29.7%. Has this been a drag on industry and innovation? Germany has higher rates of tax but uses those revenues to invest in innovation, industrial strategy and education. Germany has one of the most highly educated populations in the world and most German states have no (or very low) University tuition fees.

Invest in people, invest in infrastructure - physical and intellectual - and you collectively invest in the future. Perhaps then, Labour under Corbyn, and the young voters flocking to the party, might be on to something after all. They did not win this sprint race, but they may win the longer one.

Chris Roberts

Senior Lecturer in Journalism, Media and Culture at University of Roehampton, London.

Email: c.roberts@roehampton.ac.uk

Twitter: @Chr1sR0berts

PEBs in 2017: not gone, but largely forgotten?

Dr Vincent Campbell

Associate Professor in the School of Media, Communication and Sociology, University of Leicester.

Email: vpc2@le.ac.uk

Twitter: @Campbell_VPC

Party Election Broadcasts look ever more like something from a different age of politics, an anachronism from the 1950s in a hypermedia age of campaigning. In 2017 it seemed as if PEBs were increasingly being forgotten by many voters and some campaigners more interested in online media spaces. To give an example, the Conservative candidate Greg Knight found with his brief amateur video being viewed more than half a million times on YouTube, that a lack of quality need not mean a lack of reach - even if the audience is a mostly mocking one. Compared to views for the Ken Loach-directed Labour PEB on YouTube of just over 5,000 by June 7th (a not atypical number of viewers for the main parties' PEBs on YouTube), Knight and others might think that all the effort put into PEBs' high production values isn't worth the time and effort.

In more conventional modes of viewing, entering the last week of the campaign, Loach's PEB was the only one to feature in the top 30 most viewed programmes for any channel, with an audience of 4.1 million on May 15th, the 25th most viewed programme on the BBC that week. With the rescheduling of two PEBs due to the Manchester terrorist attack as well, total audiences for PEBs are likely to be down on previous elections – though 4 million people is still a sizeable audience for a party to reach with a single piece of content. Perhaps because of that still potentially large reach, even despite the snap election context, parties seemed to take some time and effort to produce relatively polished PEBs compared to the rather cut and paste work seen in the Vote Leave referendum Campaign Broadcasts last year. Mostly these were not concept or gimmick ads but rather conventional public and party vox pops, and some party leader-focused material. Indeed, observed trends since the 1980s and the days of the Saatchi brothers for the ever-increasing predominance of principles and practices of political marketing in PEBs, involving attributes of commercial brand advertising such as celebrity endorsements, emotional appeals, and personalisation, seems to have possibly peaked.

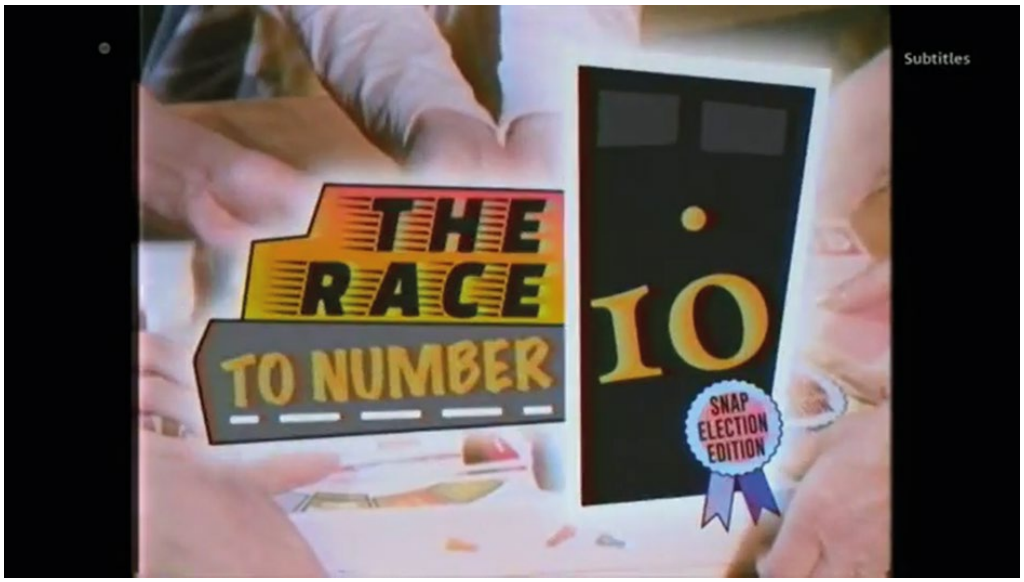
The snap election might have been a factor in production complexity, but also the more "Wild West" frontier of social media channels arguably offers a more productive space for commercial political advertising styles that can be targeted directly to (hopefully) receptive audiences for pithy, brash and often outright attack ads. By comparison, the rather staid platform of the PEB for a general audience arguably requires a more circumspect approach, though they do offer parties the space of several minutes of broadcast time – an age in advertising terms – to present something more sustained and substantive, an increasingly rare opportunity in the age of multi-media campaigning.

Whether that opportunity for substance achieved much in 2017 is hard to see. Only UKIP leader Paul Nuttall's appearance drew any commentary around PEBs, as one framed him in a manner that made him look like he was walking oddly on the spot. Even the agenda-setting function of PEBs – garnering news coverage if not viewers – seems to have waned to the point of only unintended coverage. The Green Party, who had generated the only real PEB interest with their "change the tune" broadcast in the 2015 campaign, again went for a concept ad, produced by the same team as their previous "hit", this time under the slogan #changethegame. With a family playing a board game called 'The Race to Number 10', the PEB satirised the damaging policies and empty slogans of the major parties. It was watched more on YouTube than the main parties' PEBs (over 32,000 views by June 7th), and commended by the ad industry but was still not as noticeable as its 2015 forebear (watched nearly a million times to date). The 2010 and 2015 results established a basis for more screen time for minor parties, though their presence on television specials and debates seemed more of a focus than an extra PEB or two, and the return to much more of a two party framework in the 2017 results might see the range and number of PEBs diminish in future elections as well.

Whether PEBs can retain a purpose in future elections remains to be seen. Change in British politics around broadcasting is slow – televising Parliament only since the 1990s, televised leader debates only since 2010 – so PEBs might be around for a while yet. Even after being drowned out by television news coverage, PEBs retained potential for image and news management for many years, but perhaps now they are little more than a ritualistic curio, retained more out of nostalgia than electoral value.

Labour PEB, 15th May 2017

Green PEB, 12th May 2017



UKIP PEB, 10th May 2017

‘Strong and stable’ to ‘weak and wobbly’: Tory campaign, media reaction and GE2017

Dr Anthony Ridge-Newman

Convenor of the PSA Conservatives and Conservatism Specialist Group and Vice Chair of the Political Marketing group. Anthony’s research at the universities of Glasgow, London and Oxford includes two books with Palgrave Macmillan: ‘Tories and Television, 1951-1964’ (2016) and ‘Cameron’s Conservatives and the Internet’ (2014).

Email: anthony.ridge-newman@glasgow.ac.uk

Twitter: @RidgeNewman

Theresa May was described as the ‘second Iron Lady’ amid inevitable comparisons to Thatcher on becoming the first post-Brexit Conservative Party Prime Minister in 2016. However, following the embarrassing result of the election, credible comparisons between May and Thatcher will likely cease abruptly.

The Conservatives’ central message of ‘strong and stable’ leadership was repeated incessantly. Like brand Cameron in 2010, the Conservative Party strategy centred on Theresa May as the primary brand, with her face and name featuring on most party communication. Ultimately, in addition to a number of political communication blunders, this proved to be a significant miscalculation. In the first few hours and days following the indecisive election result, May’s so-called strong and stable leadership looked like metaphorical rhetoric as she was described ‘weak and wobbly’; ’robotic’; the ‘zombie prime minister’; and a ‘dead woman walking’.

So, what went so terribly wrong for the Conservative campaign, especially in the context of the Tories’ main political opponent being the much derided Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn? This brief analysis of the Tory campaign explores this question through an examination of the main political communication features of the Conservative campaign and reaction to it across traditional and digital media channels.

Following the election, May attempted to cling onto power through forming a minority government, which, in keeping with the strong and stable theme, she claimed would offer ‘certainty’. However, television news networks suggested the opposite was the case in reporting that financial indicators had reacted negatively to the ‘uncertainty’ of a minority Tory administration in negotiations with Northern Ireland’s controversial Democratic Unionist Party (Bloomberg). Furthermore, TV news largely framed the outcome of the election around notions of crisis and uncertainty (Sky News); and May’s role in the Conservative Party and EU Brexit negotiations as significantly weakened (EuroNews).

In a political marketing sense, the ‘strong and stable’ message was well suited to building a Thatcher-like personal brand. However, to gain traction in the wider populace, the product, in this case Theresa May, had to some extent live up to the image being created. This can be thought of as brand credibility. Steve Hilton, David Cameron’s former director of strategy, appeared on Fox News stating the election was meant to be the ‘Brexit election’, but instead it became a referendum on May’s ability to lead.

The strength of May’s leadership came into question early on in the campaign following her awkward U-turns on policy and manifesto commitments. Furthermore, in terms of credibility, her apparent ineptitude in communicating convincingly via twenty-first century media was perhaps more important to the overall campaign narrative. It became a theme of media analysis and critique. For example, Michael Crick (Channel 4 News) broadcast an entire feature questioning the Conservative's overly cautious media management, which, like the calling of the snap election, ultimately seems to have backfired. Engagement, credibility and trust can be closely related factors in this interactive age.

In keeping with this theme, May’s credibility as a strong and stable leader took a nosedive when media headlines and narratives became dominated by the Prime Minister’s refusal to take part in any televised debates. May’s notable absence left a silence that spoke volumes. In contrast to and at odds with an image of a strong and stable premier, May inadvertently communicated to the electorate that, in actuality, she was much more timid, unconfident and weak than she wanted voters to believe. Therefore, from the outset, the central campaign message became an oxymoron that could be flipped by opponents of the Conservative Party to undermine the Prime Minister’s credibility. Furthermore, the overuse and repetitiveness of the phrase ‘strong and stable’ morphed into anti-Tory media witticism both on- and off- line, which appears to have spread virally via people power through grassroots uses of social media. Rachel Gibson refers to this type of activity as ‘citizen-initiated campaigning’.

Anti-Conservative citizen-initiative campaigning seems to have played a significant role in the 2017 campaign insofar as, in this politically charged post-Brexit context, many personal social media pages, which would have perhaps otherwise remained personal in an election period, sprung into political action. Early indications suggest this was largely due to younger sections of the electorate, large numbers of whom are thought to have been inspired by Corbyn, becoming politically active. This did not escape the attention of political commentators, some of whom suggested in this election social media activity replaced the role of the tabloids in shaping the political mood (BBC Radio 4).

Pierre Bourdieu described elections as a ‘sublimated form of civil war’. In the post-Brexit context it seems the UK has split into two camps that have been at war for at least the last year. However, the outcome of the 2017 election seems to have been most impacted by the Conservative’s lacklustre campaign. Sun Tsu’s ‘Art of War’ famously advises never to underestimate your opponent. If the Conservatives’ unpreparedness in terms of policies, presentation and communication of message is anything to go by, bearing in mind the Tories held all the cards and advantages of being the governing party calling a snap election, it seems the party underestimated its opponent in Jeremy Corbyn and ultimately overestimated Theresa May’s strength as a leader.

The resultant outcome of May’s seemingly weak and wobbly leadership, three days after the election, is somewhat summed up by the most influential Tory Party blog, ConservativeHome, stating: ‘Conservative MPs do not believe that May can lead them into the next election. Nor, reluctantly, do we.’

The Greens and the "progressive alliance"

In the aftermath of the June 8th election, some have spoken of "the return of the two-party system" (Channel 4 @FactCheck on Twitter, 9th June). Whilst, on the surface, the numbers support that analysis, it misses the grassroots significance of the 'progressive alliance'.

The Greens wrote to the Liberal Democrats, Labour and Plaid Cymru in 2016 proposing an anti-Brexit alliance in the event of a snap general election, which they suggested could prevent a Tory / UKIP / DUP coalition. Caroline Lucas, with Labour's Lisa Nandy and the Liberal Democrat's Chris Bowers, published *The Alternative: Towards a New Progressive Politics* (2016). The Greens made the call for a coalition again the day after May called the general election.

Lucas remains the Green Party's sole MP, but doubled her majority in Brighton Pavilion on June 8th - thanks to an alliance where the Lib Dems stood down, and many Pavilion Labour activists concentrated on campaigning in nearby Kemptown. However, she consistently punches above her party's weight. Elsewhere, Green parties have entered national government in Belgium, Finland, France, Germany and Italy - coalition being "the dominant mode of party government in democracies" (Poguntke, 2002, Environmental Politics). Here, the goal must be proportional representation (PR). Today's political landscape (the rise of UKIP and the SNP, each of which may yet resurge) means others are listening. Corbyn's Labour and the Greens have much in common, from fracking opposition to the scrapping of tuition fees. Lucas' calls for a 'progressive alliance' were taken up, at grassroots level, by Green and some Labour and Liberal Democrat activists.

Several 'progressive' tactical voting websites also operated: Tactical17, Avaaz's 'Vote Smart' and The Progressive Alliance set up by Compass. The PA Twitter publicised suggestions: Lib Dem's Vince Cable for Twickenham and Labour's Fiona Onasanya for Peterborough, both of whom did win their seats from the Conservatives. On the other hand, their picks of Vix Lowthion for the Greens on the Isle of Wight, Raushan Ara for Labour in South Thanet and Chris Clark for Labour in Sevenoaks did not. It is notable the Greens stood down in Twickenham, and UKIP stood down in Peterborough, part of the other unofficial alliance of this election, between UKIP and hard-Brexit Conservativism.

These uneasy alliances, unfolded in the marginal seat of Bury North. UKIP stepped aside, because the Conservative incumbent was a Brexiteer. The Greens likewise, potentially lending their votes to Labour, and the Lib Dem candidate suggested his supporters vote tactically. Labour took the seat. But, the Lib Dems still picked up votes. Labour's win can be attributed partly to the alliance (with the Greens' full commitment and the Lib Dems' partial one) and partly to the UKIP vote peeling substantively towards Labour as well as towards the Conservatives.

The Labour leadership and National Executive Committee took an official negative line on the progressive alliance. In Jeremy Hunt's constituency, local Labour, Lib Dems and Greens collaborated to support the National Health Action Party in a bid to unseat the Health Secretary. The Greens withdrew and the other two parties agreed not to campaign. Three Labour activists were expelled from the party as a result, adding to grassroots antipathy towards General Secretary Iain McNicol (ignited by purges of members during Corbyn's leadership bids, which saw expulsions merely for re-tweeting Caroline Lucas). Labour did not stand down any candidates for the Greens. Constitutionally, it cannot do so. Nonetheless, there were some local arrangements which saw the Greens step aside to help Labour, as (successfully) in Bristol North West, key being an MP's support for a second-referendum on the EU exit deal and for PR.

Electoral risks prevented the Liberal Democrat and Labour leaderships from officially supporting alliances. The Lib Dems worried after their collapse following coalition with the Conservatives, and Labour wary after Cameron's insinuation of an SNP / Labour coalition played badly for Ed Miliband. Whether the Greens will go into the next election pursuing the same high-minded long-game strategy (of holding the Lib Dems to an anti-Tory position and softening Labour up to support proportional representation) given what were only partially reciprocated collaborations, remains to be seen. Lucas, in an interview on Radio 4 on 9th June sounded a little despondent as she said the Greens had been "squeezed" in the election and it was difficult to get their voice heard.

Nevertheless, whilst there are many elements to which we might ascribe the 2017 Labour surge, the Green drive for progressive alliance was undoubtedly one. We saw this in Brighton Kemp Town, Bristol North West, Bury North and Derby North swings to Labour, where the Greens stood down and the Lib Dems agreed to reduce campaigning. A less piecemeal alliance could help prevent the Tory / DUP arrangement next time. Had the Liberal Democrats joined the Greens in not fielding a candidate against Amber Rudd, Labour would likely have gained her seat.

The youth, whom this election has newly energised, are green-inclined. Fox hunting, although it received almost no mainstream media traction, was a big issue on Facebook this election. Youth are also talking about PR and don't view first-past-the-post as fair (Channel 4 News, 9th June). Green Party strategy would do well to engage vigorously and build support for PR in grassroots conversations, online and offline. And, given that we are living in an era of hung parliaments, Labour would do well to listen.

Dr Jenny Alexander

Teaches environmental communication at Bournemouth University and worked at the Advertising Standards Authority on environmental claims (2007-10) under the chairmanship of Lord Chris Smith. She is the author of Environmental Advertising: New Forms of Transnational Persuasion (Routledge, 2018).

Email: alexanderj@bournemouth.ac.uk

It's the way I tell 'em: car crash politics and the gendered turn

Prof Karen Ross

Professor of Gender and Media at the University of Newcastle.

Email: karen.ross@ncl.ac.uk

I've been researching the relationship between gender, politics and media for 20+ years but GE2017 provided me with my first opportunity to consider a British general election campaign which had a woman in the top job. Would designer style and décolleté feature as strongly as 'Brexit-means-Brexit' and border closures? As it turned out, campaign coverage in relation to gender was rather more complex and mostly, journalists were not overtly sexist in terms of their coverage but more subtle strategies of undermining and trivialising women as political actors were still in evidence. The precedent set in GE2015 for set-piece leaders' debates to include the leaders of the smaller parties was carried over to this election so that Caroline Lucas, Nicola Sturgeon and Leanne Wood all had premium airtime and the media's verdict on their performances was reasonably even-handed.

For Wood, the behaviour of two male panellists towards her - David Davies (*Question Time,* 4 May) and Paul Nuttall (*Leaders' Debate,* 18 May) - provided two explicit and very public examples of sexism. In the case of Davies who was manspreading into her space in a faux avuncular fashion, Wood was soon trending on Twitter with her "I won't be intimidated by anyone" tweet after the show ended. In the Leaders' Debate, Nuttall repeatedly addressed her as 'Natalie' which she corrected him each time but his apparent failure to hear her and thus repeated misnaming was parodied as his inability to distinguish one woman from another. Both these examples were political own-goals on the part of the perpetrators and the speed with which both incidents went viral on Twitter meant that mainstream media were forced to pay attention and cover the stories, boosting Wood's visibility and calling out sexism.

Theresa May, on the other hand, went on the gender offensive from even before the get-go, saying in an interview with the BBC (2 May) that she intended to be a "bloody difficult woman" during the Brexit negotiations. When asked about her remark, Jean Claude Juncker's chief of staff Martin Selmayr said adroitly that his boss believed her to be an "impressive woman and a very impressive negotiator." Difficult or impressive, or impressively difficult, readers with a political memory which extends as far back as last year will recognise May's appropriation of this phrase, originally uttered about her by Ken Clarke in an unguarded moment and subsequently broadcast by Sky and #bloodydifficultwoman was soon trending on Twitter. Unfortunately, May was unable to make much capital out of this initial ploy because her media (non)strategy was significantly criticised by parts of the media, reinforced by the Twitterati and condemned by the public through various talkback shows. Slogan politics can only ever work if the slogans are matched by action and in May's case, 'bloodydifficultwoman' and 'strongandstable' were undermined by her refusal to participate in any of the televised leaders' debates, her withdrawal from *Woman's Hour* and her appearance on the *One Show* (9 May) with husband Philip where she insisted that there were 'girls' jobs and 'boys' jobs in the May household.

It is absolutely the case that women politicians, including Prime Ministers, provoke a media attention which is different to their male counterparts and this propensity, coupled with the slide to infotainment resulted in women on both sides of the political divide being particularly vulnerable to gleeful accounts of 'car crash' interviews, from May herself, to Justine Greening to Diane Abbott. While the reporting of these women's failures, mostly for not knowing how the numbers stack up, was not overtly sexist, the 'car crash' designation was used almost exclusively about women, slyly implying a biological predisposition for incompetence, the male exception being Jeremy Corbyn.

However, as Theresa May retreated from the media gaze apart from some tightly managed spots, Emily Thornberry (Shadow Foreign Secretary) took every opportunity to provide commentary on defence, Trident and numerous other topics, articulate and confident. Michael Fallon was expertly ambushed by Thornberry on the *Andrew Marr show* (14 May), showing that the skills she had honed as a barrister were being gainfully and effectively employed in her political life. Aside from the accident-prone Abbott, Thornberry was one of a handful of MPs, both women and men, who managed to rescue the news-consuming public from the univocal horse-race focus on the May/Corbyn dyad in #electionsoboring, particularly in the final days of the campaign, playing the engaging 'straight woman' to Nuttall's less intelligible madman. Although her appearances were not that frequent and the Fallon encounter saw her castigated by some parts of the pious press for uttering 'bollocks', albeit uttered sotto voce, they were passionate and memorable, reinforcing the point that not all publicity is good but good publicity is gold. Her final election hurrah saw her back-footing David Dimbleby as the results came in, challenging him to be even-handed: she was comfortably returned but May's future is a little less certain.

Dogwhistle sexism

It began with politics as usual; another masculinised election campaign. The election was called and initially framed as focused around Brexit. May promised 'strong and stable' leadership, and claimed the term 'bloody difficult woman' (which had originally been intended as an insult) as a marker of her strength. She could do the job as well as any man was the implied message. Newspaper headlines picked up extensively on her 'war on Brussels' soundbite. Militaristic language is long recognised as a masculinised way in which political authority can be asserted.

As we moved closer to the election the war metaphors proved prophetic; events in the last two weeks of the campaign overtook: three terror attacks made headline news. While May responded by asserting her militaristic and masculine strength, Corbyn's response was one which was more nuanced. But his argument that we need to look to our own foreign policy was lambasted across many media outlets. While a YouGov poll showed that 53% of the population agreed with the claim that the wars fought and conducted by the UK are in part responsible for terror attacks against the UK and only 24% disagreed that we have played a role, still *The Sun duly castigated Corbyn as a terrorist sympathiser (with* headlines such as "Jezza's Jihadi Comrades" on the day before the election).

We saw Corbyn 'emasculated' and characterised as weak, whereas May was masculinized and presented as strong, militaristic, ready to fight – by whatever means necessary – the war on terror. We saw Corbyn seek to elevate the discussion: asking us to think and talk about the causes of the terror attacks means we can also have conversations about those who are impacted (and here, while soldiers die in warfare, we know that women also bear significant costs – which again are less likely to feature in war coverage). We know that wars are ways in which leaders win elections, Thatcher and the Falklands for example, we also know that media discourses focus on the what has happened rather than the why it has happened. And in this cumulative closure of wider debate about our own complicity in the contemporary climate, we saw a reassertion of the ideal way to 'do' politics: strong and single minded rather than nuanced and reflective; militaristic rather than considered or peaceful.

This election also saw women representing an average of 30% of those candidates standing. An analysis of women, gender of their relationship with politics often focuses around the numbers of women who are MPs, and/ or the way we talk about women (so why focus on Theresa May's leather trousers, and yet not the trousers that her male counterparts wear?). What a gendered analysis also enables us to reflect on is not just the critical mass of women within the Parliamentary system, or the ways that they are depicted in media coverage, but it also allows us to consider the ways in which discourses of politics themselves are conducted. Despite the increasing numbers of women standing for office this time, throughout the campaign, we still saw the activities of politics discussed in militaristic, individualistic, masculine ways: the way we do politics is through war, and a readiness to do whatever it takes to win that war. This assumption that war and those able to conduct war are the best way for us to 'do' politics, means that we still discursively construct politics in masculinized ways. This 'below the radar' dogwhistle sexism, thus becomes an inherent feature of election campaigns and political discourse. But in recognising this, we do also see that there is the possibility to conduct and talk about our politics differently, and more peacefully. And while post-election analysis focused attention on Brexit 'regret' as a way to explain the outcome, perhaps what we also witness from the electorate is a desire for a different, more considered, less masculinised politics.

Prof Heather Savigny

Professor of Gender, Media and Politics at Leicester Media School, De Montfort University. She is author of a number of books and articles which explore the ways in which women politicians are represented in media, as well as the wider ways in which gender plays a role in political analysis.

Email: heather.savigny@dmu.ac.uk

The Women's Equality Party and the 2017 General Election

Dr Elizabeth Evans

Senior Lecturer in Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her work explores the interaction between gender, feminist activism and political representations in formal and informal locations.

Email: elizabeth.evans@gold.ac.uk

Twitter: @DrLizJEvans

Dr Meryl Kenny

Lecturer in Gender and Politics at the University of Edinburgh. Her research interests bridge the intersection of gender politics, party politics, territorial politics, and institutional approaches to the study of politics.

Email: m.kenny@ed.ac.uk

Twitter: @merylkenny

The Women's Equality Party (WEP) started with a (seemingly) throw-away comment made at the Women of the World Festival in March 2015, from British author and journalist Catherine Mayer. Frustrated by a panel discussion on women in politics, Mayer intervened from the audience: "Let's form a women's party and see what happens. I'll be in the bar afterwards if anyone wants to discuss it." By the end of the festival, Mayer acquired a party co-founder in comedian and presenter Sandi Toksvig. WEP was officially registered with the Electoral Commission in July 2015, and, in the same month, Sophie Walker was announced as the party's new leader. Just two years later, the party has acquired more than 65,000 members and supporters, with over 50 branches across the nations of the UK, and fielded candidates for the first time in 2016 in the devolved and London mayoral elections.

Unsurprisingly, for a new party, organising for a snap election was a challenge. WEP decided it was unlikely to field a full slate of candidates. Instead, it worked closely with local branches, evaluating whether or not to stand a candidate on a constituency by constituency basis, with the ultimate decision was taken centrally. The party targeted seven seats, but did not concentrate their efforts on particular regions or parties.

The party fielded an all-women list of parliamentary candidates including two BAME women. In all other constituencies, WEP claimed that they were looking to 'forge alliances' with other parties who shared their values. WEP came to an agreement with the Green Party: in exchange for the latter standing aside in Shipley, where party leader Sophie Walker was challenging Conservative MP Philip Davies, WEP agreed not to stand in five key seats being contested by Green women (Brighton Pavilion, Bristol West, Bath, Isle of Wight and Sheffield Central).

WEP's presence in two of these races proved controversial. In Shipley, a safe Conservative seat held by high-profile anti-feminist Philip Davies, the party attracted criticism for potential vote splitting and for its failure to engage with local feminists, the Shipley Feminist Zealots (so named after Davies described feminists as "zealots who want to have their cake and eat it"). The second controversial contest was Hornsey and Wood Green, held by Labour MP Catherine West. Walker had previously declared that the party would stand candidates against female candidates who failed to demonstrate support for its goals; yet their decision to stand against Catherine West appeared to be motivated more out of a desire to stand in a seat where they had a large concentration of members rather than because of West's record. The party fielded Nimco Ali, a high profile anti-FGM campaigner, who had to repeatedly justify her candidacy, arguing that she was 'standing for equality', rather than against a particular candidacy. The day before the election, the party called the police to investigate a series of threats targeted at Ali.

The party provided a costed manifesto which, in addition to building upon its seven core policy issues (equality in healthcare, representation, pay, parenting, education, media treatment and an end to violence against women), also detailed the party's vision for a caring economy, Brexit and immigration. The party also filmed themselves hand delivering their manifesto to the other parties, promoting this with the hashtag #nickablepolicies, to encourage other parties to adopt their policies. Staff members at all the parties accepted a copy apart from Labour, which WEP said refused.

This was a snap election, making it difficult to reach sweeping conclusions about WEP's performance. However, the party has struggled to make an electoral impact, losing all seven of its deposits. And while WEP has high profile members and significant media savvy, its policy positions failed to cut through the election headlines – particularly in a context where all of the main British parties have responded to demands for women's individual and collective representation. The UK's first-past-the-post electoral system, as well as the seeming return to two-party politics in the 2017 GE, present significant obstacles for the party. But the campaign will have galvanised WEP's supporters, and afforded campaign experience for WEP party members and activists. Moreover, the political uncertainty resulting from the 2017 GE, particularly over Brexit negotiations, may create further spaces for the Women's Equality Party to engage with the electoral process and get women's issues on the political agenda.

Table 1: constituencies contested by WEP

Constituency	Region	Incumbent (sex)	Share of the vote
Hornsey and Wood Green	London	Labour (female)	0.9%
Manchester Withington	Manchester	Labour (male)	0.4%
Shipley	Yorks & Humber	Conservative (male)	1.9%
Stirling	Scotland	SNP (male)	0.7%
Tunbridge Wells	South East	Conservative (male)	1.3%
Vale of Glamorgan	Wales	Conservative (male)	0.3%
Vauxhall	London	Labour (female)	1.0%

The resurrection of ethical foreign policy

Dr Victoria Honeyman

Lecturer in British Politics at the University of Leeds. Her research focuses on British foreign policy, including the Blair and Cameron governments and British aid policy. She also works extensively with the media, including the BBC and is Chair of the BISA Foreign Policy Working Group.

Email: v.c.honeyman@leeds.ac.uk

With the fallout from the Iraq war and conflicts in Libya and Syria, ethical foreign policy in Britain can be argued to have gone out of style. Theresa May made this clear in January 2017 when she stated that "The days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image are over". Her speech suggested that the active protection of human rights globally by the UK, whether in terms of justification for action or realistic aim, no longer carries such weight in Downing Street, and many may well be pleased to hear such a promise. However, foreign policy, like all policy areas, is complicated and slogans and soundbites rarely explain its complexities. While the conflicts in Iraq, Libya and Syria have undoubtedly been problematic, the downgrading of human rights as an issue seems equally problematic, if not disastrous for all involved.

To be fair to the Blair government, an ethical foreign policy was never proposed by them. Robin Cook, in his infamous speech in 1997 called for 'an ethical dimension' to foreign policy. This ambiguous statement raised as many questions as it answered, largely because there was no discussion in the speech about where in the political hierarchy of priorities human rights fit. Since 1997, human rights have been used as a justification, and an excuse, for military action in numerous nations, not always with positive results. May's speech indicated an end to such justifications. This is not surprising when considering the impact of Brexit on foreign affairs. In the light of Britain's exit from the EU, the government will need to build strong business relationships with some global nations with less than glowing human rights records. Some of these nations, including Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, are already important arms customers. It therefore comes as no surprise that May would seek to ease minds on the importance of human rights to Britain, although it could easily be argued that Britain's preoccupation with human rights has rarely led to a restriction in arms sales to repressive nations.

While foreign policy seemed to be largely overlooked in the 2017 election campaign, the Labour party sought to change that, by focusing their attention again on ethical foreign policy. While Emily Thornberry made little headway, the Manchester bomb changed the political environment. Corbyn's speech on foreign policy, delivered just days after the bombing, questioned the impact of British overseas military action on domestic security. Putting his timing to one side, the speech caused consternation in some quarters, with Ben Wallace, former Security Minister, describing the speech as 'crass' and 'appalling'. Corbyn's allies argued that the speech was attempting to consider foreign policy in a more nuanced way, moving away from the flag-waving, jingoistic message which is often repeated by politicians. Instead, Corbyn argued that the actions of the British government overseas had allowed terrorist cells to paint Britain, and the west, as aggressors, acting as a form of recruitment for these terrorist organisations. Considering the linkages of the Manchester bomber with Libya, it seems likely that Corbyn may have been raising a valid point, certainly worthy of consideration, but was this General Election campaign the time to raise it?

The Blair and Cameron approach to military action was certainly not identical, but there were some similarities in their justification for military action, with some notable exceptions. While human rights was often mentioned, security concerns tended to be the issue on which both Blair and Cameron hung much of their military action. Be it the supposed threat from Iraq and the 45 minute claim or Cameron's concerns over mass migration from Libya and Syria into mainland Europe, the threat to the UK is often identified as being a compelling factor for British action. May has argued that human rights concerns cannot be a factor for military action, but will the accompanying security concerns? For Corbyn the picture is even less clear. Like Cook, Corbyn is offering no detail on how he would balance human rights violations with domestic security, and it is clear why. Such a sliding scale is hard to explain under normal circumstances. It is near impossible in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, as Corbyn attempted to do. Inevitably he has been portrayed by some as an enemy of the British state, tying into the existing concerns over his links to the IRA and Hamas. May has wrapped herself in the Union Jack, suggesting that Britain will no longer place itself at risk by protecting abstract concepts such as human rights. For the British public, making a decision on foreign policy is not easy, with neither party being able to suggest a realistic plan to end terrorism in Britain.

Why immigration faded from view in election 2017

Immigration had been the number one issue of public concern before the start of the General Election campaign. Traditionally, this has benefited the Tories over Labour and the other parties. Several difficulties came up during the campaign that undermined support for the Tories and rendered immigration not only less of an issue, but weakened the Conservative Party's grip on it.

First, the Tories offered surprisingly little on how they would change immigration policies – and their message became increasingly confused. Their election manifesto committed them to the same net migration target of 100,000 and by the same means – placing their hopes that leaving the EU would make it possible to meet their target. The message was confusing. On the one hand, a net migration target would be in place, but on the other admittedly not met until long after Brexit talks concluded likely into next Parliament. At a time where voters have little trust in their politicians to deliver on immigration reform, this was an admission of kicking a major issue into the long grass.

Second, what was new on immigration was feeble. Parliament passed the Immigration Act 2016 launching a new surcharge on employers hiring non-EU labour. This was meant to raise money to fund apprenticeships and provide a disincentive on hiring from abroad. There is no evidence yet that numbers are down or new jobs created as the new fee now comes online, but yet the Tory manifesto pledged to double it – raising questions about what, if any, evidence was used to change a policy only just passed. More importantly, to say employers will have a new fee as the new means to cut net migration by over 100,000 didn't get far on the doorstep.

Thirdly, the Tories are more vulnerable on immigration now that they have a record. It was easy to attack Labour's policies using the latest migration statistics, but now they are proving very damaging to the Conservatives. While public opinion is still critical of Labour, it is now fact that the UK's net migration has never been higher than under Tory-led governments breaching over 300,000 per year. Perhaps the public could forgive the Tories and blame Labour for the first year or two of results, but nearly a decade of broken promises can only get Conservatives so far.

Fourthly, the Tories had mixed success on key immigration statistics during the campaign. They finally hit the headlines with achieving the first drops on their watch for two successive periods. This might normally be seen as a real boost. But the data behind the new figures showed they were driven by more EU nationals leaving what was perceived as an increasingly hostile environment – and the gains could be almost fully accounted for by the numbers of British nationals choosing to leave or not come back over the past 12 months. This highlights a long-term concern that raising immigration hurdles can actually be a disincentive to British nationals staying and raising families, especially when married to non-UK nationals.

Fifthly, the big issues were neither immigration nor Brexit. A US Presidential-styled race around Theresa May as "strong and stable" hit the rocks almost immediately with a U-turn over what became known as the dementia tax. This wavering in the face of intense pressure only four days after the Tory manifesto was published did serious damage to claims of being strong and stable for obvious reasons – and May never seemed to recover. It turned attention largely to the NHS and social care which generally favour Labour.

Finally, the Labour Party greatly improved their policies around immigration for their manifesto. While 2015 was characterised by mugs claiming "controls on immigration" later etched into the so-called Ed Stone (now reduced to rubble figuratively and literally), Labour developed a more detailed programme in line with their progressive commitments. It opposed use of arbitrary targets, favoured focusing on impact not net migration, defended a crackdown on exploitation of workers, called for reintroducing the migration impacts fund and a national review into immigration laws to build a system more fit for purpose than the largely ad hoc creature we see now. While Labour's new immigration policies were never going to win an election by themselves, they were more popular and helped make the issue less of an electoral liability.

Together, these six reasons help explain why immigration was not the major issue by the end of the campaign that it was at the beginning, why the issue did not benefit the Tories in any case and why Labour was able to confound most predictions. It's a cocktail few saw coming, but unlikely to change if another General Election is called in the next year or less.

Prof Thomas Brooks

Deputy Chair of the Education Committee and Head of Durham Law School.

Email: thom.brooks@durham.ac.uk

Invisible enemies, wars without winners: when 'khaki elections' fail

Dr James Morrison

Reader in Journalism, Robert Gordon University.

Email: j.g.morrison@rgu.ac.uk

Troops on the streets, covert Cobra briefings, terror threat raised to 'critical'. Semantic salami-slicing by security top brass about whether code red means another terrorist attack 'is' or merely *'may be'* imminent. Baleful words of defiance from the Downing Street podium about the need to defend 'our values, our country and our way of life'.

Two weeks before polling day, Theresa May and Amber Rudd's politically calculated reply to the carnage in Manchester arguably bore all the symbolism of what *Policing the Crisis* memorably dubbed 'law and order panic'. From its 'enemy within' rhetoric to its authoritarian actions, the Government's default battle-lines starkly echoed the apocalyptic responses from politicians, judges and law-enforcers that pepper Stuart Hall et al's atomization of an earlier 'crisis' of values, country and way of life – one played out through a distinctly 1970s cocktail of street crime, strikes, protests and (periodic) IRA bombs.

Of course, there is much that is different about the nature of today's marauding 'folk devils' – not least that, compared to the largely specious threat posed by the central bogeymen of *Policing the Crisis* (black 'muggers'), our latest enemy within, 'radical Islamist terrorism', is real (if also simplistically racialized and, at times, exaggerated). The more 'militarized' nature of the present threat also allows the state and its agencies to conflate law and order and defence under an overarching umbrella of 'security' - both in framing the problem and prescribing policy solutions. Faced with a back-pedalling pacifist as her principal rival - one repeatedly (if disingenuously) accused of opposing 'shoot-to-kill' policing on Britain's streets – by the time terrorists struck again, less than two weeks after the Manchester attack, Downing Street's 'strong and stable' incumbent should have made light weight of mobilizing a wave of public scepticism about Jeremy Corbyn's principled, but presentationally opaque, nuances. Indeed, in her fleet-footed move to take ownership of the earlier terror threat upgrade – appropriating the right to announce it from the independent Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) – May had shown every sign of following the Crosby crib-sheet to the letter. Similarly, her swift deployment of battle-clad troops onto Britain's streets symbolized a readiness to revive the 'war on terror' discourse long since publicly abandoned by UK ministers, with the armoured trappings of a state of emergency.

But, for all the 'strong and stable' imagery, Churchillian grand-standing and warnings of dire peril if 'terrorist sympathizer' Corbyn were elected, this was never going to be a clear-cut khaki election. For one thing, the rhetorical devices used to construct one were barely fit for purpose. With the image of May's 'snap election' statement still fresh in voters' minds, and amid criticism of her reluctance to meet ordinary people or debate her fellow leaders, her Number 10 podium now looked to be more protective barricade than public-facing platform. Even the mediatized 'spectacle' of her dispatches from Cobra seemed more transparently stage-managed than usual – with wider than usual tabloid exposure of the acronym's meaning, 'Cabinet Office Briefing Room A', betraying a level of bureaucratic banality more redolent of *Yes, Prime Minister* than Graham Greene or Ian Fleming.

More importantly, what marked out the historical Tory khaki triumphs of 1900 and 1983 and the more pyrrhic 1918 win for Lloyd George's controversial coalition was that each played out against recognizable iterations of conventional warfare: with, in turn, fixed bayonets, trench warriors and seaborne taskforces vividly mobilized against ominous, all-too-visible enemies. By contrast, war against Daesh and its adherents – invariably home-grown guerrillas capable of living (and plotting) undetected among us – is a wholly different proposition. Quite apart from the now widely recognized absurdity of waging war on an abstraction – 'terror' – what can victory ever hope to look like against a phantom enemy? And it is victory, above all else – dressed up as military conquest or the mere restoration of law and order – on which success in elections fought on securitized agendas depends.

The sobering reality of backdoors: cybersecurity and surveillance circumvention during GE2017

Cybersecurity and surveillance circumvention are not famed as classic election campaign issues. Yet both figured prominently at different times throughout the 2017 UK General Election, triggered by three devastating attacks during the campaign: the WannaCry ransomware attack that ground the NHS to a halt in early May; the Manchester Arena bombing on 22nd May that killed 23 and injured 119 people; and the London terrorist attack 3rd June that left 8 dead and 48 wounded.

The WannaCry ransomware attack affected computers worldwide (including several transnational companies), propagated through a vulnerability in computers running older versions of Windows. It reportedly affected around 45 NHS organisations across the UK with thousands of computers locked down, rendering patient records, appointment schedules and internal phone lines inaccessible. While the NHS was keen to stress that no patient data had been compromised, blame was quickly attributed to Government underspending on NHS IT infrastructure.

The Guardian reported back in May 2015 that the Government refused to renew a £5.5M million deal with Microsoft to extend support for end-of-life software. The NHS was singled out as one of several public bodies perceived as "exploitable by relatively low-skilled attackers". Much maligned Jeremy Hunt was attacked again in May 2017, accused of ignoring "'extensive warning signs' that could have prevented an unprecedented global cyber-attack which has plunged the NHS into chaos".

In the immediate aftermath of the Manchester Arena attack, the Conservative Government briefed reporters that they intended to enact parts of the Investigative Powers Act called Technical Capability Orders that would require technology and communications companies to break their own security and encryption to facilitate access for security services. According to anonymous 'senior ministers', "The social media companies have been laughing in our faces for too long" – with WhatsApp and Telegram messenger apps often singled out as having been used by terrorists.

May reignited the same calls for crackdown on encryption following the London Bridge attack. In what was widely perceived as a politicised intervention, she called for international collaboration to "regulate cyberspace" and argued that "We need to deprive the extremists of safe spaces online". This seemed to revive former PM David Cameron's plans from 2015 to ban end-to-end encryption, which was widely derided by industry experts and even opposed by Conservative stalwarts like Brexit Minister David Davis (who successfully challenged the Conservative Government on this issue in none other than the European Court of Justice). May's calls for stronger surveillance capabilities also triggered detailed scrutiny of the Conservative record – and Theresa May's six year tenure as Home Secretary in particular - on national security and cuts to policing.

May's comments on encryption were entirely consistent with her previous record on internet regulation. The 2017 Conservative manifesto echoed this tough stance, proclaiming that "we do not believe that there should be a safe space for terrorists to be able to communicate online and will work to prevent them from having this capability" (p. 79). It is important to remember that these manifesto promises come in the context of the recently passed Investigative Powers Act, which "allows for some of the most extensive and intrusive surveillance practices in the world". And that this is broadly speaking a Conservative crusade.

Whilst Labour promised to "provide our security agencies with the resources and the powers they need to protect our country", they also took care to balance this against ensuring "such powers do not weaken our individual rights or civil liberties" and to "reintroduce effective judicial oversight over how and when they are used, when the circumstances demand that our collective security outweighs an individual freedom" (p. 77).

The Liberal Democrats were even more explicit in their opposition, by promising to "Roll back state surveillance powers by ending the indiscriminate bulk collection of communications data, bulk hacking, and the collection of internet connection records." (p. 76), alongside other commitments to control and regulate surveillance. It was also the only manifesto to overtly pledge to "Oppose Conservative attempts to undermine encryption".

The Green Party simply called for the internet to "be free of state and corporate surveillance, with our rights and freedoms protected." (p. 21). The Conservative party's new bedfellows, the DUP, promised in their manifesto merely to "support the expansion of cybersecurity research in Northern Ireland" (p. 17). The most detailed anti-surveillance manifesto pledges were from the small Pirate Party (it received only 2,321 votes in total), while others – including SNP, UKIP, Sinn Féin, or Plaid Cymru – failed to make any specific mention of cybersecurity, internet regulation or surveillance in their manifestoes.

The lack of detailed policies or manifesto pledges in this area should be of considerable concern. Opponents as diverse as Brexit Minister David Davies and BoingBoing's Cory Doctorow, highlight that the entire premise for all of our everyday digital interactions (from banking to the health sector) is predicated on the ability to communicate securely. However well intended, any backdoor into such processes will paradoxically undermine not only the ability of your adversary to communicate securely, but also enable them to strategically target weaknesses in our own communicative systems. Case in point: the WannaCry ransomware that nearly brought the NHS to a halt at the start of the election campaign, was spreading via a Windows exploit stolen from the NSA. That is, the NSA identified the vulnerability and used it to create a backdoor for its own offensive surveillance work rather than reporting it to Microsoft to be patched – exposing weaknesses in the very same principles and methods advocated by Theresa May.

Dr Einar Thorsen

Associate Professor of Journalism and Communication at Bournemouth University.

Email: ethorsen@bournemouth.ac.uk

Twitter: @einarthorsen

5

The Digital Campaign

Corbyn, Labour, digital media, and the 2017 UK election

The 2017 election result was truly extraordinary in many respects but here I want to discuss what it reveals about the role of digital media in reshaping the Labour party.

The deep question here is to what extent Labour's surge during the campaign—and remember it was really only during the final two weeks of the campaign that the surge became evident—can be explained by broader, below-the-radar systemic shifts in political engagement in UK party politics and how elections are being reshaped by ongoing changes in our media system.

Central to this are new forms of engagement through digital media and how they jell with the evolving ground war on the doorstep and online, as well as longer-term cultural shifts in how people experience politics. As Jenny Stromer-Galley and I argued in the introduction to a special issue on digital media, power, and democracy in parties and election campaigns the growth of digital media in citizens' political repertoires has affinities with a broader shift toward youth engagement and a general skepticism toward authority. There is now a willingness among many individuals to see elections and party participation as fair game for social media-fuelled contentious politics of the kind that has been so important for non-party protests and mobilizations over the last decade. This is happening among those significant sections of the public who have started to channel their social media-enabled activism into party politics and to integrate it with face-to-face doorstep campaigning under the guidance of the new Labour party leadership and Corbyn's ancillary movement Momentum.

We saw similar forces at work with Bernie Sanders' campaign in last year's U.S. presidential election. We saw it with Italy's M5S and Spain's Podemos. Key here is the process of organizational and generational cultural change and how it fits with changes in how digital media are now used in political activity.

When Labour lost the 2010 election, and even as Corbyn continued to attract a huge influx of new members for his party during 2015 and 2016, much commentary revolved around the "death" of social democracy and even of the party form itself. But what June 9 suggests is that, for Labour and its half a million-plus members, the party organizational form is alive and kicking.

Rather than dissolving, Labour looks like it is going through a long-term process of adaptation to postmaterial political culture and is leading the way in new organizational strategies that combine online and offline citizen activism. Skepticism about Labour's new members, suggesting that they are not prepared to help out on the doorstep and are merely "clicktivists" who do not see the value of old-style campaigning now seems wide of the mark.

This is a complex process. Interactions between the organizations, norms, and rules of electoral politics, the new, flexible, ad hoc, connective styles of political engagement, specific issues, and the affordances and uses of digital media will make the difference. National, regional, and local contexts will also shape overall outcomes.

Digital media and the party-as-movement mentality

But still, digital media foster cultures of organizational experimentation and a party-as-movement mentality that enable many individuals to reject norms of hierarchical discipline and habitual partisan loyalty. Substantial numbers of the politically active now see election campaigns as another opportunity for personalized, contentious political expression and for spreading the word in their online and face to face networks. As a result, Labour is being renewed from the outside in, as digitally enabled citizens, many (though not all) of them young people, have breathed new life into an old form by partly remaking it in their own participatory image. The overall outcome might prove more positive for democratic engagement and the decentralization of political power than many have assumed.

So far, this shift has not touched the Conservatives. They remain a declining party, with a shrinking membership of fewer than 150,000, stuck in the elite-driven, broadcast-era mode that they (and Labour) perfected a generation ago, bolting on digital media targeting without the engagement.

Turnout among young voters rose significantly during this election. A reported 63 percent of 18–34 year olds voted Labour. The campaign saw a massive voter registration drive led by Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Greens, but missed in the coverage is that the parties were also joined by online movement 38 Degrees who ran their own crowd-funded registration campaign including targeted Facebook advertising that generated four million "register to vote" ad viewings. It looks like it worked.

At the same time, it pays to remember that these extraordinary changes are also accompanied by persistent, long-term trends in our media system. The election day front pages of *the Sun, the Star, the Mail* and *the Express* were outrageous even by the usual standard of these outlets.

The Conservatives achieved more than 42 percent of the popular vote and will be forming a government, albeit a weak one. Labour surged, against all the odds, but it seems difficult to suggest that the incessant campaign against Corbyn in the British press did not make a difference to the overall outcome of the campaign.

How long the Conservative minority Government will last is anyone's guess. But there are deeper changes underway on the British left. Digital media logics, in complex interactions with older media logics, older organizational forms, and evolving patterns of participation are playing a role in these changes.

Prof Andrew Chadwick

Professor of Political Communication in the Centre for Research in Communication and Culture and the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University. His latest book is The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power (Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 2017).

http://www.andrewchadwick.com

Was it 'AI wot won it'? Hyper-targeting and profiling emotions online

Prof Vian Bakir

Professor of Political Communication & Journalism at the University of Bangor. Vian researches strategic political communication.

Email: v.bakir@bangor.ac.uk

Twitter: @VianBakir1

Dr Andrew McStay

Reader in Advertising and Digital Media at the University of Bangor. Andrew researches profiling of emotional data.

Email: mcstay@bangor.ac.uk

Twitter: @digi_ad

The 2017 UK General Election has shown that social media are the real battleground, and this plays by rules typically found in Adland.

Facebook is where the action has been. Using technologies built with advertising and commerce in mind, political parties have targeted voters on the basis of age, gender and postcode. Regional targeting allows hyper-local messaging of a kilometre wide, allowing campaigners to pitch policies to resonate with hyper-local interests. Furthermore, *Facebook* allows parties to segment by our 'likes' and online engagement, what we say and what photos we post. This grants richer insight into life-stage, employment and views about issues. It also allows for *automated psychological profiling at scale* – in particular, targeting people's emotional triggers.

While analysis of the emotional valence of the UK 2017 General Election has yet to materialise, the 2016 EU referendum provides insights into emotional profiling and targeting of voters. Dominic Cummings (campaign strategist for 'Vote Leave') documents the potency of Leave's message on 'Turkey [i.e. immigration]/NHS/£350 million'. While dedicated voters are unlikely to change their views on the basis of ads, others can be persuaded by data scientists and their behavioural insights. Indeed, it only takes a small number of 'persuadables' to swing a close election: according to Cummings, Brexit came down to 'about 600,000 people – just over 1% of registered voters'.

Cummings also explains that, given Vote Leave's many campaigning disadvantages (including inability to control the referendum's timing, the fact that Vote Leave bucked both the government's wish and the status quo, and that British broadcasters were pro-'Remain'), Vote Leave relied on data scientists. Vote Leave spent 98% of its budget on digital (rather than mainstream media) advertising, with most spent on ads that experiments had demonstrated were effective, these positioned at the campaign's end as 'adverts are more effective the closer to the decision moment they hit the brain'.

Debate about the role of hyper-targeting, analytics and what is essentially information warfare was intensified when the alleged role of Cambridge Analytica in 2016's EU referendum and US presidential election campaigns was revealed. We should not depict this as a democratic collapse, not least because advertising technologies are not as effective as their sales teams tout. However, the prominence of analytics companies *is* cause for concern, especially regarding transparency of their activities to the Electoral Commission. The issue is this: technology platforms and companies are typically partisan, they have insight into what we think and feel, and this raises questions about scope for unhealthy and non-transparent influence.

Particularly revealing was a Sky News report on 16 May 2017 focusing on comments by Will Critchlow, chief executive of digital consultancy *Distilled*. Concerned about the UK's lack of oversight on digital campaigning (for instance, parties are not required to publically record all their spending on social media), Critchlow warned about *Facebook*'s hyper-targeted, hyper-local messages that, due to their nature, are invisible to most people (including journalists). Other techniques are: (a) creation of *fake pages* to attract opponents, using this to plant cookies in their browsers and then delivering attack adverts; (b) *rankslurs* – namely, creating damaging websites designed to appear in *Google*'s search rankings for your opponents; and (c) *impersonation* - namely pretending to be a candidate's aide on *Twitter*, then expressing plausible but damaging opinions.

Whether done by bots or human influencers, that people may be surreptitiously emotionally engaged in online debates is deeply worrying. There are precedents for such targeting of sentiment and feelings, not least the Facebook Mood study that revealed evidence of emotional contagion. This showed that exposure to a particular type of emotional content in users' *Facebook* news feeds stimulates posting behaviour that reflects the emotional charge of that content. In other words, change the informational context and you can change behaviour.

What political campaigners are doing is feeling-into online collectives, measuring individual and collective sentiment, and gauging 'fellow-feeling'. The scope to employ what McStay calls 'empathic media' to quantify emotional life means that big technology companies will only improve at profiling and quantifying our interests, fears, concerns and hopes. It further opens the door for automated targeting on an unseen scale, not least through algo-journalism and software capable of hyper-localised and increasingly realistic fake news. Indeed, analysis of Twitter in the 2017 UK General Election campaign shows that 16.5% of traffic about UK politics was generated by highly automated accounts. Furthermore, while professional news organisations accounted for 54% of the relevant content shared, fake news accounted for 11% - a not insignificant figure.

Due to technology and wealthy political interests, election campaigning is no longer transparent. What is evident, however, is the rise of automated online political profiling, measuring emotions, stimulating behaviour, algo-content, involvement of technology giants and rich donors happy to subvert electoral processes. It is surely time to critically challenge profiling designed to invisibly push our emotional buttons.

Sharing is caring: Labour supporters use of social media #GE2017

Social media has opened up a new tactical front for political campaigns, and the 2017 General Election showed how citizens – armed with smartphones, computers, and tablets – actively enlisted their support in the online electoral battleground. In this report, we look at how Labour supporters leveraged the platform-specific features of different social media to widely promote their favored candidate or cause.

Despite all their glitzy features, social media are virtual spaces built from rather unglamorous lines of code. These codes construct a social media's digital architecture: the functions that govern what we can – and cannot – see and do through a social network. Every social media platform needs a distinctive architecture that is constantly updated to keep users engaged and drive advertising revenue. Almost by definition, the 'social' aspect of social media requires that each platform offer some way for its users to share information. Sharing is not only a defining characteristic of social media; it is also becoming an increasingly strategic campaign tactic for both political parties and citizens.

Facebook, for example, has steadily decreased the direct visibility of posts from a public page (the type of account that political parties use) to encourage pages to pay-to-promote. With their so-called 'organic' reach limited by Facebook's digital architecture, political parties can only reach a fraction of their followers on Facebook for free – less than 10%. However, by successfully encouraging supporters to use Facebook's share feature, campaigns can increase their reach by channeling their message through citizens' personal networks. Critically, citizen sharing enables a campaign to reach users who might not otherwise be exposed to its political messages.

In this election, Labour appears to be the party who most skillfully mobilized an active base of citizen sharers, helping extend the party's reach across the Facebook and Twitter spheres. On Facebook, Labour garnered over 1 million shares during the entire campaign – three times as many as the Conservatives. Granted, Labour also posted over three times as often (547 compared to 161 posts). Although the Conservatives averaged more shares per post, the sheer amount of Labour's shares – enabled by an active citizenry online – guaranteed the party a 'strong and stable' presence on Facebook and helped mitigate the risk of their message being washed out by the Facebook algorithm.

Political accounts tend to have relatively small followerships; many citizens try to avoid politics on social media. (Run a search for tweets using the terms 'Social Media' and 'Politics' on Twitter, and you'll find the large majority of results bemoaning the encroachment of political discourse on social networks). One should be careful in looking only to parties' Facebook pages to find citizen campaigning. The most shared political story about the election comes from an alternative media source – a blog called An Angry Voice. The post, "How many of Jeremy Corbyn's policies do you actually disagree with?", has been shared on Facebook over 100,000 times. This more than doubles Labour's most shared post (48,730) and is slightly more than the Conservatives' (92,773 - although it's worth noting that this post, an attack ad against Jeremy Corbyn's soft approach on terror, was a massive outlier).

Sharing is also a key function for Twitter's architecture, which supports messages travelling outside of a user's network through hashtags. Throughout the campaign, retweets outnumbered tweets, with original messages representing only about one-quarter of the total GE2017 discussion. For campaigns, sharing by citizens may be even *more* necessary on Twitter, given its low level of algorithmic filtering and the resulting short life-span of a tweet. Here, too, Labour was able to mobilize its supporters, who pushed @jeremycorbyn to become the most retweeted and most mentioned political account. Moreover, Labour hashtags (i.e. #VoteLabour) ranked as the third most used after informative and media labels such as #GE2017 and #BBCqt.

Twitter digital architectures also allow bots (algorithm-driven accounts) that can automatically share messages from given accounts or with certain hashtags. Even though it is uncertain who is exactly behind accounts such as @Corbynator2 or @JeremyCorbyn4PM, these are clearly supporting Labour and their tweets are being shared 10,000 times, so they contribute to the further spread of party communication.

Instagram and Snapchat lack the 'share' feature often seen as integral for mobilizing political activity and were not used widely during this campaign. Users can contribute their pictures from the campaign but cannot easily distribute external posts. The power of these platforms is, rather, that their digital architectures are built around close ties; thus, uploaded content may be more persuasive peer-to-peer. Snapchat was barely used politically in GE2017, and there is no data on politicians' followers there. On Instagram, the best measurement of reach available is the number of followers, and Labour has one over the Conservatives: 33,200 followers vs 6,555 (partly because Labour established an account in 2012, compared to 2016 for the Tories).

Future election campaigns will be the ground to test whether the 'share' feature helps explain the dominance of Facebook and Twitter in terms of political use, and will show whether Instagram and Snapchat will adapt their architectures (possibly by building in a more distributive functionality) in order to become more attractive for political campaigning.

Dr Anamaria Dutceac Segesten

Lecturer in European Studies at Lund University and vice-chair of the Center for European Studies.

Email: anamaria.dutceac_segesten@eu.lu.se

Twitter: @anamariadutceac

Michael Bossetta

PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Copenhagen.

Email: mjb@ifs.ku.dk

Twitter: @MichaelBossetta

Labour's social media campaign: more posts, more video, and more interaction

Dr Richard Fletcher

Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. He is lead researcher and co-author of the Reuters Institute Digital News Report.

Email: richard.fletcher@politics.ox.ac.uk

Conventional wisdom has it that election campaigns make little difference to the overall election result. However, this doesn't appear to be true of 2017, as Labour – who had been slowly losing ground to the Conservatives in polling conducted before the election was called – reduced a gap of 24 percentage points (by some estimates) to less than 3 points in the final result.

Much of the analysis of the 2017 election will therefore be focussed on the campaigns. Many believe that the Conservatives ran a flawed campaign, and this is undoubtedly part of the story. Labour both appealed to and targeted younger voters, and because social media is an important source of information for younger people, it was a key part of their strategy. Before polling day had arrived, a report by the Oxford Internet Institute revealed that Labour dominated the election conversation on Twitter, lending support to a view among digital strategists that Labour had indeed won the 'social media election' (if not, as it turned out, the actual election).

Online video has been singled out as a specific area in which Labour outperformed the other parties. I've used CrowdTangle – a tool that monitors the output of social media accounts – to see whether this view is supported by the data. I've used it to compare the output of the official Facebook accounts of 6 parties (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP, SNP, and the Greens) during the 2015 and 2017 general election periods, looking in particular at the volume of video posts. I've focussed on Facebook, as it is by far the most widely-used social network in the United Kingdom (63% of the online population use Facebook each week, and 80% of 18-24s), and because there is a lack of studies based on Facebook data.

To start, I compared the number of posts made by each official party account in 2015 and 2017. Somewhat surprisingly, the average number of posts per day from all parties except the Liberal Democrats was slightly lower in 2017 than in 2015 (I use average number of posts per day rather than the raw figure because the 2015 election period was slightly longer than in 2017). But during both elections, Labour posted over twice as many times to Facebook as any of the other parties, posting an average of 12 times per day in 2017, compared to 3 to 5 times per day for the rest (see Figure 1).

So, what did Labour do differently in 2017? One answer is that they posted more video. The Liberal Democrats and the SNP both posted slightly more videos per day in 2017. The Conservatives, UKIP and the Greens posted fewer. But Labour, who already made more use of video in 2015 than any of the other parties, nearly trebled their number of video posts, from just over 3 per day in 2015 to over 9 per day in 2017. This means that around three-quarters of all posts from the official Labour account included a video of some kind (see Figure 2).

This matters, because for all parties in 2017 videos were more likely to produce an interaction (defined as a like/dislike, a share, or a comment) than any other type of post (such as an image, a link, or a status update). This is likely to be linked, in part, to Facebook's earlier decision to prioritise video content in people's news feeds. Labour were therefore particularly successful at generating interactions during the election period, producing around 2.5 million in total, compared to 1 million for the Conservatives, and no more than 400 thousand for any of the other parties. This is partly because they posted more often. But importantly, around 90% of all of Labour's likes, shares, and comments came from video posts. This figure is much higher than the equivalent figure for the Liberal Democrats (around 70%), the Conservatives, the SNP, and the Greens (between around 50% and 55%) and UKIP (around 33%).

Of course, the content of these videos is important, and more in-depth analysis will help build a richer understanding. Nonetheless, this data suggests that during the 2017 campaign Labour were indeed able to attract the attention of social media users through the use of engaging video content, which may have ultimately had some bearing on the eventual result.

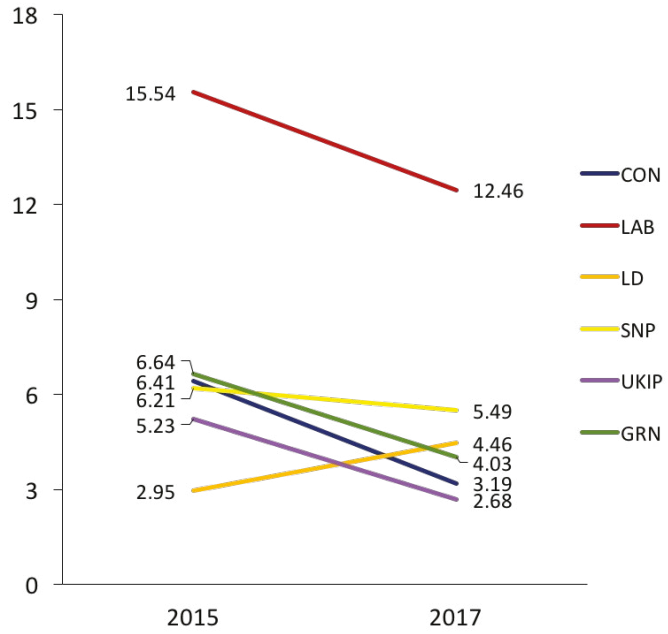


Figure 1: Average number of Facebook posts per day (2015 and 2017)

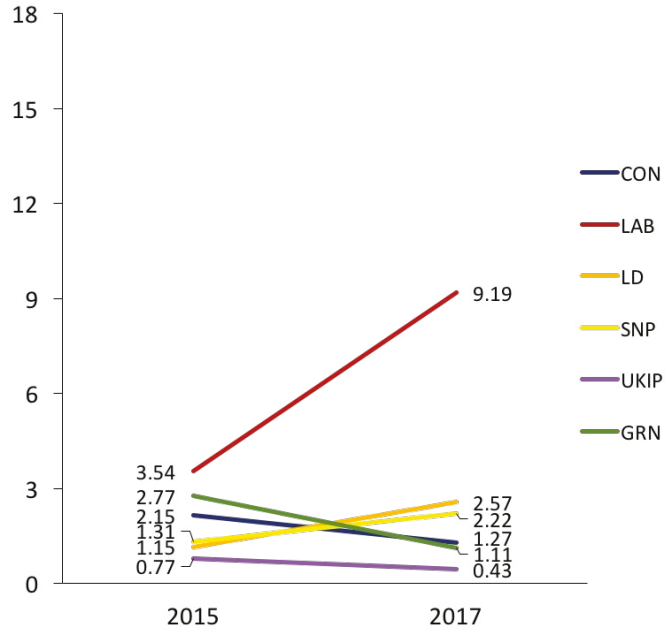


Figure 2: Average number of Facebook video posts per day (2015 and 2017)

Like me, share me: the people's social media campaign

Dr Darren Lilleker

Associate Professor of Political Communication at Bournemouth University.

Email: dlilleker@bournemouth.ac.uk

Twitter: @DrDGL

2017 is perhaps the first social media election, in terms of the likelihood of political activities taking place on social media having an impact upon voter turnout. It would be wrong to claim the election was decided online, rather that the key youth demographic who turned out in greater numbers is likely to have been exposed to, and thus mobilised by, communication promoting Labour online. As in the run-up to the election of Obama in the US in 2008 a left-leaning milieu had become highly active, independent media such as Another Angry Voice or The Canary became fervent supporters of Jeremy Corbyn. Momentum was created as a campaign organisation to promote him and his policies. Party involvement in online communication proved tentative prior to the election contest. However, as the party machine swung into action the activists began to promote its content. Social media may not have been dominated by Labour, but if you had any politically interested friends in your network there was a higher chance of seeing a Labour message. This is clear in the data displayed below.

The online environment is a complex one. A range of brands push their messages, many paying for the access to the communities of users of a platform. Political parties create free profiles; they are therefore not promoted automatically by the algorithms that deliver content to user news feeds. However if parties receive high numbers of shares this activates an alternative algorithm which promotes content based on popularity. Hence to be a successful a party needs a highly energised and active followership. Followers of parties need to be driven by intrinsic motivations, passion for the cause basically. Followers also need to feel that there will be rewards for promoting a party. Rewards can be provided by an election outcome. As polls tighten the drive to support the party users are passionate about increases and therefore activity likewise strengthens. But rewards are also provided by the user's network. If a user shares content and their network likes it in large numbers this motivates them to share similar material. Research demonstrates that online rewards from within a network, from peers, is powerful and can actually contribute to increasing the passion of the individual for a cause. We might therefore hypothesise that a person accidentally exposed to a political message they agree with, and who then shares that message will, if they get positive feedback in the forms of likes and comments, share more similar material. There is therefore a virtuous circle at work here.

SoTrender provide data on Facebook and Twitter which allows the disaggregation of activities relating to a brand's profile. Comparing the parties for number of followers, the percentage of those followers who engaged with the campaign and the overall interactivity for the last four weeks of the campaign May 12-June 8 we see the extraordinary advantage Labour had. Table 1 shows the data for Facebook. These figures indicate how shareable the content of each party was. UKIP's active support collapsed compared to 2015, the other parties struggled, but Labour had the highest followership, the second highest but overall largest number of engaged users and so over double the interactions with their content as their closest rival.

The Twittersphere shows less dramatic differences but Labour had a much larger followership and while not the most mentioned they were far more retweeted and liked. Their nearest rivals for gaining the retweets and likes that afford greater reach were relatively minor players. The mentions figure includes trolling, in this respect it is likely the Conservatives at times had a fairly hostile reception on Twitter.

The only real effect that can be judged by this is the increase in followership over the course of the campaign. The hypothesis is here that having an engaged followership equates to greater reach which in turn generates increased interest and followership. Table 3 shows the percentage increase for each platform over the course of the four week campaign. Again the story is one of exponential gains by Labour, sound gains by the Conservatives and the minor parties lagging behind.

These data reveal some interesting patterns. Interest in Labour increased by almost 20%, arguably this is evidence of the party benefiting from the high levels of activism among their supporters. The interest may well have been stimulated by partisan, or at least pro-Corbyn, platforms such as Momentum and The Canary. However the party as a whole benefitted and the campaigns locally also turned to social media. Strong performances by Momentum branches may have contributed to surprise results: such as Labour taking second place in true-blue Poole with a 16.6% swing. Labour's social media team supported this by creating far more videos, the most shareable and promoted form of content, so understanding the dynamics of social media far better than their rivals. The data also shows the collapse in interest in UKIP, and the Liberal Democrats not regaining anything near their support levels prior to 2010. These are indications that social media dynamics have parallels with the outcomes at the ballot box. In this respect social media may have played a key role in Labour bypassing the largely hostile mainstream media, getting support for their platform and encouraging interest, building support for Corbyn and the party, and mobilising the youth vote that seems to have been crucial in ensuring the Conservative majority was lost. Had the campaign reached and persuaded a further 2,227 to turnout in key marginal constituencies there is a likelihood Jeremy Corbyn would now be prime minister.

Party	Followership	Engaged users (%)	Interactivity Index
Conservatives	633,477	34.23%	6,239,432
Green Party	305,577	47.32%	1,405,806
Labour	989,752	44.59%	15,875,607
Liberal Democrats	185,914	24.01%	839,772
Plaid Cymru	29,249	20.09%	110,462
Scottish Nationalists	287,883	19.14%	1,209,605
UKIP	596,471	6.56%	599,567

Table 1: Follower numbers and engagement on Facebook per party

Party	Followership	Mentions	Retweets	Likes
Conservatives	269,859	84,297	25,381	209,633
Green Party	207,466	20,449	49,775	186,732
Labour	475,647	59,239	60,041	369,693
Liberal Democrats	191,070	52,065	39,246	135,364
Plaid Cymru	27,787	10,080	9,039	33,940
Scottish Nationalists	187,810	46,973	34,383	158,507
UKIP	166,246	32,151	15,223	66,875

Table 2: Twitter numbers and engagement on Twitter per party

Party	Facebook – percentage followership increase	Twitter – percentage followership increase
Conservatives	10.00%	8.00%
Green Party	7.43%	6.00%
Labour	19.98%	19.00%
Liberal Democrats	6.53%	6.00%
Plaid Cymru	4.44%	4.00%
Scottish Nationalists	4.73%	2.00%
UKIP	2.24%	4.00%

Table 3: Followership gains on social media

The alternate and influential world of the political parties' Facebook feeds

Dr Matt Walsh

Head of Journalism, Media and Performance at University of Northampton.

Email: Matt.Walsh@northampton.ac.uk

Twitter: @Matt_Walsh

It was Facebook wot almost won it.

After the 2015 General Election social media was decried as an echo chamber, endlessly reconfirming the biases of voters and candidates.

In 2017, social media gave us the largest clues to the political earthquake that was underway. The energised supporters of Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party consumed large amounts of Facebook content. The party was able to mobilise support via the large numbers of people subscribed to their Facebook feeds and organically sharing their content. The huge growth in likes, compared to other parties and leaders, should have been an indication that something extraordinary was happening.

The way the parties used Facebook was markedly different.

There were some common characteristics. With little notice of the coming campaign, social media became a vital and reactive tool for all the major parties. They all used their Facebook feeds to promote their key messages, to provide explanations of policy and transmit statements and speeches from their leaders.

The Conservatives feed displays a controlled attempt at messaging, at the start of the campaign there was rarely more than three posts a day. By the last weeks, post frequency had increased hitting a peak of seven posts on the 2nd of June.

Positive messages, particularly about Brexit, were transmitted from Theresa May's account. The main Conservatives page was used to house attack ads and other key messages. There was very little attempt to provide detailed explanation of policy and it was only following the pause in the wake of the Manchester bombing, that there was any attempt to create a positive tone. The party's Facebook newsfeed provided a hub of content that supported targeted digital advertising delivered to swing voters in marginal seats.

The Labour party feed was much more active, from the start regularly repeating key messages and content. This appears predicated on an organic rather than paid advertising model. The assumption being that significant sharing by supporters would have spill over impacts with undecided voters.

The content of the Facebook feed was relentlessly positive; there were very few straightforward attack ads. Although an attack on Theresa May's record on security and police numbers was one of the most shared social videos of the campaign.

The content tended to be of two types. Explainers of policy or polished campaign videos focusing on Jeremy Corbyn or celebrities endorsing the party. The key topics were the NHS and the impacts of austerity cuts on people's lives.

While there was much cynicism in the media of Corbyn's rallies, they had significant impact on Facebook. They were widely watched and shared. Their presentation of Corbyn as a successful and dynamic figure meeting crowds of people provided a contrast to the perception of Theresa May as a remote, cold figure who wouldn't interact with normal voters. A Facebook live video of a Corbyn rally in Birmingham, where he shared the stage with Clean Bandit and the actor Steve Coogan, attracted 2.3m views - an astonishingly high number for a political Facebook live video. While there was some local media reporting of the rally, it made little impact on the national press.

With the exception of the two terror attacks in Manchester and London, little news made it onto the Facebook feeds. There was no attempt to use Facebook, as the Conservatives did Twitter in 2015, to break stories.

The response to the terror attacks was different.

Following the shock of the bombing of Ariana Grande's concert, the Facebook accounts went silent for several days. They'd only just begun to campaign again when the London Bridge attack took place. In its wake, the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats all used Facebook to highlight their policies on terrorism. Theresa May's Downing Street speech of June 4th was posted on her Facebook page in full. Edited highlights of Jeremy Corbyn's speech of the same day were also posted on his account. Both Labour and the Conservatives launched highly watched attack ads lambasting each other's records on terrorism and national security.

The use of video to communicate political messages on Facebook was popularised during the 2015 election and it was a key tool for all the parties, with the exception of UKIP who barely attempted any significant engagement with their more than 500,000 followers.

This election also saw third parties engaging with political video. Most significantly, Momentum, who explicitly targeted the youth vote with satirical films and videos by credible political campaigners and journalists, such as The Guardian's Owen Jones and the writer Paul Mason. Some of these went viral and attracted significant viewing, Tory Britain 2030 was watched more than 7.5m times in the closing days of the election.

In conclusion, during the 2017 General Election campaign the major parties carried out aggressive campaigns on social media. They made extensive use of video to try and communicate directly with supporters and floating voters. These had various levels of engagement but when they did connect with users high viewing numbers were recorded.

But for the most part the campaigns tried to disconnect themselves from the news agenda, focussing on their talking points and key messages in an effort to disintermediate political journalism and the wider media. Given the settled view of the media establishment that the Conservatives were heading to victory, this policy seems to have been particularly successful for The Labour Party.

Change in Facebook likes +/- Name	Likes on 19/4/17	Likes on 08/06/17	Change figure +/-	Change % +/-
Caroline Lucas	72,907	81,347	8,440	11.58%
Conservatives	565,915	629,277	63,362	11.20%
Green Party	278,732	303,168	24,436	8.77%
Jeremy Corbyn	839,332	1,138,239	298,907	35.61%
Jonathan Bartley	7,661	9,082	1,421	18.55%
Labour Party	543,241	956,915	413,674	76.15%
Leanne Wood	31,071	32,447	1,376	4.43%
Liberal Democrats	161,513	185,049	23,536	14.57%
Nicola Sturgeon	293,704	299,346	5,642	1.92%
Paul Nuttall	46,802	49,389	2,587	5.53%
Plaid Cymru	26,426	28,912	2,486	9.41%
Scottish National Party	276,253	286,798	10,545	3.82%
Theresa May	343,562	419,094	75,532	21.98%
Tim Farron	30,823	37,458	6,635	21.53%
UKIP	582,364	596,109	13,745	2.36%

Fig 1: Change in Facebook likes for parties and party leaders during election campaign

Top 5 Facebook videos	Content	Party	Views (per million)
1	Attack ad on Corbyn's record on national security	Conservative	7.9
2	Corbyn's question to May on ITV's Facebook live	Labour	4.6
3	10 reasons to vote Labour animation	Labour	4.4
4	Attack ad on May's record on national security	Labour	3
5	Attack ad on Abbott's record on national security	Conservative	2.9

Fig 2: Most watched party social videos on Facebook

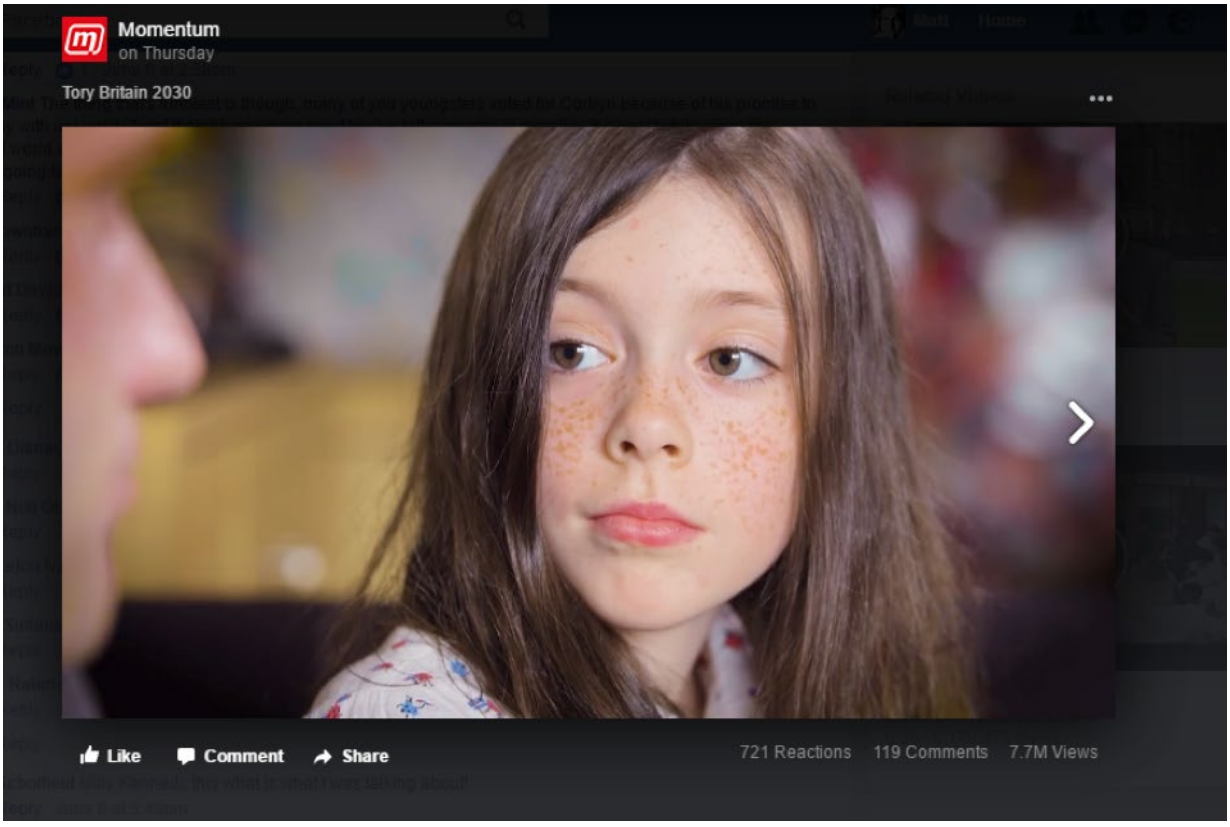


Fig 3: Still from Momentum campaign ad Tory Britain 2030

Social media and the Corbyn breakthrough

Dr Mark Shephard

Senior Lecturer in politics at the School of Government and Public Policy, University of Strathclyde.

Email: mark.shephard@strath.ac.uk

Twitter: shephard_mark

The days when we all interacted with identical information from limited media outlets has largely gone thanks to the growth of media and in particular social media channels. However, a more Orwellian interpretation is that social media algorithms actually restrict choice as our preferences become increasing determined by previous behaviour patterns. This is the difficulty facing political parties and candidates. Even if you can buy access to individuals and target messages (for example, free university fees targeting younger voters), you may be preaching to the converted and if not it is impossible to determine who paid attention, if they were impacted and for how long. There is also the question of regulation. Current laws are pretty laissez faire and parties are reluctant to reveal their online tactics leading to accusations of the proliferation of 'dark ads': targeted by constituency and consumer and online activity using algorithms.

However, what became clear in 2017, is that even with the resources to run more targeted ads, what is hard to predict is reach and impact via retweets or shares. When the polls were at their closest in the last week of the campaign, for example, the Conservatives tweeted nearly twice as much as Labour (382 to 220 tweets/retweets from June 5-8). However, tweet traction (likes and retweets) was considerably higher for Labour . They capitalised on their leader, Jeremy Corbyn, whose tweets regularly surpassed Theresa May's in terms of likes and retweets. Corbyn also caught the public mood with the inspirational populist manifesto catch-phrase 'for the many, not the few' and both he and the party pushed policy sweeteners on education, health and pensions to reflect their slogan. Labour's positive messages promoted incentives from their manifesto that could prove attractive for anyone earning under 80k. The Conservative's policy of austerity meant that they had little to sell, and lots to take from their core voters (for example, ending the triple-lock on pensions, ending universal winter fuel payments, and an 'elderly/dementia housing tax' to pay for personal care). Consequently, the Conservatives focused on negative posts about Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott (typically either gaffes on live media, or controversial policy positions such as Corbyn's on shoot-to-kill given the context of the terrorist attacks that happened during the election campaign). While these were the most popular Conservative posts, they gained nowhere near the reach (likes, shares, retweets…) of Labour's mix of promises and celebrity endorsements.

Indeed, Corbyn and Labour connected to celebrity endorsements and core music events (for example, #OneLoveManchester) where the views, likes and shares were earned from the resulting high profile UK-wide audience reach far eclipsing anything the Conservatives could manage via more mundane visits (for example, May visiting Atherley Bowling Club) and businesses (for example, May meeting traders at Smithfield Market). In short, while the Conservatives tweeted more in the last week of the campaign, it enjoyed far less reach than Labour via likes and retweets. The tweets of the leaders are also revealing. In the final 4 days Corbyn tweeted 93 times compared to May's 14. Across the campaign Corbyn posted over 8k tweets, May less than 300. Not only was Corbyn more active than May, but brand Corbyn became a campaign asset that countered his highly negative image portrayay in many tabloids. A rupturing dissonance occurred as Corbyn went from a low-base to being humanised and seen as a potential leader through TV debates and social media in contrast to the typical negative media portrayal. The exact opposite happened to May. Reluctance to debate on TV or social media (awkwardness and wooden performances) meant May went from a high-base to low irrespective of the anti-Corbyn line disseminated by the Tory press.

At the end of the campaign Corbyn had over a million likes on Facebook compared to just over 400k for May. Corbyn also had almost 1.2 million followers on Twitter, May had under 350k. In the final week of the campaign, Labour also posted three to five times more per day on Facebook than the Conservatives. This matters, because Facebook not only has a larger audience than Twitter, but online users engage with it more frequently and for longer periods per visit. Volume, and more positive content, arguably worked. A June 6th Corbyn event in Birmingham featuring Clean Bandit and Steve Coogan attracted 91k likes, 45k shares and 2.3m views. This contrasts with a negative ivideo of Diane Abbot messing up an interview posted by the Conservatives on the same day registering 12k likes, 10k shares and 1m views. Even when it came to selling Labour Party policy, Labour's '10 Reasons to Vote Labour' post was viewed over 4m times by June 6th. Online, the public seemed more interested in an upbeat party with things to offer than a party with less to offer and more negative ads.

Did the better online performance help Corbyn – Yes. The 18-30 demographic are most active online in terms of numbers and activities, and they actually turned out to vote in unprecedented numbers. Consequently, social media was more important in this election than any other. Young people used it more, used it more to spread the positive Corbyn narrative and also crucially turned out to vote. Had it not been for the multiplicity of anti-Tory parties and the first-past-the-post electoral system, social media might have helped tipped the balance for Labour.

The UK digisphere and the 2017 election

On April 18th, a resolute Theresa May held a press conference outside Downing Street, calling for a general election to be held on the 8th of June. Outlining the reasons of her decision, she explained that "at this moment of enormous national significance, there should be unity here in Westminster. But instead, there is division: *the country is coming together*, but Westminster is not". After the election result, however, the country emerges more divided than ever. Clearly, this was an election full of surprises and plot twists. How did it come to that?

First, although exact numbers of voter turnout were still unclear at the time of writing, it is likely that young voters under the age of 30 significantly shaped the election outcome. In its run-up, 1.5 million young people registered to vote, giving the Labour party with its popular policies, such as the scrapping of tuition fees, an electoral boost. Second, the respective launches of the Labour and Conservative manifestos worked against the latter. While a clearly rattled Theresa May struggled to contain herself during a press conference half way through the campaign in which she claimed that 'nothing has changed' – despite having u-turned on social care just hours before – the launch of the Labour party's manifesto received unexpectedly favourable news coverage. Third, the election was overshadowed by two appalling terror attacks that laid bare the cuts to police officers Theresa May and the Conservatives had presided over for several years. Last, but certainly not least, Theresa May's unwillingness to face her opponent in a TV debate, and her staged and somewhat awkward appearance on the BBC's *The One Show* did little to portray her as a likeable political figure. To the contrary, according to research by Loughborough University, on the back of his well-received Labour manifesto, Jeremy Corbyn gained momentum in the third and fourth week of the campaign and became the most frequently reported political figure in the news.

A further important aspect of this general election was the rise of new, alternative media online. This election is a prime example of how online, alternative outlets are now extending their reach to the levels expected of mainstream media in the past. Unlike their counterparts in the press, these new online media came out in enthusiastic support of Corbyn. One example of this trend is Another Angry Voice, a blog started in 2010 by English tutor Thomas Clark. In the run-up to the election, his post, 'How many of Jeremy Corbyn's policies do you actually disagree with?', became one of his most popular ones. As of June 8, his article garnered 4,300 reactions on Facebook and was shared 12,560 times. Analysis by digital market intelligence service SimilarWeb shows a huge increase in traffic to Clark's site between April, when the blog attracted around 50,000 total visits, and May, when total page visits surged to 370,000.

Similarly, analysis by the Buzzfeed News Social Barometer showed that three weeks before the election, an article by The Canary with the headline 'A bystander took a behind the scenes photo of Theresa May that reduces her campaign to a sham' had been shared 42,400 times on social media. The article shows Theresa May during one of her campaign rallies, supposedly surrounded by large crowds of people. However, the picture by the 'bystander', who had taken it from further afield, showed a much smaller crowd than the official pictures suggested. Other left-leaning sites such as Evolve Politics and Skwawbox, provided an antidote to the UK's often Eurosceptic, pro-Tory mainstream media.

Indeed, when looking at the UK general election through the prism of the mainstream media, one could almost get the sense that they reported on a different event altogether. Loughborough University found The Sun and the Daily Express attacking Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour party in predictably harsh terms reminiscent of the red tops' denunciation of the 'loony left' in the 1980s. The Daily Mail was also hostile to Labour, and broadly positive towards Theresa May and the Conservatives, an editorial stance echoed by The Times. This pattern of pro-Tory coverage shifted as the campaign period ended, with Jeremy Corbyn gaining momentum in some parts of the media. However, the coverage of his party overall remained negative. On election day, the Daily Express called on its readers to 'vote for May today' and The Sun called on the electorate not to 'chuck Britain in the Cor-bin'. By contrast, the alternative media mentioned above seemed to report on an election happening in a parallel universe.

As we know, the pro-Corbyn media were vindicated. And as if this election wasn't already surprising and unpredictable enough, the day after the result, even the usually Tory-backing press had their knives out against May. The Daily Mail's front page read 'Tories turn on Theresa', and The Times noted that May 'stares into the abyss'.

Here at the Digital Media Research Centre at QUT, we are working on a project funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) called 'Journalism beyond the crisis'. I have just completed my first round of interviews in Sydney, and across the board, journalists agreed that legacy news media no longer hold the sole authority of being the 'storytellers of our time'. In an election riddled by surprises and plot twists, the power of alternative media in this election lends strong support to that view.

Dr Aljosha Karim Schapals

Research Associate at the Digital Media Research Centre (DMRC) of Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia, working on the ARC-funded research project "Journalism beyond the crisis".

Email: aljosha.schapals@qut.edu.au

Twitter: @AljoshaKarim

From voices to votes: how young people used social media to influence the General Election

Vyacheslav Polonski

Researcher at the University of Oxford. Member of the World Economic Forum Expert Network and Global Shaper. He is the Founder and CEO of Avantgarde Analytics. His research focuses on complex social networks, human dynamics and the emergence of collective behaviour online.

Email: vyacheslav.polonski@oii.ox.ac.uk

Recent elections around the world have raised serious questions about the potential effects that social media might have on voters. The UK 2017 Election seems a vivid example of what happens when one political party completely neglects social media, while its opponent leverages its incredible momentum to activate young voters.

As seen during the EU referendum, social media is becoming a vital election campaign battleground. Young people increasingly turn to sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as sources of information and entertainment with regard to upcoming elections. In particular, we note Instagram has become popular among young adults to express political views and show support for the causes they care about. After Theresa May's election announcement , there was a deluge of Instagram posts about what this election might mean for British society.

In addition, to encourage young people to vote, several musicians, actors, athletes and social media celebrities joined the political battle. In the months leading up to the election, the hashtag #RegisterToVote caught on. It amassed over 29,870 public posts on Instagram showing overwhelming support for Labour, which we collected and analysed as part of our research at the Oxford Internet Institute.

Related hashtags frequently co-tagged hashtags also tried to galvanise youth into political action through memes and emotional appeals. For example, #VoteLabour (83,094 posts), #ForTheManyNotTheFew (20,063 posts), #JC4PM (18,275 posts), #ToriesOut (16,439 posts), #ForTheMany (9,738 posts), #FuckTheTories (7,499 posts), #MakeJuneTheEndOfMay (5,515 posts), #YourVoteYourVoice (5,046 posts), #Grime4Corbyn (2,251 posts) and, perhaps most ironically, #StrongAndStableMyArse (1,457 posts). All showed strong support for Labour and were predominantly promoted by young people.

Our findings suggest Britain's younger generation and their prolific use of social media had a massive effect on the election outcome. What is more surprising, perhaps, is the diversity of Instagrammers who decided to encourage young voters to register to vote while also showing support for Jeremy Corbyn. As shown in our exploratory study, the Internet is full of surprises and sometimes new advocates of democracy emerge from the most unexpected places.

Some of the most influential Instagrammers who actively stepped into the election campaign were actresses Emilia Clarke from Game of Thrones and Kaya Scodelario from Pirates of the Caribbean, high street brands like TopShop and Lush, as well as musicians like Stormzy and Clean Bandit, who all got behind Corbyn. To put things into perspective, Emilia Clarke's picture of her cute dog, in which she urged young people to make their voices heard, was liked by over 271,934 people. By contrast, the median post in the studied sample only received 21 likes.

As a direct result of this the number of young people registering to vote in 2017 was the highest of any age group. While no official data on youth turnout exists at the time of writing, some exit polls suggest turnout among under-35s rose by 12 percentage points compared with 2015, to 56 percent. Other reports estimate that as many as 72 percent of eligible 18-24 year olds voted. This surge in young people registering, soon dubbed as the "youthquake", partly constituted Labour's 10-point advance in vote share.

Throughout the election, Labour lagged in the polls but was winning on social media. Jeremy Corbyn's remarkable online popularity allowed him to defy pundits and pollsters to bring Labour back on track. This is good news for parties with similar political philosophies around the world who are facing upcoming elections. Our data indicates that young voters are not only more visible on social media, but they are also more left-leaning and more likely to put their faith in political parties that support globalisation.

For a new generation of politicians, social media now offers a new path to power that was previously unimaginable. However, merely relying on tech-savvy younger people online is not enough to win an election. As social media becomes increasingly crowded, competitive, and saturated with clickbait articles and fake news, many political parties struggle to build meaningful relationships with citizens. Our research indicates there is a severe disconnect between motivated voters, who keenly generate content on social media, and political party strategies.

Rather than relying on chance, social media momentum can be actively fostered through technological means at a large scale. Digital campaigning agencies like Avantgarde Analytics offer artificial intelligence solutions to make this political dream a reality. Deep neural networks can be trained to recognise patterns in social media behaviour and actively reach out to voters with personalised messages. In this way, machine learning algorithms can be used to better engage young voters; to inform them about the diversity of political opinions and guide them towards political empowerment in an accessible and personalised manner.

As the GE2017 campaign was entering the home stretch, Jeremy Corbyn could have used this form of algorithmic campaigning to reach out to the millions already expressing their support for him online and encourage them to vote. However, Labour still managed to cause a seismic shift. For many Conservatives the result was a huge surprise. Maybe next time, to avoid such a spectacular misjudgement, they should turn away from polls and look to social media to get a better sense of what is really going on.

emilia_clarke Follow

267,323 likes 5d

emilia_clarke This is the only creature who I can forgive for not USING THEIR VOTE. (Something about thumbs) YOU HAVE THE POWER. Register to vote before 22nd may. Do it. Just do it. Lets do it. If you don't vote we're all out of excuses. #UseYourVoice #registertovote #equalitystartswithmakingyourvoicehear d #yesmydogistthecutestthingyoullseeoninstaoutsideofyourbestiesbrandnewbaby https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote?gclid=CPiEhZz88dMCFe297Qod58AMpQ

load more comments

marabaetal In Russia that doesn't work exactly though we know that if you don't vote, someone will vote for you

mister.hemant @ishita.shahi chutiya lg

Add a comment...

gizzierskine Follow

2,762 likes 3d

gizzierskine Holborn tube says save your future #toriesout #registertovote

load more comments

rachelsmilesalot Labour encourages people not to work and makes working families pay for it.

catbanks @mike.l.healy

lucywint If you are encouraging people to vote labour you have clearly lost your mind.

susanfoynes The women vote needs to get out there, 9 million women didn't vote in 2010 out of an electorate of 45m and there are lots of reasons for this, encourage and help anyone you think may not vote

hannah1hudson Encourage people to vote yes but let them research and vote for who they want in power #vote2017

Add a comment...

cjh_ox Follow

23 likes 19h

cjh_ox Expected nothing less from the Tory Manifesto. Also, expected nothing less from the BBC's coverage, impartial my arse. 4 days left to register to vote, don't let Thatcher part 2 take the food from your children's mouths #torymanifesto #generalelection2017

undercoverbr0ther Brilliant picture this isn't it hahaha

cjh_ox @undercoverbr0ther I legit stole it from you fucking hilarious

keironkingsley Brilliant

undercoverbr0ther @cjh_ox didn't give me any credit? How rude

mainlinednb Follow

20 likes 1d

mainlinednb My first and last comment on the General Election 2017.

#generalelection2017 #theresamay #primeminister #jeremycorbyn #election #politics #uk #forthemany #forthemanynotthefew #election2017 #drakesaysitbest #drake #hotlinebling #hotlineblingvideo #hotlineblingmeme #london #parliament #westminster #registertovote #makeyourvoiceheard #labour #votelabour #jezza #labourparty

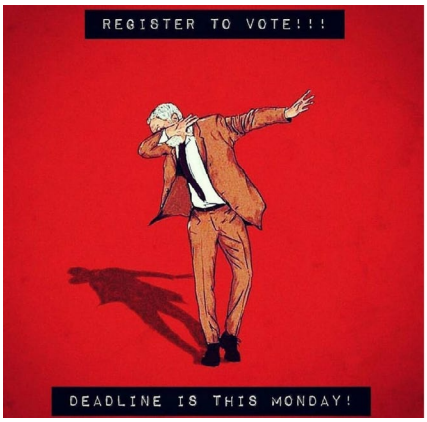
Add a comment...

jeremycorbyndoingthin... Follow

86 likes 7h

jeremycorbyndoingthings Torys are coming #got #gameofthrones #corbyn #jezwecan #jc4pm #grime4corbyn #ge2017 #generalelection #labour #tactical2017

Add a comment...



bebemadisonleigh
United Kingdom Follow

12 likes 11h

bebemadisonleigh Good people of Britain, register to vote before it's too late! #RegisterToVote #Labour #JC4PM #ForTheMany #DownWithThatcher #IMeantMay

Add a comment...

poison.1vy Follow

23 likes 18h

poison.1vy #truth #vote2017 #votetactical2017 #ukelection #generalelection #election2017 #starwars #lotr #Harrypotter #8june #registertovote #geeksunite #jointherebellion #rebelalliance #nerdsunite #nerds #geeks #geeky #geekygirls #geekyboys #comics #cosplay #cosplayersofinstagram #tactical2017

Add a comment...

All LOLs and trolls

Prof Alec Charles

Head of the School of Arts at the University of Hull. He has worked as a print journalist and a BBC radio programme-maker, and taught at universities in Estonia, Japan, Cornwall, Chester and Luton. He is the author of Interactivity, Interactivity 2, Out of Time and Political Animals.

Email: A.Charles@hull.ac.uk

Twitter: @alecrcharles

Theresa May's first Facebook post on 18 May, three weeks before polling day, heralded her newly published manifesto: "We can build a stronger Britain." Initial responses weren't exclusively enthusiastic. The first ten included support for Labour, suggesting her policies were "stronger" for Tory bank accounts and spelt a return to "the dark ages", a demand she apologize for the British Empire, posts calling her a "self-serving snake" and slamming her refusal to take part in a TV debate, and a link to a blog entitled 'Theresa May isn't strong, she's cowardly, evasive and weak – and I'm a Tory!' By contrast, the first ten responses to Jeremy Corbyn's first Facebook post that day (in response to that manifesto) were broadly supportive, with just one ambivalent response – "until we see the detail we have no idea what the relative impact is."

When on 15 May the Prime Minister appeared on Facebook Live only 14,000 users logged in. As the BBC noted the next day, the "female Conservative Prime Minister" celebrated by Tory Facebook groups tends to be Margaret Thatcher rather than Mrs May.

By polling day, Corbyn had 1.15 million Facebook likes and May 420,000. On Twitter Corbyn had topped 1.17 million followers, while May had reached 346K. Nine of the first 10 responses to May's manifesto tweet lambasted her hostility towards the disabled, elderly, unemployed, sick, homeless, children and foxes. Only three of Corbyn's first ten responses attacked his first tweet of the day. (He'd posted a shot of that day's i newspaper front page – "millions of pensioners lose winter fuel funding" – prompting one respondent to call him a "lying Trot").

As the BBC reported on 10 May, Corbyn "dwarfs his political rivals" on social media. His Twitter lead didn't reflect his support nationally, but may have symptomized that desire for change (particularly among younger voters) which led to a hung parliament. Yet Corbyn's campaign success might be ascribed less to social media than to his increasingly confident TV performances and what *The Independent* described as May's "spectacular series of mistakes".

To equate social media reach with electoral potential is clearly misleading. After all, as Anstead noted, in 2015 "Labour seemed to have a significant dominance in the online space." 2015 had been hailed as Britain's "first social media election"; but it remains unclear whether social media promote democratization or the disruption of democracy.

Donald Trump's exploitation of social media ("without the tweets I wouldn't be here") underpinned a divisive campaign, while the Brexit vote exposed discord propagated by social media. Fenton has supposed that social media inspire "a form of radical politics that favours gut reaction and quick fixes over long-term struggle." But might social media ever overturn established elites to deliver power to the people? Was that what happened with Brexit and Trump – or were those phenomena merely the triumph of (as George Monbiot suggests) "dark money" and (as David Remnick and Jason Wilson have argued) strategies of "constant lies", "clickbait scoops" and fake news?

Britain's political establishment have voiced concerns about a post-truth culture of fake news: what the Defence Secretary called a strategy of "weaponising misinformation" and the Chair of Parliament's Culture, Media & Sport Committee dubbed a "threat to democracy." The vogue for fake news and alt-right alt-reporting erupted in 2016 to fill a vacuum created by American mainstream media's refusal to address the Trump campaign with much more than contempt. But in Britain there's been no such void for the crazed rants of fake news to fill. Instead our spread of extreme news narratives ranges from the reactionary Mail lamenting 'Corbyn's plan to bankrupt the UK' (17 May) to the Momentum-sustaining Canary declaring that the Tory manifesto 'officially told the UN to go fuck itself' (18 May). It seems telling that when the Sunday Sport's parody of the *Daily Mail*'s campaign coverage went viral on social media – 'Teenage Corbyn squashed my sister's baby rabbit with his pogo stick' (14 May) – many readers mistook it for the genuine article.

Milan Kundera once warned against the laughter of a fanaticism "ready to hang" dissenters and a cynicism which "proclaims that everything has become meaningless." The polarizing properties of social media tend to foster such extremes. Far from fostering conversations to synthesize shared societal aspirations, their destabilizing effects undermine those dialogical sense-making strategies which sustain possibilities of political consensus – as social media starkly fail to fulfil their social potential.

These platforms aren't tools of political control so much as randomizing phenomena which open limitless opportunities for faux pas, spin political processes beyond party control, and – rather than toppling elites – merely add unprecedented degrees of unpredictability (or irrationality) to peacetime democratic processes. They may as such have longer-term impacts upon political realignments… but only time (and tweets) will tell. The best lesson social media have taught us is to expect the unexpected.

Captain Ska's protest song, 'Liar Liar GE2017', was released on 26th May and reached number 4 in the UK Singles Chart during the campaign.

Music and comedy duo, Casetteboy, produced another one of their infamous mashups - this time of Theresa May - during the campaign.

6

The Nations

Nasty, British and Short: an emotional election

In her 20th April interview on Andrew Neil's *This Week*, Gina Miller asserted "I'm interested in the facts; I'm not interested in any emotions". This is very surprising from the self-appointed leader of the anti-Brexit movement - because if Brexit revealed anything, it is that British politics are increasingly dominated not by neutral facts but by raw emotion. The dominant issues of 2017 – Brexit, immigration, faith in leaders, and security – are fundamentally emotional. Like Scottish independence and Brexit, the GE2017 was dominated by slippery issues of identity, sovereignty, and nostalgia, and subsequently the election was influenced by raw feeling as much as cold calculation. As a consequence, this election was nasty, British, and short.

The campaign has been nasty. The General Election was called in a country still smarting from bitter arguments over Scotland, Brexit, Trump, Le Pen, and indyref2; the emotional legacies of which had not disappeared when Theresa May made her announcement. Alongside these lingering divides, the campaign brought into national focus political frustrations which have appeared since Cameron's resignation and Corbyn's election as party leader. The early days of campaigning seemed to offer voters two equally unappealing choices: between an unelected authoritarian imposing yet more austerity, or a man with dubious connections who had refused to publicly sing the national anthem. In this atmosphere of heightened emotions, economic and constitutional issues were overshadowed. Throughout the campaign both Labour and the Conservatives appealed to emotions by castigating and sometimes demonising their opponents as heartless scoundrels or a direct threat to national security. This was particularly visible in the televised debates and interviews, in which audience questions aimed at both May and Corbyn were rarely neutral but instead laden with frustration and fury. Subsequent media analyses and endorsements focused on the personalities of the two leaders and appealed to emotions through such language as "cold", "robotic", "the nasty party", and tediously recycling the word "hope". These emotive portrayals of May and Corbyn point not only to the nastiness of the election, but also to the return of the old system.

The campaign has been British. In 2010 the sudden emergence of UKIP, the SNP, and the Con-Dem coalition suggested a transformation from American-style two-party politics to a European-style multiparty system. GE2017 ended that brief experiment. UKIP is nearly extinct and the SNP is in retreat, while the LibDems have failed to rally the remains of 'Remain'. This restoration of two-party politics has exacerbated, and been exacerbated by, the growing hostility and contempt between two parties which are no longer jostling in the centre as they have from 1997 onwards, but which are separated by a broad gulf. Corbyn has taken Labour to the far left, and May rather clumsily attempted to fill the centrist vacuum by taking the Conservatives slightly to the left. This strategy failed, but in its failure demonstrates how parties have taken a back seat while individual leaders have been pushed to the front. It is difficult to have emotional ties with an abstract entity such as a party, but very easy to form an emotional connection with a single individual. Online press stories on policy suggestions or manifesto proposals received far fewer public comments than reports of a party leader's or cabinet/shadow cabinet member's latest car-crash interview. The return of binary politics and the power of emotion are interdependent - particularly in the context of such a brief election.

The campaign has been short. Not only was this campaign shortened due to terrorism, but the increasing emotionalisation and bipartisanship of politics points to political debate itself becoming increasingly brief. First seen in the Scottish referendum, social media and the digital realm are fast becoming the dominant forum for political debate and information. In an age of heightened emotions and in an online world of single-click symbols and profile picture-frames which instantly advertise the user's voting intentions, social media users increasingly purge those online contacts who do not share their political views. The result is an electorate – especially the young – who gather and share information in politically homogeneous echo-chambers which have little or no contact with the opposing side. As a consequence, social media is becoming not a forum for civilised debate but a collection of digital soapboxes whose speakers merely hurl abuse and accusations at one another before unfriending and blocking. Debate, when it occurs, is becoming short and savage. If this trend continues, elections and referendums will become even more dominated by emotions, self-righteousness, and intolerance of diverse opinions. This does not bode well for future elections.

However, this is not of immediate concern. After national votes (or votes on national-scale issues) in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017, political exhaustion is setting in. The emotional response of 'Bristol Brenda' symbolises much of the electorate's fatigue, and even Corbyn's cage-rattling is unlikely to drown out the national sigh if another General Election is called. It is even more unlikely that the Conservatives, with Momentum unexpectedly snapping at their heels, will risk calling an election before 2022. Demands for Irish unification, a second Brexit vote, and indyref2 have clearly fizzled out, and so the need for national votes is temporarily over. The Conservatives are almost guaranteed to remove Theresa May but the party will remain in office, quietly propped up by the DUP, for five years. The 2017 General Election was nasty, British, and short – but at least it was the last one for a while.

Dr Russell Foster

Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the Department of European and International Studies, King's College London. His research examines the role of emotions, memory, and identity in contemporary British and European politics.

Email: R.D.Foster@uva.nl

Twitter: @RussellDFoster

Scotland in the 2017 UK General Election

Dr Michael Higgins

Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities at the University of Strathclyde. He has published extensively on media, politics and culture, and is currently writing on the development of mediated populism. Michael's most recent book – Belligerent Broadcasting (with Angela Smith, Routledge, 2017) – looks at performances of anger and righteous indignation in unscripted TV and radio.

Email: michael.higgins@strath.ac.uk

Twitter: @MichaelTHiggins

It will be clear across this report that the 2017 UK General Election was called on a single issue. Just as Edward Heath went to the voters in 1974 to ask "who rules Britain", 2017 election saw the Conservatives' Theresa May demand the confidence of the electorate in negotiating the UK's exit from the European Union. Neither request produced the desired response: Heath was removed from office and May's anticipated increased majority crumbled to a minority administration.

To some extent, such altered prospects are to be expected in the information vortex of an election contest. The tragedies that befall a functioning state, along with the interests and tactics of opposing parties, buffer and derail even the most robust campaign messages, and therefore played havoc with the conspicuously-vacuous "strong and stable" slogan favoured by Conservative strategists.

Scotland departed from the repetitiveness of the UK campaign, however, with the Scottish Conservative and Unionists opting for a more fruitful line on the internal composition and integrity of the UK. Attacks on the Scottish National Party (SNP) cited their alleged fixation on securing a further independence referendum, and consequent neglect both of other issues central to this particular election and their responsibilities in running the devolved Scottish administration. However, the most cursory examination indicates that whoever was consumed by independence over the period of the campaign, it was not the SNP. However, in a way that benefited the unionist parties, the SNP and the drive for independence had already become conflated. To take just one day, on the 5th and into much of 6th of June, the Scottish Conservatives' Twitter feed (n=21) included 16 tweets referring either to the SNP or their First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, along with 5 tweets referring to the constitutional arrangement of Scotland (especially the "Barnett Formula"), leaving 10 tweets to other matters, including the terrorist attack at Westminster Bridge and a visit by UK Conservative leader Theresa May to Scotland. Across the other parties and platforms too, McAngus and his colleagues found that the SNP referred to independence the joint-least of the four main parties, accounting for 10 per cent of party communications; 5 per cent less than Labour and 12 per cent less than the Liberal Democrats. As elephants in the room go, independence therefore proved to be a most peculiar specimen: one that not only received its warranted attention, but excited argument as to who was responsible for its invitation.

Yet, while it is true that the independence issue helped distinguish the political debate in Scotland, it is also arguable that Scotland became central to the UK-wide campaign. At a surface level, this was manifest in discussion of the influence that Scottish members may have in Westminster. But at a deeper level, this was apparent in a lexicon portending the destruction of the whole political settlement. Picking up on a trope developed for the 2015 campaign, the rhetoric of Conservative campaign groups and right-wing newspapers cast the SNP within a "coalition of chaos", alongside Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

This campaign moved along the contours of the devolved arrangement, informed by the on-going dynamic between contested powers across the periphery and the centre. In ways easily resolvable by political communicators, this had policy implications that may not have been made clear. As Cushion has recently noted in relation to Scotland, Wales and, now-tellingly, Northern Ireland, news and the packaging of party manifestos routinely ignored the devolved status of issues such as social care, disregarding the implications this may have for voter choice. In its symbolic status as well, however, the place of Scotland now reaches beyond the composition and balance of the House of Commons, and is symptomatic of a deeper constitutional uncertainty at a sub-national, national and now European level.

The General Election did little to solve Wales' 'democratic deficit'

When interviewed on television following his narrow win on Ynys Môn, incumbent Labour MP Albert Owen attributed his victory over his Conservative challenger to two factors: "The people of Anglesey were concerned about health and education," he said. Powers over both these issues have been devolved to the National Assembly of Wales since 1999, and so the people of Anglesey would have been better directing their concerns at the Labour government in Cardiff than the Conservative government in London.

Ignorance of what powers are devolved to the National Assembly of Wales continue to raise issues of accountability at both Westminster and Welsh General Elections. A survey by the BBC/ICM in 2014 found that there was widespread confusion about what powers were devolved to the Welsh Assembly, with only 48% correctly identifying that health was a devolved matter, and 42% wrongly believing they had control over policing.

The central problem is that while Wales now has many of the institutions of a modern nation-state, it lacks a public sphere that would keep the public informed about them. The country has no English-language national news service, and depends largely on the BBC as well as two regional newspapers, *the Western Mail* in south of the country and *the Daily Post* in the north. *The Western Mail* has seen its circulation fall from above 55,000 in 1999 to 16,754 in 2016, while *the Daily Post* decided in 2016 to no longer send a reporter to the National Assembly to cover devolved matters.

In May 2013 the Presiding Officer of the Welsh Assembly spoke in stark terms of what she termed the "democratic deficit" in Wales. She identified a "financial pressures faced by our indigenous Welsh national and regional press" as the main culprit, which meant that the population relied on "Anglo-centric" broadcasters and news outlets that reported on England-only issues as though they applied to the whole of the UK. One would therefore presume that elections would be a means of dispelling people's ignorance about these matters, due to the increased focus on Welsh politics. However, rather than clarifying the dividing lines between the different parliaments, both Westminster and Welsh General Elections tend to further muddy the waters.

The Labour Party's rallying cry at last year's Assembly Elections is that they were Wales' shield against the Tory government in Westminster. Their own record after 17 years of government in Wales was barely mentioned. During this year's Westminster General Election, the reverse happened, as they sought to distance themselves from Jeremy Corbyn's leadership by emphasising their autonomy from the UK Labour Party.

The Welsh Labour manifesto for the Westminster Election included plans for a relief road for the M4, improvements to the A55 and plans for metros for south and north east Wales. It also included a commitment to 30 hours of free childcare a week, a promise to build 20,000 affordable homes in Wales, and an increase the number of nurses, doctors, consultants and GPs caring for patients.

But the Welsh Labour MPs the public were being asked to vote for would have no role in implementing these policies - transport, education, housing and health are already devolved to Wales, and under the control of the Labour Welsh Government.

It is not clear what precisely can be done to ensure that the people of Wales are better informed about the distribution of powers between the Welsh Assembly and Westminster Parliament.

The growth of online alternatives has only hastened the Welsh print media's slow decline since its golden age in the 19th century. Ownership and editorial decisions are being further centralised outside of Wales' borders. The BBC could shoulder a greater burden in ensuring that news about Welsh politics reached a wider audience.

A 2010 report by Cushion et al into how much coverage of devolution was involved in the BBC's UK output found that, excluding news about UK politics at Westminster, only 3.6% of BBC television, radio and online news was geographically relevant to Wales, compared with 4.5% for Northern Ireland, 9.9% for Scotland and 82% for England.

It could be argued that the Welsh Assembly itself needs to take a more proactive role in educating the public about its role, either by investing greater resources in providing its own online content, or by financing independent, not-for-profit media. The online Welsh-language news website, Golwg 360, which is subsidies by the Welsh government, offers a model for how this could be done.

The only certainty is that an increased focus on Welsh politics will not necessarily solve the 'democratic deficit', if it is done through the prism of a media that itself has little understanding of or interest in devolution.

Ifan Morgan Jones

Lecturer at Bangor University's School of Creative Studies and Media.

Email: cos003@bangor.ac.uk

Twitter: @ifanmj

GE2017 in Northern Ireland: total eclipse of the moderates

Dr Neil Matthews

Lecturer in British Politics at the University of Bristol and former Research Fellow on the Northern Ireland Assembly Election Study 2016.

Email: neil.matthews@bristol.ac.uk

Northern Ireland's voters could be forgiven if their immediate reaction to Theresa May's calling a snap election was one of complete exasperation. Barely a month had passed since snap elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the 2017 General Election would be the seventh time in four years that they were asked to troop to the polls

The 2017 General Election result in Northern Ireland should be viewed in light of developments at the devolved level. Even by the province's standards, 2017 has been a seismic year in Northern Irish politics. It began with the collapse of the power-sharing government at Stormont; Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister (DFM) Martin McGuinness resigning in protest at the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP) mismanagement of a government-funded renewable energy initiative, among other things. Sinn Féin's refusal to nominate a DFM unless DUP leader and First Minister Arlene Foster stepped aside while a public inquiry was held into the scheme triggered fresh Assembly elections in March. Those elections saw a marked surge in the nationalist vote, depriving unionists of a majority at Stormont for the first time in the history of the Northern Irish state and bringing Sinn Féin to within 1,168 votes and one seat of the DUP's mantle as the largest party. The abiding impression was therefore one of nationalist gains juxtaposed with unionist decline.

Following the Assembly election, the DUP and Sinn Féin entered negotiations to end the impasse at Stormont. While there were small signs of progress, talks were cut short by the General Election. The Westminster election could therefore not have come at a worse time as far as power-sharing in Northern Ireland was concerned. Any prospect of reconciliation was quickly extinguished as parties retreated to their respective corners for another divisive campaign. With the close-run Assembly contest still fresh in voters' minds, the two main parties – the DUP and Sinn Féin – appealed to their communities for a mandate to strengthen their hand in post-election talks on the restoration of devolution.

Fuelled in part by the first-past-the-post electoral system, Westminster elections in Northern Ireland typically take the form of sectarian headcounts. 2017 was no exception. To avoid splitting the unionist vote the DUP opted not to field a candidate in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Likewise, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) did not stand in North Belfast, gifting the DUP a clear run against Sinn Féin. These informal constituency-level pacts were not replicated by the nationalist parties.

The election proved nothing short of a triumph for the DUP – securing ten of the eighteen seats available and increasing its share of the vote by 10.3 percent. This represented a high-water mark for the party at Westminster and would, ultimately, grant it 'kingmaker' status at national level (see below). Its eight-seat haul from the 2015 General Election was defended with relative ease, including in East Belfast where the incumbent was under pressure from a strong Alliance challenge. As well as gains in South Antrim and South Belfast – at the expense of the UUP and Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) respectively – the party took a substantial chunk out of the Independent Lady Sylvia Hermon's vote in North Down. 11 seats might well be achievable for the DUP in the not-too-distant future.

DUP joy was matched by UUP angst. Following Mike Nesbitt's resignation in the wake of a poor showing in March's Assembly contest, the party entered the election under new leadership. It would prove a chastening debut for Robin Swann as his party lost both its seats, South Antrim and Fermanagh and South Tyrone. The UUP's overall vote share slumped to 10.3 percent – a 5.7 percent decline on 2015. Coming off the back of a dismal Assembly election, this result leaves the once dominant Ulster Unionists facing serious questions as to how they fashion a way forward and arrest their interminable decline.

A similar picture – of a moderate party suffering electoral wipe-out at the hands of a more hard-line ethno-national rival – was observable on the nationalist side. Sinn Féin – with new northern leader Michelle O'Neill at the helm – posted its best ever Westminster result, winning seven seats. The most significant Sinn Féin gains came in South Down and Foyle, both at the expense of the SDLP. These seats were long established SDLP citadels: South Down had been represented by an SDLP MP since 1987; Foyle since 1983. Coupled with losing South Belfast to the DUP, these losses would leave the SDLP facing a similar existential crisis to that of the UUP.

Whatever of the results – and questions of the future viability of the UUP and SDLP – the 2017 election in Northern Ireland will be remembered for the bearing it would have on the formation of a national government. The Conservative Party's failure to secure an overall majority at Westminster saw them invite the DUP to prop up a minority government. What this Conservative-DUP arrangement means for the future of devolution in Northern Ireland, and relations between the DUP and Sinn Féin remains to be seen. No longer an exceptional 'place apart', often consigned to the margins of UK politics, all eyes are suddenly on Northern Ireland.

BBC
NI LEADERS' DEBATE
Does your party bear any responsibility
for the current Stormont impasse?

Twitter, dual screening and the BBC Northern Ireland Leaders' debate

Dr Paul Reilly

Senior Lecturer in Social Media and Digital Society at the University of Sheffield.

Email: p.j.reilly@sheffield.ac.uk

Twitter: @PaulJReilly

Previous research into 'dual screening,' when individuals switch between broadcast media and social media and provide commentary during media events, has suggested that this 'viewertariat' is typically a small but vocal minority (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Vaccari et al, 2015) . My aim here is to add to the limited empirical data on these practices by exploring the preliminary results of a study of how Northern Irish tweeters responded to the BBC Northern Ireland Leaders' debate on 6th June. While it is beyond the scope of this article to fully explore the context in which this televised debate took place, the continued impasse over efforts to restore the Stormont Assembly and disagreements over how to respond to Brexit had resulted in a negative campaign characterised by SDLP and Sinn Fein demands for a border poll and DUP rallying calls for unionists to come out in support of the Union. It should also be noted that there was much criticism of DUP leader Arlene Foster for declining an invite to participate (Sir Jeffrey Donaldson would represent the party), with Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill also a late withdrawal due to illness (to be replaced by John O'Dowd). The BBC debate would also provide an opportunity for Colum Eastwood (SDLP), Naomi Long (Alliance) and Robin Swann (Ulster Unionists) to make a last pitch to the Northern Irish electorate before polling day.

I used Discovertext to collect and analyse 1,842 tweets tagged with the official hashtag (#bbcnidebate) between 3pm and the end of the one hour live debate at 9pm. Twitter activity tended to spike just after key moments in the debate (see Figure 1). For example, between 8.27 and 8.30pm Donaldson would be ridiculed by tweeters for waving a photograph of Sinn Fein's Máirtín Ó Muilleoir meeting Ulster Defence Association leader Jackie McDonald at O'Dowd when challenged about loyalist endorsement of DUP candidates in the election. The DUP representative would also be the main talking point during the spike in hashtagged tweets between 8.33 and 8.39pm, when there would be bemusement about how he knew about a forthcoming Belfast Telegraph story on Shankill bomber Sean Kelly canvassing for Sinn Fein.

The response of tweeters to Donaldson's contribution to the debate came at the expense of other talking points such as Brexit and the scandals that had resulted in the collapse of the Stormont Executive (see Figure 2). There were also efforts made by each of the parties to flood Twitter with quotes from their respective candidates and provide evidence to corroborate their attacks on each other. For example, the DUP official account tweeted a link to a story about Kelly's link to dissident republican terrorists immediately after Donaldson's claim about him canvassing for Sinn Fein. However, as per my previous study, the republican party appeared to be the most strategic in terms of their use of Twitter during the debate. One of the most shared tweets in the corpus (retweeted 17 times) was attributed to An Phoblacht, its official newspaper.Titled 'SDLP credibility test', it featured a picture of MPs Mark Durkan, Alasdair McDonnell, and Margaret Ritchie along with the caption 'Couldn't lead the SDLP' and the hastag #Retired2Westminster. Nevertheless, it was notable that the tweets produced by each of the official parties represented at the debate tended only to be shared by accounts maintained by party activists and supporters. However, further work is needed in order to explore this preliminary finding about the ways in which these tweets were shared during the debate.

Northern Ireland tweeters appeared to respond favourably to the performances of Naomi Long and Colum Eastwood. The former would be praised for 'talking the most sense' and recognising the complex causes of political violence (particularly in comparison to Donaldson and O'Dowd). They were also angry at Donaldson's lack of respect for the Alliance party leader and for shushing her during the debate. The SDLP leader would also receive praise for his withering attack on O'Dowd, in which he claimed Sinn Fein had no influence in the EU Parliament due to its decision to sit with the communist parties of Bohemia and Moravia. Although O'Dowd received few messages of support via the hashtag, a few tweeters did express anger at host Noel Thompson's 'biased' and 'unfair' questions to the Sinn Fein representative.

Further work is needed in order to understand the dynamics of these information flows and what impact, if any, they have on digital 'refuseniks' and 'watchers' who don't contribute to such hashtags. However, these preliminary results do suggest that social media metrics (e.g. retweets) may offer greater insight into the relative popularity of each party rather than the views expressed by 'unaffiliated' citizens.Figure 1: #bbcnidebate tweets during Northern Ireland Leaders' Debate, 8-9pm.

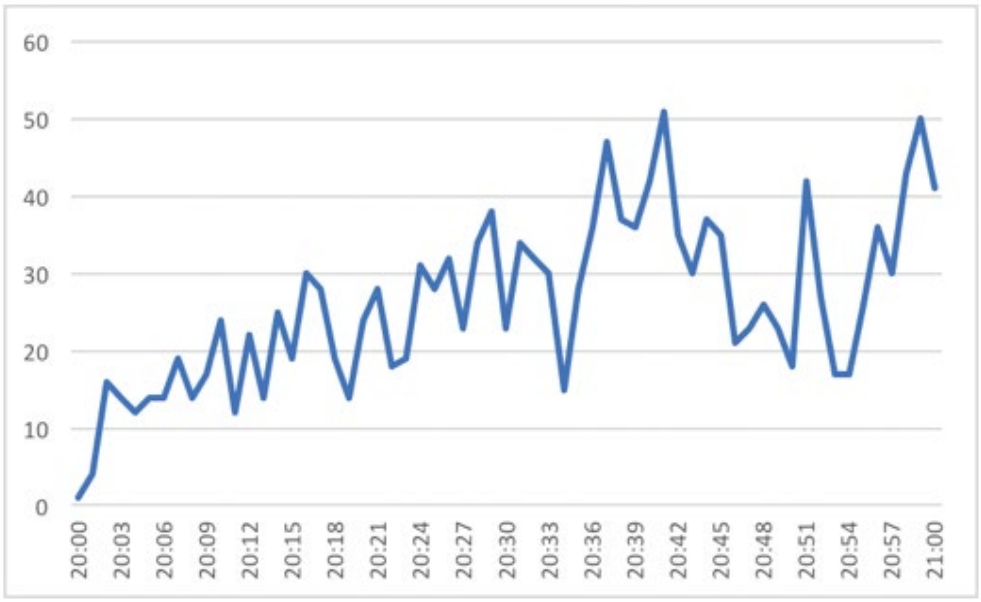


Figure 1: #bbcnidebate tweets during Northern Ireland Leaders' Debate, 8-9pm.

Figure 2: Most frequently occurring words in #BBCnidebate

7

Brexit and European Perspectives

Brexit without Brexitland

Brexit was central to this election, but not in the way we might have expected. The momentous implications of Brexit, both for the UK and for the EU, were for the most part sidelined by a campaign dominated by domestic concerns and May's public relations implosion. Labour glossed over the contradictions of their Brexit strategy and resolutely campaigned for social justice. The May-centric campaign, with its 'strong and stable' mantra, never went much beyond superficial sound bites. Nevertheless this was the Brexit election. It was rooted in the triumphalism of the Leave campaign's victory of June 23rd 2016, which we were told was a foundational political moment. Brexitland was a new Kingdom, in which the people had taken back control of their country from the Westminster and Brussels elites, and their representatives were compelled to restore sovereignty and greatness in their name. Born-again Brexiteer Theresa May perfectly symbolized the new order, having renounced her 'Remain' tendencies, she fully embraced the Brexit cause. Brussels may be out to get 'us', interfering in our election and proposing to extort billions for daring to leave, but it will be no match for this 'bloody difficult woman'.

With a 20 point lead in the poll, May's decision to call an election made sense. She concluded that the people wanted Brexitland and they want her to be its leader. Once ordained, her authority would be absolute and she could enter into battle with the EU as the people's champion. The point of the election was to crush dissenters in parliament who continued to resist the will of the people. "The country is coming together but Westminster is not" she told the nation. While in hindsight this appears hubristic, May's agency should not be overstated. She is the inevitable product of a right wing Eurosceptic coup within an archaic 'winner takes all' parliamentary system. She has surrounded herself by hard line Brexiteers, many of whom have nurtured the fantasy of revived greatness outside of the EU for thirty years. Most importantly they believed the referendum and the election would transform populist Euroscepticism into the moral community of Brexitland, and who better to do this than the vicar's daughter?

The Brexit vision we were told was rooted in notions of authenticity, its core base were the 'citizens of somewhere', at the heart of the nation in ways that elites no longer understood or appreciated. These social identities were mobilised by the Eurosceptic ideology of British exceptionalism, superiority and sovereignty. From this view, to spell out what Brexit meant, its complexities and impossibilities, is to undermine the vision of Brexit in all its 'back to the future' simplicity. In this sense, Brexit is what we are not what we become. It opposes all those who bring change - to the EU, to experts, to metropolitan elites, and to immigrants. Any future it projects must be rooted in the past.

According to Boris, the Brexit negotiations may get a bit 'hairy' but we'll be 'perfectly OK' even if there's no deal. The vision is 'post-Brexit' global Britain as Empire 2.0, economically secure in a revival of the Commonwealth and Anglosphere. In Brexitland the future is never a problem as we are always returning to greatness.

Farage complained following the election result that this is what you get when you put a Remainer in charge of Brexit but the collapse of UKIP demonstrated, with many voters turning to Labour, that the problem was more fundamental. When it became clear that the 'Empress had no clothes' it also demonstrated the vacuousness underlying the Eurosceptic power grab. Its biggest challenge has come from young people, who do not want to live in the past and face chronically insecure futures. In the referendum and election they have voted for a society that is open, diverse and fair. They reflect the reality of what the UK has been becoming for some time a more urban, educated and cosmopolitan society but also one that is more unequal and socially unjust. They are experiencing intergenerational injustice as their debts mount, their pay does not increase and they struggle to buy a home. Corbyn's appeal to the reality of social injustice is the perfect antithesis to Brexitland fantasies. Nevertheless, while the election may represent the end of Brexitland, Brexit continues and, as the economy slows, is more threatening than ever.

Dr Chris Gifford

Head of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Huddersfield. He is a political sociologist and has published widely on Euroscepticism in the UK. The second edition of his book, The Making of Eurosceptic Britain (Ashgate), came out in 2014 and he co-edited The UK Challenge to Europeanization (Palgrave, Macmillan), published in 2015.

Email: c.g.gifford@hud.ac.uk

Why the General Election will make little difference to the Article 50 negotiations

Dr Simon Usherwood

Reader at the University of Surrey and Research Investigator on the ESRC's "UK in a Changing Europe" programme.

Email: s.usherwood@surrey.ac.uk

Twitter: @Usherwood

At the heart of Theresa May's logic for calling the snap General Election was the argument that she needed a stronger mandate as she entered into negotiations with the European Union on the process of withdrawal. Having formally begun the process of Article 50 discussions at the end of March, May now needed to be able to demonstrate the commitment of the UK to pursuing this to its conclusion on the terms laid out by the Conservative Government in its White Paper, so that she could get the 'best deal' for the country. Moreover, Brexit became one of the issues that May used to contrast herself with Jeremy Corbyn, who she tried to present as lacking in leadership or having a coherent policy on the matter.

Quite aside from the merits of this line of argument as a campaign strategy, the more pertinent point is one of whether it holds true for the Article 50 negotiations. The EU institutions and leaders of EU member states were pointedly quiet during the general election campaign, limiting any comment to their pursuit of agreement among themselves on negotiating documents on citizens' rights and the financial settlement, and reminding the UK that the clock continues to count down to the March 2019 deadline. As in the EU referendum, there was a general understanding that there is nothing to be gained by trying to participate in the hermetically-sealed bubble of British politics.

Even if there were something that could be achieved, it would be dwarfed by the structural issue of how Article 50 works. It is a mechanism for the EU to manage the departure of a member state, rather than one for a departing member state to craft a new relationship: think of it as a schedule for the EU to work out what it will offer, rather than a menu from which the UK might pick and mix.

This is evident in a number of ways. During April 2017, the EU confirmed that it would approach Article 50 in a phased manner, working to resolve outstanding liabilities before discussing frameworks for a new package to be negotiated post-exit. Despite bluster from various parties, this means dealing with finances at the beginning, as well as forcing the UK to accept a role for the EU's Court of Justice in overseeing the new package. In addition, the ever-increasing level of detailed positioning coming from the EU side contrasts with the vagueness of all the main parties' manifestos on the subject.

In crude terms, the size of the new government's mandate – and even the shape of its policy preferences – is going to have very little impact on the substantive negotiations that were due to begin on 19 June, beyond the basic choice between being members of the single market or not. This is not because the EU does not care about the UK, but because it also has to care about the interests of the remaining 27 members, each of which has its own political imperatives and mandate. As the election of Emmanuel Macron in France in May demonstrated, even a 'big' member state has little effect on how Brexit will run, let alone one that is heading for the door.

If the election is to have an impact then it will be in two areas. Firstly, the uncertainty over May's position immediately after the vote has raised questions about whether 19 June will see talks occur, as both sides might feel more certainty on the composition and longevity of the British Government is needed. This means less time to reach an agreement within the two-year timeframe of Article 50, which in turn strengthens the EU's hand, as the only party with a clear strategy.

Secondly, the British Government's room for manoeuvre in detailed negotiations is likely to become constrained: the Tory leadership now has to balance hard and soft Brexiteers with the DUP, any one of which could deprive a government majority. Assuming this balances out, even if policy does not move, then UK negotiators are going to be less flexible, as they manage their domestic audience. This is going to make an already-difficult process even more so.

Totem, taboo and trigger word: the dominance and obscurity of Brexit in the campaigns

Brexit is the spectre at the feast. It was the making of Theresa May as Prime Minister in the first place; it was cited as the reason we had a snap general election; and it was the driving force behind May's personalised campaign. It looms large as the biggest legal transition the country has faced in generations, and it could well be etched into the political epitaphs of the 'victors' now sat nervously at the cabinet table.

But it remained a shadowy presence in the campaigns. An inability, or unwillingness, to engage with the details of Brexit meant that politicians had very little to say of substance. May urged us to believe she will make a 'success of Brexit' while Corbyn has spoken enigmatically of a 'jobs-first' Brexit. The manifestos gave the matter very little attention. The Conservative manifesto made numerous Brexit mentions, but devoted only two pages (out of 83 pages of text) to actually discussing it. The Labour manifesto didn't give it much more space – 4 out of 95 pages of text. Both were supremely vague on their objectives; the Conservatives wished to 'pursue a deep an special partnership' with the EU, while Labour wanted the 'benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union.' Corbyn has repeatedly spoken 'tariff-free access' which does not really mean anything. The magnitude and complexity of Brexit – and its sheer unknowableness – makes it a difficult, if not impossible topic to debate without descending into empty rhetoric, and makes it a difficult sell in the great marketing project of an election. And so while the word 'Brexit' was swung around like an oratorical weapon, even the basic objectives of Brexit were not discussed, debated, or scrutinised. The White Papers on Leaving the EU, and on the Great Repeal Bill had provided very little concrete detail, beyond ominous suggestions that government would be awarded substantial delegated powers to 'correct the statute book'. The papers were barely mentioned during the campaigns. In the 'Leaders Special' of Question Time, David Dimbleby asked May what a 'bad deal' would be; she responded that a bad deal would be one that 'punished' the UK, or was the 'worst possible deal at the highest possible price'. She might as well have said that a nasty deal would be a bad deal. There was a desperate dearth of detail in the campaigns on the biggest, most complex political issue facing the UK.

On the rights of EU nationals in the UK, a pressing issue stemming from the leave vote, the Conservatives proposed to 'secure' their entitlements, and the Labour Party pledged to 'immediately guarantee' them. Again this tells us very little. This issue on its own is incredibly complicated; the EU Rights Project has shown that it is hard enough to discern, and then assert, EU nationals' rights as it is in light of recent changes, let alone during and after Brexit. What measures would be taken to distinguish those who live in Britain from newcomers? What rights will be retained? What about the rights of children? What about when those children turn eighteen? What about EU nationals not yet born – will the right to reside be heritable for future generations? What of third country national spouses? How will other family members be defined? What about temporary returns to states of origin?

These questions demand a modicum of legal literacy, and there was little enough in evidence during the campaigns. However, in contrast to May's emphatic presentation of herself as negotiator-in-chief, during the course of the campaign Corbyn moved from emphasising his role in 'reaching out to colleagues across Europe', to place greater emphasis upon the legal credentials of his Shadow Secretary of State for exiting the European Union, Keir Starmer. It is possible, that maybe, just maybe, after a period of disfavour, experts might be creeping back into fashion….

The election result achieved the seemingly impossible, in that it has complicated things further. The minority government cannot steam-roller Brexit plans through Parliament, and will have to work harder to get cross-party agreement. This may mean there will be more meaningful debate and scrutiny. But we do not have the luxury of time; the two-year Brexit clock is ticking. According to Article 50(3) the deadline could be extended, but that requires the unanimous agreement of the other 27 Member States, so we should probably start meta-negotiations for an extension now. And the DUP – armed with its own wish list - has been unpredictably catapulted into a potentially pivotal role, which begs serious questions about what might be bartered for Brexit.

As the deadline bears down on us we need to get beyond evasions and platitudes, and into the legal, economic, social, political and environmental specifics. And yes – like it or not, we are going to need experts.

Dr Charlotte O'Brien

Senior Lecturer in York Law School, University of York.

Email: charlotte.obrien@york.ac.uk

The Conservatives and Brexit: the election and after

Dr Philip Lynch

Associate Professor of Politics at the University of Leicester. This article draws upon research for the ESRC UK in a Changing Europe project 'Parties, Parliament and the Brexit Process'.

Email: PLL3@le.ac.uk

Twitter: @DrPhilipLynch

The main narratives emerging about the 2017 general election are that it was a 'Brexit election' and that the Conservative campaign was disastrous. But the two are not closely intertwined.

Brexit was the dominant issue in the Conservative campaign yet we learned little about their position and rival parties only made limited headway in probing it. Still, Brexit did not deliver the votes the Conservatives expected. They gained some ground in constituencies that registered a large Leave vote in 2016, but the greater than anticipated numbers of 2015 UKIP voters switching to Labour helped unseat some Conservatives and deny them gains in the Midlands and North. Labour significantly increased its vote share in areas with large Remain votes.

As in 1997 and 2001, a Conservative campaign built around the EU issue did not bring great reward – but back then, Conservative divisions had been a key reason. David Cameron lowered the salience of the EU issue at the 2010 election and his referendum pledge kept a lid on dissent in 2015. In the referendum, 186 Conservative MPs voted Remain and 141 voted Leave (3 did not disclose their vote).

Yet Brexit, and internal divisions on it, was not the cause of the Conservatives' campaign calamity. There was no major Conservative dissent on Brexit during the campaign. Hard Brexiteers were relatively quiescent, buoyed by Theresa May's embrace of parts of their agenda. Nine Remain Conservative MPs had voted against the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill and seven others deliberately abstained. They did not dissent from the party line during the campaign, but a softer position on Brexit could not save Ben Howlett (Bath) and Tania Mathias (Twickenham) in heavily Remain constituencies.

Of the Conservative candidates standing in England and Wales, online searches reveal that 248 (43%) had voted Leave and 233 (41%) Remain. Among those who were not MPs in 2015-17, 109 voted Leave and 57 Remain. But most candidates rehashed the central party message rather than highlighting their own vote. There was no readily accessible public statement of how 91 candidates (16%) had voted. Many of these had not campaigned actively in the referendum (or the election itself). Some refused to disclose their vote and/or removed online evidence of it. Remainers may have been particularly reluctant to reveal their vote now that Brexit was party policy, but candidates from both camps may also have been wary of disclosing their position if it was contrary to the referendum result in their constituency.

The 2017 Conservative parliamentary party consists of 169 MPs who voted Remain, 138 who voted Leave and 10 (6 from Scotland) whose referendum vote was undisclosed. But many of the former were 'reluctant Remainers' and have accepted the Leave vote with few qualms. The trend since 1979 of each cohort being more Eurosceptic than the last continues. Considering seat losses and gains plus retirements and replacements since the referendum, there is a net loss of 18 Remain-voting MPs and 2 Leave MPs. Neil Carmichael, chair of the Conservative Group for Europe, lost his seat as did persistent Eurosceptic rebels David Nuttall and Stewart Jackson.

The EU issue wrecked the premierships of Margaret Thatcher, John Major and David Cameron. Theresa May now faces her own perfect storm on Brexit:

(i) a minority government with a wounded prime minister at its head, propped up by the Democratic Unionist Party which has its own Brexit demands.

(ii) the EU issue will dominate the new Parliament as negotiations with the EU get underway and the government tries to get the 'Great Repeal Bill' and other Brexit-related legislation through parliament without having a majority in either House.

(iii) a group of some 60 hard Brexiteers associated with the European Research Group who will insist upon leaving the single market and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, oppose a 'divorce bill' and lengthy transition period, and who would not hesitate (indeed, might relish) to walk away from negotiations without a deal. Among their ranks are a core of Eurosceptic rebels who have mastered the art of using parliamentary procedures to make life difficult for the government.

(iv) a smaller group of Remain MPs who will be emboldened by what they interpret as voters' rejection of hard Brexit and will not shy away from rebellion and will seek to forge cross-party alliances to extract concessions from the government. Twelve new Scottish Conservative MPs will seek greater recognition of Scotland's distinctive interests.

Theresa May hoped that by strengthening her personal authority and increasing her parliamentary majority, a general election would give her a mandate for Brexit and afford her more room for manoeuvre. Instead it has made the most difficult single challenge facing any post-war government even more formidable.

The 2017 UK election: reflections from Norway

When discussing the 2017 UK election and its possible implications, it is useful to refer to Norway's experiences and to draw some parallels between the UK and Norway. Norway has had two popular referenda on EU membership, one in 1972 and the other in 1994. Both produced small 'no' majorities. The interesting point about the 1994 referendum is that it was arranged after Norway had entered into the EEA agreement with the EU. Thus, in the 1994 referendum, the Norwegian population was not simply voting for or against EU membership, it was voting on the type of relationship that Norway should have with the EU. The underlying options were: free trade agreement (revert back to pre-EEA status); the EEA Agreement; and EU membership. All subsequent elections have produced parliaments with a significant majority of MPs that support EU membership. Voters who voted no to membership in the 1994 referendum have thus voted in favour of parties that have officially endorsed EU membership. They knew that their voter choice would not affect the EU membership issue.

There are clear parallels to the UK situation. In the referendum, the underlying options were at least three: some form of trade agreement with the EU; inclusion in the EU's single market (similar to the EEA Agreement); and continued EU membership. It was quite clear what would happen if voters voted Remain, but not if they voted Leave. Voters were not given the option to decide whether they should authorize the government to go for a soft Brexit or for a hard Brexit. PM Theresa May entered the 2017 election with a resolve to opt for a hard Brexit. Additionally she made all kinds of assurances of continued EU access, but did not spell out how that would come about when the UK would no longer be part of the EU's customs union or single market. In the election it became clear that voters supported parties that sought a more binding association with the EU. UK voters, as Norwegian voters, rejected EU membership, but wanted to retain a close relationship with the rest of Europe.

Another parallel between the UK and Norway pertains to the problem of finding a proper democratic procedure to settle the deeply divisive EU membership issue. PM May's behavior during the election campaign is symptomatic of these problems: she stressed that the election should be about Brexit but did not engage with the key underlying question, namely: which UK in which Europe? This fundamental issue cannot be addressed without paying sufficient heed to historical bonds and obligations. That would bring out the affinities between people on the British Isles and those in the rest of Europe, and such a discussion would need to include their voices and views, as well. In many ways, the UK election gives credence to the strength of Laura Cram's notion of 'banal Europeanism', or the sense of attachment that people develop through their daily engagements and interactions. Strong forces sought to replace this by a narrow, exclusive nationalism that sits uneasily with Britain's history and global outlook.

In Norway, the equivalent question: 'which Norway in which Europe' has never been properly discussed. Formal status as EU non-member retains the impression of sovereign control. In reality there is a significant gap between the illusion of sovereign control and the reality of self-imposed hegemonic submission (including taxation without representation).

Many analysts believe that the UK election result will compel the government to opt for a 'soft' Brexit. There is renewed talk of the so-called Norway model. Note that each EFTA country can bar the UK from entering the EEA after Brexit. It is not likely but UK admission requires their active consent. Some in Norway think that a UK that seeks a binding EU relationship could spell the end of the EEA Agreement. Others are concerned that UK EEA membership will politicize and render Norway's EU relationship more difficult to manage. Norway's EU relationship is based on a complex domestic compromise between a popular majority that does not want EU membership and a business sector anxious to have secure access to the EU market. This situation of close association without formal membership survives through removing the deeply divisive EU membership issue from the political agenda and preventing it from interfering with the rapid and dynamic EU adaptation. UK EEA membership is likely to politicize and render the status of non-EU member more apparent; hence reduce certainty.

Norway's experience brings up democratic procedural questions of relevance to the UK: How long does a popular referendum result 'bind' a government to a specific course of action? Can – and should - an election result override the popular referendum result? If so, under what circumstances? These are not only practical questions but require theoretical-normative reflection.

Prof John Erik Fossum

Professor of Political Science at the ARENA Centre for European Studies at the University of Oslo, Norway. His main interests are democracy and constitutionalism in the EU and Canada.

Email: j.e.fossum@arena.uio.no

Twitter: @johnfossil

Partisan and plentiful: the 2017 UK election in the German press

Dr Isabelle Hertner

Lecturer in the Politics of Britain in Europe at King's College London. Her research is comparative in nature and focuses on British, German and French politics. Isabelle's monograph, Centre-left parties and the European Union: power, democracy and accountability is forthcoming with Manchester University Press.

Email: isabelle.hertner@kcl.ac.uk

The German print media covered the general elections of June 2017 very extensively. It is fair to say that German newspapers and magazines tend to be more outward looking than their British counterparts, and that British (and other elections across Europe) always receive a lot of attention. This time, a plethora of issues and events were picked up by the press and discussed along partisan lines. The key themes were: the future role of the state in Britain's economy; Islamist terrorism and the different reactions to the recent attacks in Britain; and Brexit. Each theme will be briefly discussed in the following three paragraphs.

The future of the British market economy

Partisan affinities are clearly reflected in the coverage and the reporting. For instance, the left-wing newspaper *Tageszeitung* (TAZ) published a piece about Labour MP Kate Hoey's campaign in Vauxhall, focusing on her Eurosceptic views. What comes through in this article is a sense of political disillusionment many working-class voters in Vauxhall express after years of austerity. The TAZ also notes that Prime Minister Theresa May has

"added some Labour policies to her programme. She wants to make the Tories more palatable to the traditional Labour voters, for whom party leader Jeremy Corbyn is too far on the Left: more state intervention instead of uncontrolled market economy, limiting manager salaries with the help of shareholders, more participation for workers, an upper limit for energy prices. At a first glance, this sounds good. But is there a reason why we should trust a Prime Minister who, over many months, asserted that there wouldn't be early elections, only to hold them suddenly and out of base motives?"

A different perspective on Britain's economy is taken by the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ). Here, predictably, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto is criticized for being too leftwing and regressive in its call for the re-nationlisation of some key industries, such as Royal Mail and the railways. Labour's manifesto is described as a farewell note to the market economy. The FAZ's focus however, lies on the terrorist attacks in Manchester and London, and how these have affected the election campaign.

The British response to Islamist terrorism

The FAZ praises Theresa May's strong words and willingness to confront Islamist extremists. Her speech of 4 June, in which she introduced a four-point plan to combat extremism, and in which she proposes stricter laws and more online surveillance, is well received by the FAZ. By contrast, the centre-left *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is more sympathetic towards Jeremy Corbyn's statement that "the war on terror has failed" and that Britain's involvement in some of the wars in the Middle East, such as in Libya, might have contributed to the radicalisation of home-grown Islamist terrorists. In the article it is also argued that national security has become the dominant theme of the campaign. But although the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* remains critical of Theresa May, the newspaper was by no means convinced that Corbyn will win the elections:

"Is is, however, unlikely that the Tories will lose the election. For this to happen, Corbyn's popularity isn't big enough, and in addition [shadow Home Secretary] Diane Abbot speaks too much nonsense. It is rather possible that the victory will be far less clear than expected, and perhaps even so narrow that little will change in the current balance of power. In this case, one could ask themselves why citizens were asked to vote again."

The absence of Brexit

The implications of the UK elections on Britain's Brexit negotiations is of major interest to Germany. Different newspapers from across the political spectrum have highlighted that Brexit – the trigger of the snap election – was largely absent from the campaign. An article published by the liberal, centrist newspaper *Tagesspiegel,* entitled "Brexit-election campaign in Great Britain: beating around the bush" argues that despite Theresa May's discourse of a 'strong and stable' Conservative Government, British voters are far from united in their views on Brexit and in their preferences for Britain's future relationship with the EU. The article also highlights the Labour Party's internal divisions over Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn's ambivalence towards the EU.

The 'Chaos-Queen' from Downing Street

As expected, the election results have triggered speculation about Theresa May's future as Prime Minister and the challenges she might face in building coalitions. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* calls Theresa May 'the chaos-queen from Downing Street' who "has managed to further increase the uncertainty in her country". The FAZ also highlights the pressure May will be facing from the left and the right when negotiating Brexit. It will be impossible to please everybody, the newspaper explains. Overall, the German press portrays May as a lonely and beleaguered leader who might not stay in power for much longer.

Expect the unexpected: French media perceptions of the 2017 UK General Election campaign

"Will the British manage to surprise us again?", quipped *L'Express* magazine a week before election day, once the campaign had turned out to be much more gripping than initially expected. Tracking French media coverage of the UK General Election campaign had been somewhat dispiriting at first due to the paucity and lack of substance of the coverage. Because of the Brexit negotiations, the stakes were high for France as well as the rest of the EU, and thus the French media were eager to frame the UK ballot as D-Day for Brexit. But as the topic of Brexit in fact ranked very low in the election campaign itself, this angle could not get much traction. As in the UK, the tipping point came with the publication of the YouGov/Times poll on 26 May which showed a significant narrowing of the gap between Labour and the Conservatives. Something unexpected was beginning to take place. The spectacular rise of Labour combined with the shock of the two terror attacks rekindled French media interest. Despite initial concerns that French media coverage consisted mainly of rehashed UK articles and news agencies' dispatches, and that this failed to provide a specific French perspective, the analysis did eventually yield some interesting results.

If there was an initial lack of attention for the UK election campaign in the French media, with coverage almost nonexistent until two weeks before election day, this was largely a reflection of the fact that the UK General Election was sandwiched between the French presidential election (whose final ballot took place on 7 May) and the subsequent legislative election. In the national and international media, all eyes were set on the high drama of Emmanuel Macron's contest against Marine Le Pen. The victory of 'iconoclastic' Macron and the collapse of the two main parties of the left and right made the UK contest between the two traditional mainstream parties look very dull in comparison, especially as a conservative victory seemed a foregone conclusion. The duel between Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn, in many ways yesterday's politicians, hardly came across as a clash of the titans. This seemed to confirm the perception in France that, with Brexit, the UK had started shrinking into itself and may soon become an irrelevance.

Therefore, as in the UK, the surprise results were framed by the French media with some irony in terms of a risky political gamble – the second in two years – which had tragically backfired: May had played and lost, her poker strike turning against herself. There were references to a similar failed political gamble by Jacques Chirac twenty years earlier. Describing a spectacular own goal, *Le Point* mused on "the art of shooting oneself in the foot". French coverage of May's humiliating defeat also carried some degree of *schadenfreude* as her aggressive stance in discussions with the EU and her attempts to instrumentalise Brexit for her own political gain had generated strong resentment. This accounts for the narrative of punished arrogance when May found herself caught in her own trap. France's best-selling newspaper *Ouest France* even awarded May the "Palme d'Or for political suicide".

Another dominant narrative was that of the victory of hope over fear, epitomised by the figure of the underdog (almost) beating the favourite on the finishing line. Corbyn, hopeless in the face of the Tory juggernaut and subjected to a constant stream of shocking attacks by the tabloid press, suddenly stands as a model for the French left, as once Blair did. The French papers were unanimous in hailing Labour's defeat as a great success. "Jeremy Corbyn: singing in defeat", headlined *Libération*. Even though French commentators and politicians are not sure what to make of Corbyn, whom they compare in turn to Benoît Hamon and Jean-Luc Mélanchon, since the fate of the Parti Socialiste seemed to parallel that of Labour, the latter's unexpected reversal of fortune inspires hope in French left-wing parties. Hamon was quick to congratulate Corbyn in a tweet on 9 June and Alexis Corbière, Mélanchon's spokesperson, claimed on FranceTVInfo that Corbyn's success owed much to the France Insoumise model.

In sum, the unfolding of the UK election campaign confirmed the narrative of the unpredictable character of British politics, a perception which had been boosted by the shock of the Brexit vote. Thus *Libération* ran an article mocking the Conservatives' penchant for risky gambles which have left its European partners stunned. In the context of the upcoming Brexit negotiations, the French media relayed the EU's eagerness to get some clarity. While the Conservatives' poor showing has generated hope that May's hard Brexit option no longer is the only one on the table, French papers have been bemoaning the continued uncertainty about the negotiations, since the result has plunged Brexit "into a thick fog" in lieu of the clear horizon which the snap election was supposed to deliver. Meanwhile, the Brexit clock which was set in motion with the triggering of article 50 on March 29 continues to tick and the EU now faces the impossible task of negotiating with a Prime Minister sitting on an "ejector seat".

The UK 2017 General Election thus provides another illustration of the ability of the UK to take its French neighbour by surprise, leaving it once again dazed and confused and wondering what will come next.

Prof Emmanuelle Avril

Professor of Contemporary British Politics and Society at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University in Paris, Director of the Master of French-English bilingual journalism.

Email: emmanuelle.avril@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

Poles apart: Polish perspectives of the 2017 UK 'Brexit election'

Dr Paweł Surowiec

Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University, formerly Research Fellow at Charles University in Prague. He is the author of 'Nation branding, public relations and soft power: corporatizing Poland' published by Routledge (2016), and the co-editor of 'Social media and politics in Central and Eastern Europe' (2017).

Email: psurowiec@bournemouth.ac.uk

Similarly, to the UK's perceived 'special relationship' with the U.S., policy-makers in Poland warm to the idea of enjoying a 'special relationship' with the UK. This historically unique, yet not always politically cosy, relationship has oftentimes been a barometer of Anglo-European relations, in which Poland has vested interests in. The recent 'Brexit election' in the UK has a strong bearing on European affairs, since the political fallout resulting from the 2016 Brexit referendum is to be determined thereafter. In theory, the result of the June election will shape multilateral (pre-Brexit) and bilateral (post-Brexit) British-Polish relations. In practice, these relations depend on Theresa May's ability to remain in power and, consequently, in her ability to implement a compelling Brexit negotiations strategy. Unfortunately, the result of the UK election is seen in Poland as weakening May's position over the shape of a 'Brexit deal', and as putting a further shadow on the legitimacy of her approach to European affairs.

The announcement of the snap UK election was mirrored in Polish media with reports on two central issues: the right of the Polish Diaspora in the UK and trade relations between the UK and Poland. Despite the emerging voices from within the UK Conservative Party, including that of the Polish-born MP, Daniel Kawczynski, suggesting that when pressed on "free movement within the EU and the loss of sovereignty", among European partners, "these fell, and continue to fall, on deaf ears". Yet, following the Brexit referendum, the UK Government initiated the development of a 'strategic bilateral relationship' with Poland as a potential supporter of the British position during the Brexit negotiations. During the recent election campaign, relations between Poland and Britain were of limited importance to any political party, but the rights of the Polish diaspora in the UK have frequently been commented upon as the status of Europeans living in the UK is most certainly to become a political negotiating card in the forthcoming Brexit negotiations. This election also revealed that the 'Polish vote' in the UK is not yet strong enough to make a direct impact on political issues, but the recent political events have mobilized the UK Poles to engage in political debates about the direction their adapted homeland is heading to.

Apart from uncertainties surrounding the rights of Europeans in the UK, Poles including, Warsaw is concerned about the trade relations with the UK as its second biggest export market. Since the Brexit referendum, the Polish conservative government was gearing towards attracting jobs and financial capital from London to Warsaw. The competition over jobs, capital investment and talent became official government policy with a view to attract 'middle and back offices rather than their corporate headquarters' to Warsaw, where companies, after all, enjoy full Common Market access. In months to follow the UK election, UK markets will be observing growing inflation rates, but also the outflow of financial capital from the UK to Poland and other Common Market destinations. The type of the Brexit deal negotiated between May's government and the EU will likely be detrimental to these transnational market movements. Polish businesses, however, remain optimistic about the UK markets; for example, the Polish Airlines LOT has recently increased capacity to fly to London.

The 'Brexit election' campaign itself also echoed widely in Poland, and news media reported on Theresa May proving to be a less charismatic and weaker campaigning leader, losing her authority, and openly speculating that she will not survive the Brexit negotiations as the Prime Minister. Contrary to that, commentators in Poland praised Jeremy Corbyn for his ability to connect with the UK voters and, in particular, for his skills to mobilise youth voters, traditionally labelled as a 'disenchanted' electorate. Gazeta Wyborcza, a leading Polish daily, kicked off its reaction to the UK election with a headline stating "Catastrophe for Theresa May: Tories lose their majority. Corbyn calls for her resignation". This is one of many examples of media reporting on the UK elections in Poland through the prism of balances of power and issues surrounding negotiation with the EU. The political gamble taken by Theresa May by announcing snap election backfired, bringing however hope for more inclusive politics in the UK, and publically demonstrating a greater appetite for a 'softer Brexit'. In his congratulatory letter to Theresa May, the Polish politician and the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, paid less attention to personal curtsies, and more to the issues surrounding European affairs. For now, this letter captures nicely the mood of the Polish-British relations. This, I am sure Theresa May would agree, might change soon too.

Theresa and Jeremy: who is closer to Matteo? An Italian view of #GE2017

The Italian media have often been accused - both by scholars and politicians – to have a too narrow domestic perspective. Despite some exceptions, most of the Italian newspaper headlines still concern the domestic politics. Foreign politics news becomes central only when they concern 'media events': the results of the presidential elections in France, the election of the President of the United States, or the election outcomes in the UK. In the last years, however, another phenomenon has emerged: we refer to the assimilation and overlay process. Shortly, both the media and the politicians tend to create an overlapping between domestic political trends and the overseas politics. It happened during the recent French presidential elections (with the development of a storytelling about an 'Italian macronism') and it resumed during the short political campaign for the GE2017.

The view from Italy

During the GE2017 campaign we have observed three specific trends in the Italian scenario:

- the development of an assimilation and re-semantization process of UK politics operated by the Italian journalists and politicians;
- the development of a projection of the British outcomes on the Italian affairs, often adopting a stadium supporter's perspective (they strive for one or another for striking the possible national equivalents);
- the re-framing of the UK political news in the framework of Italian domestic politics.

For the first time in many years, some Italian news media tried to explain how the UK electoral system works; the Agenzia Italia (one of the most important Italian news agency) also produced a short video for Twitter.

Many other newspapers produced briefs about UK electoral system, comparing it with the German one, which chimed with an ongoing debate in Italy around electoral reform. Here, the German method (to be precise, an Italian complicated version of that) got an agreement (broken after few days) among the four major parties while the Left parties proposed a proportional system or the re-instatement of the 1994 electoral law which is basically based upon the 'first-past-the-post' method. Evidently, Britain did not invent the concept of 'coalition of chaos'!

The main topics of UK GE2017 (in the Italian scenario)

The UK General Election has been observed by Italy across three main topics: a) the question of Brexit and the consequences of the Tories' (expected) victory for the relationship between UK and EU; b) the influence of terrorism over the election's outcomes; c) the predicted defeat and disappearance of Labour. This third point has also produced a sub-point, concerning Labour's campaign, based upon social issues and egalitarian perspective and the 'emotional' rhetoric used by Jeremy Corbyn. This issue was discussed by a small percentage of journalists and by social movements of the radical left before the election, becoming a trending topic for the Italian media system on 9 June.

The first topic concerned the 'sure bet' of Theresa May and the type of Brexit she would pursue. But the Conservatives have fallen short of an absolute majority of seats and this has produced astonished comments by journalists and politicians. The second topic represented a typical 'soft' argument, but most commentators interpreted it as another advantage for the Tories because of Theresa May's shock allegations about a possible suspension of civil rights.

The Corbyn effect

The third topic has produced a vibrant discussion in the Italian social media sphere, divided into supporters and opponents of Jeremy Corbyn. Also, the socially mediated politicians have shown the emergence of partisan politics, as highlighted by the networks of affiliation and/or partisan divides. This is the tweet of an Italian MP (Democratic Party) on 9 June 2017: "With a different candidate, perhaps the Labour, after the slip of May, could win. What a pity: losing good is nice, but not enough"

Similar statements have been used by many leading political figures of the same party, probably to recover their wrong predictions over Jeremy Corbyn. On the other hand, even Matteo Renzi, interviewed by *The Guardian* in 2015, defined the election of Corbyn as leader of the Labour as the evidence that the party "delight in losing".

The debate about the real proportion of Labour's success constituted one of the main topic of discussions among Italian journalists and politicians. Jeremy Corbyn has brought the Labour Party to 40% of the votes, the largest result since 2001, with a percentage increase that has only a precedent in the Attlee result in 1945. This matter of fact has been used by the Italian media and political sphere as a further pretext for debating Italian politics. Once again, assimilation, internal projection and re-framing as distinctive elements of the Italian debate on the 2017 UK General Election.

Prof Emiliana De Blasio

Professor of Open Government and of Media Sociology at LUISS University, Rome, Italy and invited professor of e-Government at SciencesPo, Paris, France. Coordinator of the Observatory "Open Democracy"

Email: edeblasio@luiss.it

Twitter: @emilianadb

Prof Michele Sorice

Michele Sorice is professor of Democratic Innovation and of Political Sociology at LUISS University, Rome, Italy and Honorary Professor at University of Stirling, Scotland, UK.

Email: msorice@luiss.it

Twitter: @Michael_Sorice

8

Personality politics and popular culture

A tale of two leadership campaigns

When Theresa May announced the election, in April, the result seemed to be a foregone conclusion, for the Conservatives were 15-20 points head of Labour in most opinion polls, and May's own popularity and leadership credibility vastly exceed that of Labour's Jeremy Corbyn. A landslide Conservative victory – and a Labour meltdown – seemed to be a formality.

Hence the shock of the final result, in which the Conservatives' loss of seats deprived them of a parliamentary majority, while Labour made significant advances, even winning former Conservative strongholds such as Canterbury and Kensington. While elections are shaped by various factors, there is no doubt that leadership played a major part in the 2017 result – but not in the way that had been widely assumed at the outset.

Theresa May had begun the campaign by promising to provide the 'strong and stable' leadership which Britain required, both to tackle domestic problems, and to adopt a tough stance *vis-à-vis* other EU leaders when negotiating Brexit. She contrasted this self-image with Jeremy Corbyn, who she depicted as ideologically extreme, a throw-back to the 1970s, and lacking the diplomatic skills and experience required to negotiate a 'good' Brexit. If voters failed to return a Conservative government, May warned, the result would probably be a 'coalition of chaos', as Labour desperately tried to form a government with the Scottish National Party and remnants of the Liberal Democrats.

Framing the election campaign in this manner, the Conservatives placed relatively little emphasis on detailed policy pledges; the main thrust was on May's apparent leadership qualities and ability to pursue Brexit. Indeed, the Conservatives' campaign bus featured May's name in large letters on the side, while the Party's name appeared in small letters.

However, her strategy to pursue a presidential-style campaign calamitously back-fired, because in some of her television interviews – the ones which she actually turned-up for – she sounded 'wooden' or nervous, and was inclined to answer questions with slogans (repeating the 'strong and stable' mantra), or verbally attacking Corbyn.

Of course, the most damaging episode was the so-called 'dementia tax', whereby some citizens who required social care in later life would have the costs recouped from the sale of their homes after they died. Not only did the policy prove deeply unpopular, May's hasty U-turn when faced with ensuing controversy, fatally damaged her claims to be a 'strong and stable' leader. Some commentators believe that it was the 'dementia tax' which ultimately 'lost' the Conservatives the election.

May also suffered, it seems, as a consequence of the awful Manchester and London terrorist attacks. Not only did she link these atrocities to the need for stronger national security which could only be provided 'strong and stable' leadership, she also pointed reiterated Conservative allegations that Jeremy Corbyn had been a 'terrorist-sympathiser', due to his meetings, many years ago, with people associated with the IRA. However, May was immediately faced with criticism – including from some Conservatives – that she had been Home Secretary prior to becoming Prime Minister, and so had been the senior Minister responsible for cuts in policing, and the apparent failure to strengthen national security. This further weakened May's authority and credibility during the election campaign.

Yet the Conservatives' failure to win was not just because of May's woeful campaign. It was also due, in part, to the surprisingly successful campaign by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. He confounded his many critics – not least in the Labour Party – with a calm, assured, election campaign, in which he promoted a package of left-wing, but nonetheless widely popular policies. Crucially, these had been 'costed', to reassure voters that a Labour government would not be economically profligate or reckless.

Corbyn's calm public demeanour, affability, the courteous, measured and generally unflustered manner in which he answered questions, and his reluctance to engage in personalised attacks on his Conservative opponents, greatly impressed many television viewers and those who saw Corbyn via social media. This did much to counter the vicious attacks on him by pro-Conservative newspapers. Indeed, some of these press attacks might inadvertently have boosted Corbyn's popularity, partly because the 'calm' Corbyn who viewers saw and heard on TV bore little relation to the 'extremist' Corbyn they read about in pro-Conservative papers, and partly because the sheer vitriol of the press attacks on Corbyn's character offended a British sense of 'fair play'.

In these respects, therefore, the 2017 general election was a dramatic tale of two leadership campaigns. The Conservatives' Theresa May had a disastrous, error-strewn, campaign which destroyed her 'strong and stable' persona, and led to a catastrophic loss of support. By contrast, Labour's Jeremy Corbyn astonished many people with his positive campaign, popular and 'costed' policies, and refusal to engage in personal attacks against his political opponents. As May's popularity plummeted, Corbyn's soared.

Prof Pete Dorey

Professor of British Politics in the School of Law and Politics at Cardiff University. In 2014, he was Visiting Professor of Politics at Bordeaux University. He has published over 100 books, articles and chapters on aspects of post-1945 British politics, many of these on political parties, leadership rhetoric and communication, and elections and voting patterns.

Email: dorey@cardiff.ac.uk

Seeing Jeremy Corbyn and not seeing Theresa May: the promise of civic spectatorship

Dr Katy Parry

Associate Professor in Media and Communication, University of Leeds. She is a co-author of Political Culture and Media Genre: Beyond the News (2012) with Kay Richardson and John Corner. Along with Stephen Coleman and Giles Moss, she has co-edited a Festschrift for Jay G. Blumler, Can the Media Serve Democracy? (2015).

Email: k.j.parry@leeds.ac.uk.

Twitter: @reticentk

During an election campaign political actors vie for attention and a distinctively managed form of visibility. In the age of digital media, the public image of the political leader is caught between ever-more tightly controlled staging of photo opportunities and the counter imaging practices of those hoping to reveal an unguarded moment, or who might create a fantasy mash-up version if such a moment does not exist. Controlling the 'optics' of the election is about hoping to influence value judgements, especially in relation to leadership qualities.

The 2017 general election campaign has been 'highly presidentialised', with the smaller parties and other usually prominent politicians sidelined in an election narrative centred on a choice between 'him or her'. In calling a snap election Theresa May immediately occupied an advantageous position: with the authority of the Downing Street stage as her backdrop, she aimed to project herself as the embodiment of strong leadership. This was her message and she was going to stick to it. But May's inflexible style soon led to a one-dimensional public image, as if she was a prisoner who could not escape the confines of a podium with placards held aloft behind her. When she did manage to escape she floundered and looked awkward in off-script moments. An early attempt at projecting ordinariness by eating a cone of chips was photoshopped to take that intended message to a wonderfully absurd level (Figure 1).

Contrast this with Labour offering not just a three-dimensional leader, but a 360 degree video of Jeremy Corbyn's public addresses on their Facebook page. In launching their use of 360 degree filming technology at major events, Corbyn stated 'This is accessible, participatory politics for the 21st century' and claimed that the immersive video enabled Facebook users to experience the event 'as if they were there'. While such faith in the visual technology might be over-stated in that claim, the initiative skilfully aligned openness and visibility with honesty and accessibility. In terms of participatory visual politics, the memes and videos often produced by Momentum activists, in addition to interested supporters, captured the DIY aesthetic of 'outsider' Corbyn in an attractive and humorous way.

As the campaign progressed, the Labour leader attracted huge crowds at rallies, with Channel 4's Michael Crick tweeting that Corbyn had probably addressed bigger meetings than any leader since Churchill (Figure 2). For viewers of such media reports, seeing large numbers of ordinary citizens mobilised in this way worked as visual evidence of his popularity. We might question whether these images merely represented the party faithful in safe Labour seats but this would be to miss their wider significance. The accumulative power of such visuals achieved something remarkable, cutting through the negativity of right-wing tabloid scenarios due to their effective harnessing of an authentic mood of positivity.

It would be simplistic to suggest that the sensational shift in the polls during the campaign, and specifically in the perceptions of the two leaders, can be explained away by reading the media images alone. But as Justin Lewis has argued, broadcast impartiality rules opened up the space for a more balanced approach to Corbyn, and so both an increased *and fair-minded* visibility worked in his favour, not enough to win the election but enough to reduce the Conservative majority in a dramatic political shock.

Outside No 10 on the morning of 9 June, the BBC's political editor Laura Kuenssberg directly commented on the bad 'optics' of Theresa May staying holed up inside, that this would 'not look good'. On one level this could be the frustration of a reporter who is waiting for the drama to unfold, but on another level it acknowledges the importance of been *seen* by and in the public. To take it a step further, we can think of the public as brought into being through attentive and participatory spectatorship; we want to see our leaders and see them interact with others like us and to feel a sense of recognition. Jeremy Corbyn got this, Theresa May did not.

Figure 1: (Created by JimmerUK and originally shared on b3ta.com before gong viral on various social media)
http://www.b3ta.com/users/profile.php?id=34212

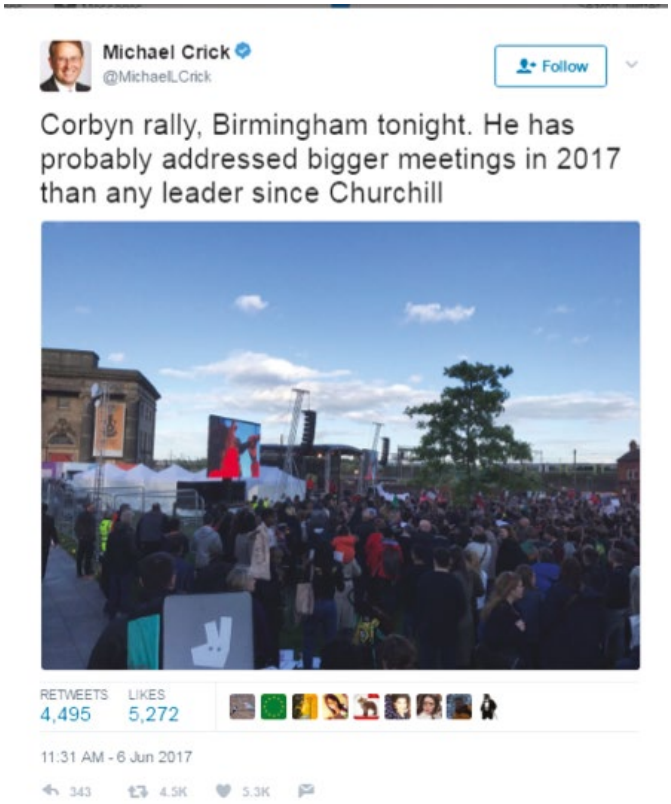


Figure 2: Michael Crick on Twitter, 6 June
https://twitter.com/MichaelLCrick/status/872158950896144385

Corbyn and his fans: post-truth, myth and Labour's hollow defeat

Prof Cornell Sandvoss

Professor in Media and Journalism at the University of Huddersfield.

Email: c.sandvoss@hud.ac.uk

The social media posts of Labour supporters following the 2017 General Election were as celebratory as triumphant. The party under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, targeted by sections of the right-wing press with the ferocity usually reserved for the EU, had achieved an unexpected triumph: he had lost the general election with a similar number of seats that had led to Gordon Brown's resignation in 2010.

The seeming paradox of the delight in defeat of Labour supporters illustrates more than an element of surprise in exceeding expectations. The emotion, passion and enthusiasm of those cheering on Labour's performance exceeded mere delight at a defeat less heavy than anticipated and was largely unaffected by the Conservatives' success in securing a minority government with the DUP. They reflected that far from being a sole means to material end, support for Corbyn and Labour was an affective investment , part of the 'fanization' of British politics.

To many Labour and particularly Corbyn supporters the election result was celebrated as a personal vindication. A victory, albeit symbolic, that felt and was personal; articulating and reflecting a sense of self more than mere participation in the democratic process. The capacity of Corbyn to attract a highly committed fan following that secured two victories in Labour leadership elections has, of course, not been in doubt. But the nature of Labour's 'hollow defeat' highlights a number of important consequences of the fanization of politics. Consequences which translate to vectors of political change that allow us to understand the 2017 General Election not as a reversal of the trends shaping the past two tumultuous years – including David Cameron's 2015 General Election victory, the Brexit vote, and Donald Trump's shock victory in the US 2016 presidential election – a substantive shift to the Right, the influence of the tabloid press in political agenda setting and the rapid disintegration of factuality in political discourse described as post-truth politics but on a deeper level as their continuation and articulation through a different electoral platform.

Fan cultures have long been understood as interpretative communities, gravitating towards collective readings and meanings, often constructed in opposition to the canon of reception. The fan cultures surrounding Corbyn with its relentless critique of most "mainstream media" are a case in point. Like the active enthusiasts in other fan cultures, these fans are highly visible through user generated online texts and other forms of online and offline activism. Importantly their 'fanon' is maintained through uncompromising strategies of textual selection: disregard of large swathes of texts, information, and facts, which in their eyes are simply part of the neo-liberal conspiracy against him.

As such, their political fandom bears notable similarities to Brexit supporters who happily discounted expert opinions warning against leaving the EU. Indeed, on the topic of Europe many Labour and Corbyn supporters demonstrated the greatest capacity of selection bias, or as psychologists call it, cognitive dissonance. Most Labour supporters and voter view the European Union favourably, aspects of the Labour manifesto such as the commitment to ending freedom of movement a policy so rightwing that it was unimaginable in all but extremist parties' manifestos two years ago – were rationalised as inevitable or simply ignored in the construction of their fan object (Corbyn/Labour).

Corbyn's relative success thus illustrates the limitations of notions such as "post-truth" politics. The affective bond between fan and fan object is maintained through the semiotic appropriation of the fan object in popular culture: what Rodman (1996) describes as myths – indeterminable realms beyond a singular notion of truth. It is thus that in their affectively fuelled Corbyn and Labour fandom, supporters (like fans of other movements) create meaning which, for instance, celebrates the highest vote share for Labour since 2001 rather than the less favourable interpretations; that an actual defeat appears as a sort of victory.

How such myths are selected, and the affective bond to the fan object they maintain, explains the wider success of Corbyn's Labour. Among its most visible enthusiasts fandom operates through the highly personalised bond between fan and object in which the latter is constructed as a self-articulation and reflection. The perspective of the fan is one that first and foremost asks "what does it mean to me". Leaders and manifestos are read and appropriated through the prism of self. Much as Vote Leave and Trump's 2016campaign succeeded in offering visions not of general values but personal interest and entitlement, Corbyn's Labour achieved unexpected success by beating the Conservatives at their own game. While May proposed policies that implied substantive costs to almost all of the electorate through her social care reforms, in Corbyn fandom traditional progressive concerns of solidarity and equality – such as the rights of millions of migrants to and from the EU– were abandoned and replaced by the concern with self in anti-elitist discourses. As the accounts of former UKIP voters explaining their support for Corbyn highlight, he convinced voters that he would stand up for *them*; if not so much for *others* – a campaign "for the many [read: *us*], not the few [read: *them*]", but certainly not "for all". As much as political enthusiasm and fandom has thus fuelled Corbyn's leadership, it also highlights its greatest weakness: the promise of affectively rewarding political engagement that in its focus on the self is condemned to the defence of relative privilege.

It's the stans wot (nearly) won it

Fandom emerged as a kind of small-scale curiosity in the 2015 election campaign – Milifandom offered an unexpected tale for the media, with Ed Miliband representing an unlikely object for fan art, memes, and intellectual crushes. But by 2017 fandom had surely taken up a very different presence in electoral discourse. Rather than politics interacting with popular culture in more traditional ways, via celebrity endorsements, or representations of 'the political', the energies of fandom that usually belonged to neoliberal consumption had instead migrated into an emergent left-populism.

No longer a mildly comedic story, aspects of fandom had become seriously integrated into ways of seeking to transform society – successfully 'activated' by the likes of Momentum. The political analyst Jonathan Dean has been foremost in documenting this, astutely arguing:

> what distinguishes politicised fandom is… the *direction* of… affective flow. By this I mean that within ordinary fandoms, the affective 'charge' runs primarily between fan, fan object and fellow fans. As fandoms become politicised, however, fans' affective investments become more 'outwardly' oriented in the sense of being constituted by a desire to change wider society.

At the same time, however, languages of fandom were being used very differently by opponents of 'Corbyn-mania' (Blairites as much as Tories), aiming to delegitimise and pathologise Jeremy Corbyn's supporters. This was something of a 'retro' move, as it's been widely argued that media fandom – once the target of 'get a life!' admonishments – is now part and parcel of mainstream culture. Indeed, books such as 2017's Superfandom discuss how fan attachment can be serviced and monetised by an ever-vigilant culture industry.

But centre-right political discourse was busy turning the clock back and ignoring the Web 2.0 normalisation of fan activities; because here, fandom stood for the irrational/hysterical, and for an alleged detachment from (political) reality. Those supporting Jeremy Corbyn were rapidly badged as 'Corbynistas', dismissed as "delusional cultists" (in the recent and critically apologetic words of Owen Jones), and positioned as improper participants in the political sphere. Such an attempt at delegitimisation, based on deep-rooted binaries of emotion versus reason, was sharply encapsulated in a New Statesman article which accused Corbyn supporters of being "socialism fans"; something that was evidently felt to be far worse than them actually being socialists. "Socialism fans", hazarded Daniel Allington,

> …joined the [Labour] party not because they agreed with its goals and wanted to help it achieve them, but because they identified with the culture of Leftism and sought an active form of cultural participation — much as theatre buffs might join an amateur dramatics club, or history enthusiasts might join a medieval re-enactment society. …They view [the Labour Party]… as an opportunity to engage in demonstrations, protests, marches, and rallies — as well as thrilling social media battles against insufficiently radical Labour MPs.

The accusation is that this amounts to politics-as-lifestyle, restricted to social media consumption and engagement rather than 'genuine' political participation in campaigning, door-knocking, and so on. Socialists should be out there fighting the good fight, but "socialism fans" are allegedly narcissistic and individualized rather than politically committed and collectivised.

All such pathologisations of an emotional Corbyn 'cult' – of fan-like 'protest' rather than supposedly mature parliamentary politics – failed to predict or perceive the *nationalisation of fandom* which crystallised in the wake of Labour's 2017 manifesto launch. Fannish energy and affect that were usually channelled through commercial (intellectual) properties became centred on a political movement that precisely articulated "social media battles" with door-knocking and the likes of mynearestmarginal.com, as well as utilising possibilities such as Facebook Live to train new canvassers.

There is an overly legible story of 'hope' versus 'fear' on show here, but this reduces the complex affective relationships of fan practice to a weirdly polarised binary, with commentary becoming (meta-)divisive. Taking seriously today's politicised participatory culture – along with its chants of "Oh, Jeremy Corbyn" – means taking seriously the "stans". As Zoe Williams says: "I had to Google what a stan was: it is a wild enthusiast, an off-the-charts believer, a person who will bore the pub down. Corbyn has these, and no other British politician does". Such passionate "stans" (or productive, transformational and socially-engaged fans, in old money) do not only stand for 'hope', and nor do they narcissistically 'mirror' their self-identity through Jeremy Corbyn. Instead, they represent a subset of the electorate that views itself as a part of multiple online communities, collectives and groupings that can influence others, act in concert, and convey affective contagions, or moods, that are irreducible to easy media narratives of singular emotion. Popular culture, and its normative Web 2.0 neoliberal consumerism, has at least partly created the conditions of possibility for an anti-neoliberal populism that traverses and appreciates the mediated figure of Jeremy Corbyn without being enclosed in a 'cult of personality'.

Prof Matt Hills

Professor of Media and Film at the University of Huddersfield, and co-Director of the Centre for Participatory Culture based there. He has written widely on media fandom, beginning with the book Fan Cultures (2002), and coming up to date with forthcoming chapters in The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom and the Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Fandom and Fan Studies.

Email: m.j.hills@hud.ac.uk

Celebrities4Corbyn: continuity and change in Labour's use of celebrities

Ellen Watts

PhD candidate in the New Political Communication Unit in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Email: ellen.watts.2012@live.rhul.ac.uk

Twitter: @EllenFelicity

With the election still a month away, Sky News asked where all the celebrities who 'clogged up' the campaign trail in 2015 were this time around. It's true that Labour's 2015 campaign had a strong celebrity presence from start to finish, from the PEB with Martin Freeman uploaded to YouTube on day one (followed by broadcasts by Jo Brand and Steve Coogan), to the surprise endorsement from Russell Brand in the final week. But while celebrities have attracted fewer national headlines and less airtime in 2017, a closer look at social media and local news coverage shows no celebrity exodus from Labour.

Long-time supporters such as Steve Coogan and Eddie Izzard continued to support Labour candidates on the campaign trail despite not backing Corbyn for leader, with Wes Streeting being singled out for support by Sir Ian McKellen. It could have been 2015 again on Izzard's constituency tour, as the comedian repeated his efforts to pre-empt cynicism about celebrity endorsers by telling activists he had not been 'wheeled out' by the party, and that he intends 'to run in the next election'.

Even if Corbyn didn't 'go to' Russell Brand as his predecessor was criticised for doing, Brand again used YouTube (and the Huffington Post) to reframe his often-misinterpreted comments about voting and lend support to Corbyn's Labour. Maxine Peake's PEB was similar to previous celebrity broadcasts with its framing of the election as a moral choice and emphasis on public services, but unlike in 2015 there was no mysterious absence of Labour's leader. Similarly while Labour again called on a familiar face from Coronation Street to speak at a rally, Julie Hesmondhalgh directed far more enthusiasm toward the leader she believes 'gives a toss'. Peake was also seen on Labour's social media door-knocking with Corbyn, one of several shorter videos shared online with public figures from Kate Nash to Michael Rosen sharing their motivations for voting Labour.

While Peake's broadcast did not attract as much media attention or as many views as Freeman's in 2015, it also did not attract the controversy. Labour's celebrity supporters were previously dismissed as wealthy alleged tax evaders (Martin Freeman), drug abusers and philanderers (Steve Coogan), and all of the above (Russell Brand). When asked which celebrity endorsement he would most like to receive, Corbyn responded 'I just want endorsement from the public – the many, not the few'. This use of Labour's campaign slogan demonstrates the tension Labour, and Corbyn's Labour in particular, faces. While consistently being the party to attract the most celebrity support, the wealth and fame of these supporters is at odds with their claims to represent the interests and share the concerns of 'the many'.

It therefore makes sense that Jeremy 'The Outsider' Corbyn found most support from those outside the mainstream in their own fields, particularly young rappers and grime artists. Akala faced a defensive Andrew Neil on This Week to discuss media treatment of Corbyn and May, with Stormzy having told The Guardian last year that Corbyn 'gets what the ethnic minorities are going through and the homeless and the working class'. Corbyn himself was more likely to be seen on YouTube and Snapchat, answering questions from JME and discussing grime and grassroots football with Poet and Vuj.

Corbyn also used football analogies to describe the state of the campaign in an interview for NME, where editor Mike Williams sought to authenticate the Labour leader for their audience by judging 'whether he's legit and for real'. These interviews combined discussion of music and football with opportunities for young people, and Akala, JME and Rag'n'Bone Man all said they would be voting for the first time because of Corbyn. The links between grime and Corbyn were explored at a panel debate and rave organised by the Grime4Corbyn campaign group, set up in the hope that pro-Corbyn grime artists could influence young fans.

Ultimately however, nobody was better able to attract a crowd during this campaign than Jeremy Corbyn himself. In front of 20,000 people at Wirral Live festival at Prenton Park, Corbyn received a response most warm up acts would dream of when he came on before The Libertines to again combine an appeal to football and music fans. But Corbyn also attracted and addressed impressive crowds throughout the campaign as the headline act, attracting nearly 6000 for a rally in Birmingham as the campaign came to a close.

This campaign has demonstrated Corbyn's impressive ability to attract celebrity supporters, particularly voices not usually heard in election campaigns, and to attract crowds of his own. Whether this assisted Corbyn in leading Labour to unexpected gains remains to be seen, but it certainly served to accentuate the differences between him and his opponent.

The othering and objectification of Diane Abbott MP

Since 8th June, the news media has been awash with stories celebrating the increased diversity of Parliament, which now has 51 Black and Asian MPs. Meanwhile, the number of women MPs rose to 208, demonstrating progress towards race equality in British politics is considerably slower than gender equality.

However, the tendency to separate 'race' from 'gender' in discussions of equality, masks intersectional experiences and hidden inequalities. Therefore, the reported 'success' of women in British politics, masks the distinct forms of raced and gendered discrimination directed towards Black women.

Patricia Hill Collins argues that Black women are routinely objectified as 'the other', and a cursory examination of mainstream discourse during the General Election reveal that both remain persistent features of Black women's experiences in public life.

Despite her British identity, stories about Diane Abbott construct her as 'the other' through constant reference to the cultural heritage of her parents. On 28th May writing for the Independent, in a scathing attack, Matthew Norman wrote: "No Paddington-reared child of Jamaican immigrants gets to study law at Cambridge by being a dummy." While on 9th June, in a front-page the Sun story by Jon Lockett: Labour's First Lady, under the sub-heading, "Who is Diane Abbott? What's her background?" The first sentence reads: "Born in London to Jamaican immigrants".

As Wetherall and Potter argue in Mapping the Language of Racism; racialised discourse need not be explicitly racist to be discriminatory, marginalising or oppressive. The term 'immigrants' marks a location of difference that has negative connotations due to repeated negative media coverage that constructs migrants as social problems. Therefore, repeated reference to 'Jamaican immigrant' serves as a process of othering and marker of difference — even though this information has no relevance to the stories.

While scrutiny and critique in the news media are endemic to the nature of politics, people of colour are subjected to "intense, disproportionate and unfair surveillance" in the political arena, as John Fiske argues in White Watch. Diane Abbott is constantly singled out and pilloried across the news and social media. On 6th June, she was forced to pull out of a planned BBC Radio 4 interview on Women's Hour after a serious long-term illness was diagnosed (revealed after the election to be type 2 diabetes). This was announced by Women's Hour on Twitter at 8.42am. Shortly afterwards a picture of Ms Abbott speaking on her phone in the ticket hall of Oxford Circus was tweeted which read "not seeming very unwell". At 11.42am ex Tory MP and Evening Standard editor George Osborne tweeted a cartoon of Ms Abbott with the caption "Anti-terror meeting? I'm far too ill to attend that." Tweets from supporters highlighted the double standards at play, as at 12.15pm one tweet read: "Tories criticising Diane Abbott for doing what Theresa May did: pulling out of Woman's Hour. Isn't that called hypocrisy?"

Bell hooks argues that Black women are frequently objectified through controlling images. The sexual objectification of Black women is rooted in slavery but persists in contemporary representation of Black women in public life. In January 2015, The Telegraph serialised an unauthorised biography of Jeremy Corbyn, which alleges that he and Ms Abbott had an intimate relationship in the 1970s. The Sun's 8th June headline 'Labour's First Lady', is clearly a reference to the book's claims and plays on historical conceptions of Black women as concubines. Such controlling images serve to maintain and reinforce patriarchal sexual ideologies about Black women.

As van Dijk argues, elite social actors play a major role in the reproduction of racism in society through racist discourse, not least because of their influential status. However, this is always accompanied by a denial of prejudice, which serves to normalise racial ideologies and present them as rational and justified. It is therefore no surprise, that on 6th June, writing for the Telegraph, Zoe Strimpel's headline read: "It's not racist to point out that Diane Abbott is a bungling disappointment".

In White Watch, John Fiske draws on Foucault's conceptualisation of the 'regime of truth', defined as knowledge and truth, not as a reflection of objective reality but of the discursive power of elites.

On 8th June, Operation Black Vote (OBV) published an "urgent statement in support of Diane Abbott MP", signed by academic, legal and political figures, including Lord Herman Ousely. Part of the statement read:

"Black leadership in the UK is under constant scrutiny and examination. This… does not generally apply, to white mainstream politicians… afforded the luxury of white privilege, that allows for such mistakes to be considered human…we note the current hysteria of sections of the British media which has a disturbing tendency to apply a wholly different standard of critical news values when reporting on senior black political figures, and in particular, black women."

The statement is an apt critique of White privilege and how it manifests in political news reporting. From a Black feminist standpoint, othering and objectification typify how Ms Abbott has been represented across the mainstream media. Historical associations with hypersexuality serve to dehumanise Black women and undermine their authority and legitimacy as politicians.

So while there is occasion to celebrate the increase in Black and Asian MPs — especially the landslide victory of Ms Abbott herself, we should be mindful that increased diversity does not mean increased equality — we still have a long way to go to achieve both.

Dr Deborah Gabriel

Senior Lecturer and self-defined scholar-activist. She is the founder of Black British Academics and the Deputy Chair of BU's Race Equality Charter Committee.

Email: dgabriel@bournemouth.ac.uk

Twitter: @deborahgabriel

“Theresa May for Britain”: a personal brand in search of personality

Dr Margaret Scammell

Senior Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics. She has published widely on politics, communication and political marketing. Her latest book, Consumer Democracy, was published last year by Cambridge University Press.

Email: m.scammell@lse.ac.uk

It had looked so straightforward for the Conservatives. They picked a campaign theme – ‘strong and stable’ leadership in an uncertain world; a tried-and-tested strategy for incumbents against the ‘time for a change’ challenge of opponents. Theresa May seemed a perfect fit. She had calmed the nation in the tumultuous aftermath of the Brexit referendum; she had united her fractured party while Labour fell apart. By the first quarter of 2017, she was high in the opinion polls, more popular than her own party, consistently had 20-plus points leads over Jeremy Corbyn on approval ratings, and was deemed to have the best policies for Brexit. At the outset then, a leader-focussed Tory campaign seemed the no-brainer option. What could possibly go wrong?

As it turned out, practically everything. With hindsight, the fatal error was to throw all the campaign eggs into the Brand May basket. Early in the piece, reporters noted that the Tories were waging an extraordinarily presidential campaign; then again, don’t they always say that? This time, they were right. Scour the official Conservative website, its YouTube channel or Facebook and it was all about Theresa. Examine the mainstream media coverage and you find May dominated to the exclusion of everyone in Cabinet, barring walk-on roles for Amber Rudd and Boris Johnson. Her battle bus gave the first clue – “Theresa May: for Britain” was its slogan. This was indeed the most presidential party campaign in living memory, more even than those from the masters of personality politics, Tony Blair and David Cameron. May was the Conservative brand. “The Conservative Party is no more. Now it’s just Theresa May’s Team” the *Telegraph’s* sketch writer, Michael Deacon, put it.

Tory strategists must have been aware of the risks of such a personalized campaign. Apart from the considerable strain on the talent and energy of one person, it carried additional dangers, particular to May. First, her capacity to carry a campaign was unknown. She had scarcely been tested in any national contest, having had no leading profile in previous elections, or the Brexit referendum and having won the party leadership by default. Moreover, while she was a solid media performer, she had not demonstrated any of the televisual ease of Cameron, Blair or Boris.

More importantly, it was not clear that she had the magic brand ingredient of emotional connection. She might be the personification of “keep calm and carry on”, but her high approval ratings did not translate into likeability. After her One Show appearance, a YouGov focus group of undecided voters found her “pushy” and “patronizing”, with a frustrating tendency to speak in soundbites. When asked to describe her “animal personality”, respondents likened her to a reptile; like a snake she was beautiful but also cold and deadly.

May’s reserved, aloof personality is a common thread of media portraits. We have plenty of information about the vicar’s daughter, her Oxbridge education and political career, but it is a struggle to get a handle on her personality. I don’t know who she really is; that was one of my first thoughts when I started to consider the May brand. Matthew Parris came to the same conclusion in his profile for Newsnight. After interviewing some of her friends and colleagues, he was still none the wiser. There is enough about her style and her willingness to take political risks to suggest a genuinely fascinating personality. But in public, certainly in this campaign, she wasn’t for sharing. Her buttoned-up, safety-first performance contrasted sharply with Corbyn’s energizing rallies or the engaging ebullience of Ruth Davidson, leading the Scottish Conservative campaign. May was, said the Daily Mail’s Quentin Letts a “glum bucket”. As the poll leads diminished, media commentators decided that she was simply a poor campaigner, isolated from real people, and robotically repeating campaign slogans. She became the “Maybot”.

Ultimately, the entire strong-and-stable strategy was undermined by the manifesto blunders, especially, the ‘dementia tax’. Forced to backtrack on a key manifesto pledge, May became the ‘Queen of U-turns’; first the budget, then the decision to call an election when she’d promised not to, and then the dementia tax. “Weak and wobbly” was the *Spectator’s* headline over a cartoon showing a distraught May desperately clinging to her modesty as her armour plating crumbles around her.

By the end, Brand May was in tatters. A brand devoid of personal charm was now ambiguous politically. Who is this Theresa May who says one thing and does another; votes Remain then follows hard Brexit; promises no election and then gives us one; promises compassionate inclusion then takes school lunches and threatens the inheritance of the elderly; promises a strong stable government, then U-turns under the first sign of pressure? This was the Brand May campaign, but if anything, we are less sure about Theresa.

Maybot, Mummy or Iron Lady? Loving and loathing Theresa May

The presidential-style prominence given to Theresa May as a symbol of strength and stability contrasts sharply with images of her as a schemer, dissembler and flaky public performer. Whatever one's feelings about May as a weak politician, the powerful emotions she attracts illustrates more widely the emotional framing of women politicians in news media and the gendered nature of contemporary politics. Although women's influence on politics is growing globally and this election saw a record number of women elected, political culture remains a masculinised sphere where numerically men continue to dominate both as political journalists and as politicians. What's more, the image and tone of male leadership remains defined as the default position against which women are often judged as lacking. If women perform assertively they are liable to be judged as cold and aggressive, but if they express emotion they are perceived as a potential liability, weak and even emotionally unstable. As racist social media and bullying coverage of Diane Abbott show, the structures of intersectionality and 'race' also play a significant role in this process. May's own mocking attacks on Abbott indicate the pernicious way that such structural unconscious bias works, even between women.

The perception of May as cold and distant was reinforced through her poor performance on the stump and toe-curling television interviews that truly reflected the poverty of her policies and poor skills as a communicator. Nonetheless, as our own analysis of the news coverage of Clinton, Sturgeon, and Abbott show, the extreme response to her as a political figure also reflects wider patterns of news reporting of women politicians indicating that they attract love and loathing in equal measure. On the one hand, as May's unflattering sobriquet 'Maybot' implies, she is represented as an unfeeling, unnatural, machine-like creature whose responses to interviews are so robotic that they would fail the Turing test. Whilst 'Maybot' presents a cartoonish image of the walking dead or a horror film Mummy, the alternative representation of May which remained popular with some Tory-leaning commentators up until the campaign's final stages was that of another kind of Mummy: the containing, wise mother - or 'Mother Theresa' in the parlance of *Daily Mail* columnist Richard Littlejohn. As with Germany's Angela Merkel, who is referred to as 'Mutti', some Tory MPs have gone so far as to refer to May as 'Mummy'. The Oedipal connotations of the latter recall passionate feelings some of the Tory old guard felt about May's role model Margaret Thatcher, who even referred to herself as 'Mummy' in her 2001 Plymouth 'Mummy Returns Speech'. May's performance as the Iron Lady re-born may have initially worked to reassure some, but for others, her femininity also evoked the return of the repressed – and not in a good way. When one Tory MP tweeted 'Here comes Mummy', journalist Sarah Ditum said it reminded her of a creepy episode of Doctor Who. Here, the fantasy dimensions of the response to May tap less into a Freudian model of Oedipal desire but instead hint at pre-oedipal anxieties about the maternal body – fears that continue to be expressed culturally when it comes to women holding positions of political power who are seen as usual and even a bit strange. Such concerns are often dealt with defensively – splitting women into good and bad – by idealising and denigrating them as objects of love or loathing as in the example of May or other politicians such as Clinton, Sturgeon and Abbott (Yates, 2015). Such attention often focuses on the body and, as we have discussed elsewhere in relation to the press coverage of Clinton's aging body, the reporting of May has also been framed in this way - as in 'Legsgate', her 'Prime Ministerial style', her 'lowcut tops' and even her womb when the issue of her child-free status resurfaced in the election.

As a political leader, the representation of May's relationship to feminism and her own femininity is complex. She follows Thatcher in aligning herself both to the memory of her actual father and to the values of the symbolic father (i.e. God, Patriarchy and possibly Geoffrey Boycott). Defining herself as the Vicar's daughter with strong Church of England values; her mother is rarely mentioned as an object of identification. This omission and the emphasis on paternal inheritance reflects perhaps – albeit symbolically – her voting record on women's issues such as more restrictive abortion laws, child tax credit cuts, and the attack on public sector jobs and social care. In this respect she follows Thatcher in failing to support other women through her social policy decisions. Her attempts to embody the 'strong and stable leadership' mantra is thus contingent upon the disavowal of those parts of herself aligned with feminism and social justice, and reinforces older notions of femininity as the cultural and political other. These same cultural processes that reinforce the dualities of femininity continue to shape the press coverage of women and the framing of their performance on the political stage.

Dr Shelley Thompson

Politics Programme Leader and a Senior Lecturer at Bournemouth University. Her research considers framing of social and political issues in the news, especially emerging and controversial science and women's expertise and leadership.

Email: shelleyt@bournemouth.ac.uk

Twitter: @JayneShell

Prof Candida Yates

Professor of Culture and Communication at Bournemouth University and Director (with Caroline Bainbridge) of the AHRC Media and Inner World research network.

Email: cyates@bmth.ac.uk

Twitter: @Candide3

Politics, charisma, and the celebrity spectre of Nigel Farage

Dr Neil Ewen

Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader of the BA in Media and Communication at the University of Winchester. Cultural Report editor, Celebrity Studies journal (Routledge) and co-editor of First Comes Love: Power Couples, Celebrity Kinship and Cultural Politics (Bloomsbury, 2015).

Email: neil.ewen@winchester.ac.uk

Twitter: @neil_ewen

"Guess who my favourite politician is…", my dentist said, as I lay, gaping and vulnerable, etherised upon his table.

I didn't get the chance to reply.

"Vladimir Putin!", he exclaimed. "Gets stuff done. Has real charisma. I'd vote for him".

For all sorts of reasons, I've found myself reflecting on this frankly terrifying moment quite a bit since I had a molar filled at the turn of the month. One reason is that, with the benefit of hindsight, this was the time when the wheels first really began to wobble on the Theresa May bandwagon and the saddle was starting to be fitted on Jeremy Corbyn's horse.

Yet, for all the "Let's make June the end of May" rhetoric on my Facebook timeline, anyone predicting a hung parliament a week before the election would have been laughed out of town: a sentiment that held, universally, right up to the election itself. On the eve of the vote, for example, Nigel Farage predicted a 65-seat Tory majority his LBC radio show and a "relatively comfortable win for Mrs May".

Yet, as we now know, things didn't work out the way that everyone had expected. And one of the reasons for the amazing surge in different directions for May and Corbyn brings us back to my dentist: the notion that exuding charisma is central to being seen as a strong leader and a successful politician.

Theories of celebrity, particularly work that explains how politicians are increasingly utilizing methods from the entertainment industries to boost their brands, have long canonized the German sociologist Max Weber's notion of charismatic authority: a proposal that power and legitimacy derive from the charisma of a strong leader. And one of the most remarkable aspects of this election was the challenge to this formulation.

Corbyn's remarkable late rise to prominence saw him overcome an image of incompetence that had plagued him since his first election to the Labour leadership in September 2015: an image fostered by opponents in the Parliamentary Labour Party and gleefully reproduced in the mainstream media. But in overcoming this hegemonic perception, Corbyn did not formulate a traditional image of a strong man. Rather, as the sociologist Katy Fox-Hodess argued in a perceptive Facebook post, Corbyn "built tremendous support without the kind of tough macho affect…associated with 'old' Labour and the old left in general. Quite to the contrary, Corbyn is kind, thoughtful and earnest and always seems genuinely bemused by the adulation he's received – which he always deflects to instead emphasize the collective efforts of the grassroots". As such, while there's little doubt that by election day Corbyn had become a cult figure, especially among younger voters, his political power and legitimacy is, at least in part, derived from his refusal to nurture a brand of celebrity based on individualism: a process that Jo Littler has suggested we consider as Corbyn being an "anti-celebrity".

Corbyn's success in doing this was undoubtedly boosted by Theresa May's advisors' strategy of foregrounding her as a "strong and stable leader": something that became increasingly ridiculous as she bumbled from one disaster to the next. Meanwhile, it was also buttressed by the UKIP leader, Paul Nuttall, who, while managing to rid his party of the vast majority of its votes, managed to throw into question the truism that in order to be popular leaders should exude authenticity. Nuttall certainly tried to act like an 'ordinary bloke', but it didn't seem to help. Along with rank incompetence, as it was becoming clear that the UKIP vote was being squeezed by the Conservatives and Labour, Nuttall's rhetoric become increasingly extreme, pressing for the return of capital punishment and for the total ban of the burqa, in a "desperate attempt to stay relevant". This was unreconstructed masculinity eating itself.

Even more damning, perhaps, by the evening of the election it was clear that the mainstream media was simply ignoring Nuttall: something that his predecessor would have never let happen. In the six hours of channel surfing for which I managed to stay awake, Nuttall did not appear a single time. The next day, after Nuttall resigned, Farage suggested that his successor did not have "time to establish himself with the voters, who still don't quite know who he is". An alternative reading would suggest that the voters knew him all too well.

Farage went on to say in numerous interviews that he feared that Brexit was now in trouble and that he "would have no option but involve myself again in full-time campaigning", though when pressed he said that this did not necessarily mean as leader of UKIP. This makes a lot of sense. In my report on Farage after last year's EU referendum, I suggested that due to UKIP's raison d'être disappearing with Brexit, Farage might find himself personally vulnerable. But, of course, I underestimated him. Farage understood better than I that his success as a celebrity transcended party politics, and spent next few months cultivating influence through radio shows, and celebrity bromances with international strongmen.

Despite UKIP's demise, Farage will continue to pervade our cultural consciousness. He proves that, despite Corbyn's best efforts, performances of traditional masculinity are far from dead: something that will, at least, cheer my dentist.

Mainstream broadcast comedy and satire

This was not a good election for national mainstream broadcast comedy, compromised by the snap character of the campaign, the terrorist attacks in Manchester and London, and reliance on a narrow and familiar (and not necessarily political) range of comic ideas as well as the requirements of non-partisanship. The main outlets were the regular topical comedy shows – on TV, this included *Have I Got News for You* (BBC 1) *The Last Leg* (Channel 4) and *The Fake News* Show (Channel 4). *BBC Radio 4* contributed via *The News Quiz* and *The Vote Now Show*. The sketch show format was represented by Election Spy, a modified and shortened version of Channel 4's behind-the-campaigning- scenes *Power Monkeys/ Ballot Monkeys* of 2015 and 2016, transferring to BBC 2. On the panel shows, election themed comedy had to take its place alongside other subjects, and the affairs of President Trump often took precedence in the earlier weeks.

Topical comedy was not suspended in response to the Manchester bombing and the attacks in London, but there were acknowledgements of the atrocities within the comedy shows, to recognise the problem of tone in public discourse at such a difficult time. One experienced performer thematised the necessity of comedy as part of a defiant national response to the aims of terrorists:

ED BALLS (GUEST HOST): So it's obviously been a horrible, terrible week.
IAN HISLOP (REGULAR TEAM CAPTAIN): Yes, but we're still, I think, allowed to laugh.
Is that, is that 0K (addressing the studio audience directly)?
AUDIENCE "YES".
IAN HISLOP: Well, I don't want to overstate it, but going out, enjoying yourself, having a good time, all the things terrorism hates. We can still do it. Even here.
AUDIENCE: APPLAUSE

Meanwhile, the regular presenters of *The Last Leg* (Adam Hills, Josh Widdecombe, Alex Brooker) on May 26th spent about five minutes in predominantly earnest discussion of terrorism and responses to it, honouring the spirit of Manchester in particular, before reverting back to the expected comic mode (transitioning via a trope on Manchester's 'sense of humour').

In these ways, authorised public comedy was positioned as taking place within a serious frame. Inside that frame, the comedy itself took familiar forms. Electioneering is, if nothing else, a matter of theatre and display. The performances of candidates and other spokespeople during elections can be regarded as always potentially comic, to the extent that the humour is in the eyes and ears of the beholders. Many listeners and viewers, unprompted, will have responded with laughter to Diane Abbott's on-air stumbling when asked about the cost of additional policing as anticipated in the Labour Party manifesto. In the TV and radio shows, the country's paid wits and entertainers took it upon themselves to perform conscious humorous work on these moments. Both parties offered up instances apt for such rekeying – Jeremy Corbyn on radio, failing to recall figures related to Labour's child care policy, Teresa May at a press conference, insisting that she had not reversed a manifesto commitment on social care. Karen Bradley on *Good Morning Britain*, refusing to answer a question from Piers Morgan about Tory cuts to police numbers.

It is questionable whether comedy focused on the (lack of) performance skills is of any directly political relevance, rather than just being another dimension of contemporary celebrity culture. *Have I Got News For You* on June 2nd, recycled, to audience laughter, a backstage video recording of Corbyn stumbling over the figures in his *Woman's Hour* (BBC Radio 4) appearance. Ian Hislop attempts to retrieve this for politics by finding the underlying memory failure unsatisfactory in a prospective leader: "There were two things to remember. How many children and how much it cost. It was poor". Hislop's judgement nevertheless remains at the level of the political persona, not political substance. May's difficulties spoke to both persona (how 'stable' is May?) and to substance (what, really, is the Conservative party's position on social care for the elderly?). In none of these cases were comedy audiences assumed to have their own political commitments of either right wing or left wing orientation. Audiences in these cases were treated as consumers of electioneering conduct, asked to find funny (and thus to judge) on the basis of offences against presumed consensual 'citizenly' values such as skills, expertise, consistency, informativeness, integrity, rather than on anything that might evoke divisions of wealth, ethnicity, gender, religious faith etc., within British society. Space for the latter is not impossible in mainstream topical comedy broadcasting, but such discourse was largely side-lined during the campaign by the focus on performance, persona and process.

Prof Kay Richardson

Professor of Communication and Media at the University of Liverpool.

Email: Kay100@liverpool.ac.uk

Twitter: @kay090555

Sound bites: the music of Election 2017

Prof John Street

Professor in the School of Political, Social and International Studies at the University of East Anglia.

Email: j.street@uea.ac.uk

Dr Adam Behr

Lecturer in Contemporary and Pop Music at the Newcastle University.

Email: adam.behr@newcastle.ac.uk

Twitter: @AdamBehrLive

For most accounts of the campaign, the words or the images are what seem to matter. But this is to ignore the sounds, often the most vivid and immediate form of communication.

A key musical moment in this election wasn't directly linked to a party campaign. A self-produced remix of a 2010 track, Captain Ska's 'Liar Liar' aimed its titular accusation at Theresa May, whose speeches it sampled. It became the subject of protests and complaints of media bias over its lack of airplay. Driven by social media up the charts and blocked from being heard on chart shows by broadcasting balance regulations, it prompted a dilemma for broadcasters. Compliance with Ofcom's Broadcasting Code and the Communications Act 2003 rubs up against this trend, which has moved from purely musical concerns to political comment. Starting with the Facebook campaign that pushed Rage Against the Machine to Christmas Number One and then the use of 'Ding Dong the Witch is Dead' from the Wizard of Oz to mark Margaret Thatcher's death, it has now arrived in electoral politics.

While a mixture of meme culture and political pop hit the charts, the music in traditional party communications continued the shift away from the apogee that was New Labour's 'Things Can Only Get Better'. Campaign songs in centrally produced Party Election Broadcasts were relegated in favour of bland background music, where music featured at all. The instrumentation and tone varied slightly – from the Conservative's pastoral string arrangements to convey safety and tradition, through the SNP's last broadcast using acoustic guitar and folk fiddle, to Labour's first film eschewing music entirely. Almost all the parties seemed to shy away from music as an emblematic centrepiece and towards a non-descript musical aesthetic, light on hooks and more reminiscent of mobile phone advertisements than rousing anthems.

Only the Greens put a song at the heart of a national broadcast – 'Shout' by Tears for Fears – and even that was a fairly anonymous cover version. Another exception to the tendency towards background music was Conservative candidate Greg Knight's co-written jingle at the end of his lo-fi video for his local campaign. Online mirth and comparisons to Alan Partridge nevertheless didn't stop the drummer in the Parliamentary band MP4 from holding his seat.

But the star power of popular music still featured, with musicians' endorsements and interventions prominent, and overwhelmingly pro Labour, or at least anti Conservative. The Grime 4 Corbyn movement, certainly, chimed with his strategic emphasis on the youth vote. Unlike Red Wedge in 1987, this wasn't officially aligned with the party. It also, by celebrating Corbyn, echoed the tenor of a campaign focused on the leader and his distinct 'grassroots' brand.

The broader spectrum of popular music also got on board, with Corbyn on the cover of both *NME* and *Kerrang* and Lily Allen's music featuring in a last minute video online. Pink Floyd's David Gilmour backed Labour on Twitter, with a home video of a song putting new lyrics to the tune of Billy Bragg's 'Between the Wars'. Again, its homemade nature echoed the greater salience of social media campaigning and the associated aesthetic convergence of campaign music with user-generated content.

This was played out in the deployment of gigs as political platforms, with Corbyn's appearance before The Libertines in Tranmere and the adoption of 'Seven Nation Army' as a kind of football chant featuring his name. The slightly ad hoc feel to some of these musical moments also related to politicians' impromptu use of music to authenticate themselves on the trail. Corbyn (again) sang hesitantly along to a busker, Iain Duncan Smith rapped Eminem lyrics on ITV's *Good Morning Britain* and the SNP's Mhairi Black delivered a pub rendition of 'Caledonia', this last case also highlighting the growing prevalence of mobile phone footage in political coverage.

The manifestos varied in their promises about music. UKIP mentioned unequal access to music education and PE to serve its broader tilt against how different faiths interact in schools while the Tories addressed the creative industries at large. But only Labour and the Liberal Democrats contained specific music related promises – Labour to introduce measures to protect grassroots venues and the Liberal Democrats to review available funding and planning rules to the same end.

Ultimately, perhaps the most significant musical event of the campaign period – Ariana Grande's Manchester concert – had little to do with the election itself, but emerged from events that nevertheless came to frame much of the debate.

It's hard to know in the bigger mix of factors exactly how much of a role musical concerns played in the result. But as an election centred on leadership proved unpredictable, it is clear that music was present throughout the campaign in an electoral environment increasingly characterised by the coming together, especially online, of party and publicly produced content.

Pictures by:
Back cover image: Picture by Jane Barlow/PA Wire/PA Images
Front cover image 1: Picture by Ben Stevens/PA Wire/PA Images
Image 2: Picture by Rick Findler/PA Wire/PA Images
Image 3: Picture by Stefan Rousseau/PA Wire/PA Images
Image 4: Picture by Owen Humphreys/PA Wire/PA Images
Image 5: Picture by Isabel Infantes/EMPICS Entertainment
Image 6: Picture by Dominic Lipinski/PA Wire/PA Images
Image 7: Picture by: Stefan Rousseau/PA Wire/PA Images
Image 8: Screenshot from "When JME Met Jeremy Corbyn", by i-D:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-rxp_QwjmQ

ISBN 978-1-910042-14-4