

ElectionWatch

3 22 November 2019

A CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM (NORTH) INITIATIVE

WE KNEW that media coverage of this election would be nasty. We haven't been disappointed.

A bloc of Tory-supporting national newspapers is having a malign influence on the flow of accurate information in this election. To brush this aside with arguments that people can make up their own minds on how to vote is to ignore the evidence.

Go back to the referendum campaign. Tim Shipman in his book *All Out War* writes, "The Tories (in the leadership of the remain camp) were about to run a referendum campaign based on a playbook ... for winning an election in an environment where the print media was sympathetic. But this time their natural allies were hostile."

The Remain Tories were the focus of relentless attacks, reminiscent of the sort of assault usually reserved for Labour leaders like Michael Foot in 1983 or Neil Kinnock in 1992. "It pains me to say it," a member of Cameron's team told Shipman, "but if the *Mail*, *Sun* and the *Telegraph* had been for 'In' we would have romped home."

It's all change now. The naked right-wing partisanship of the majority of the British press is solidly



The tabloid attack tactic: Publicise fake figures invented by the Tories.

behind the Tories again.

But there is a deeper, more corrosive problem. These same papers amplify the lies deliberately disseminated by the Tories and they seep through into the broadcast media. Two examples:

The Tories released a dossier which claimed to show a Labour government would increase spending by £1.2tn. This figure has no basis

in fact because Labour had not published its manifesto.

Priti Patel, the home secretary, claimed that net migration could treble to 840,000 people a year under a Labour government. Again the figure is fake, based on an assumption that Labour policy would extend free movement to the whole world, but it was deliberately designed to promote scaremongering about immigration.

These tactics are reminiscent of those used by Johnson's chief strategist, Dominic Cummings, during the Vote Leave campaign.

But it is the malicious intensity of the attacks on Jeremy Corbyn which is the most disturbing.

An LSE report, *Journalistic Representations of Jeremy Corbyn in the British Press*, provides the grim evidence. It found that 75 per cent of stories about the opposition leader are either distorted or failed to represent

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How media lies are making a mockery of democracy



The *Mail on Sunday* stands out. It is the nastiest of the tabloids

ELECTIONWATCH monitors election coverage in all the Sunday and daily national newspapers. Like cleaning out fatbergs in sewers it's a dirty business but someone's got to do it.

Here are a couple of observations based on what we have read since we began on 30 October. Some papers live simultaneously in two different worlds. Take the *The Daily Telegraph* for 13 November. It has been the paper relentlessly promoting Boris and his mantra of 'Let's get Brexit done' and whole swathes of it – news coverage, comment pieces, cartoons and editorials – sustain this viewpoint. But go to the Business section which is separate from the main paper, in more ways than one.

It tells a different story about

what's going on. One report is 'Sunderland fear as Nissan profits crash'. The car maker reported plunging profits and cut its full-year's forecast.

The firm churns out 444,000 Juke, Qashqai and Leaf cars a year, three quarters of which go to Europe. The piece quotes Professor David Bailey: "The plant's future is already up in the air with Japan signing a free-trade deal with the EU, which means cars can be exported tariff-free from Japan – something that may not be true for UK-built cars in the future."

On the next page Jeremy Warner has a piece, 'Let's stop fooling ourselves on the economy. It's in bad shape, period.'

Another observation. The *Mail on Sunday* is the nastiest, most vindictive right-wing rag. There's a lot of competition but the Sunday 18 November issue wins hands-down. 12 pages of relentless attack journalism plus an editorial and a Heath cartoon. Michael Gove's piece stands out. He wrote that it was unfair for EU citizens to have 'preferential treatment to free NHS care ... without paying in.' It's a lie – they don't and Gove knows it. EU citizens do not have automatic rights to health systems in other EU states. In the first three months you are treated like a tourist and have no rights and after three months, unless you are working or self-sufficient, then again you have no rights.

Our Plans

Welcome to the third issue of *ElectionWatch*. The second issue was very well-received with lots of positive responses. We plan to produce five issues during the election and welcome feedback and ideas for future articles.

This is a self-funding project and we are appealing for donations to fund the *ElectionWatch* initiative. Many thanks to Leeds and Wakefield NUJ for their support and donation.

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How media lies are making a mockery of democracy

From Page 1
his actual views on subjects.

The authors assert, 'Jeremy Corbyn was represented unfairly by the British press through a process of vilification that went well beyond the normal limits of fair debate and disagreement in a democracy. Corbyn was often denied his own voice in the reporting on him and sources that were anti-Corbyn tended to outweigh those that support him and his positions. He was also systematically treated with scorn and ridicule in both the broadsheet and tabloid press in a way that no other political leader is or has been. Even more problematic, the British press has repeatedly associated Corbyn with terrorism and positioned him as a friend of the enemies of the UK.'

The Conservative's election campaign is a ruthless masterclass in media control. It is also the most



A *Daily Mail* front page, one of many savaging the Labour leader during the election.

persuasive example of why we need media ownership reform and effective press regulation.

By Don Mort

WHEN BORIS JOHNSON and Jeremy Corbyn appeared in the first live TV general election debate on ITV, it followed more dire warnings over the state of the NHS and social care.

Over the past week, official figures showed A&E waiting times were at their worst since records began, and a survey by the NHS Confederation revealed that 90 per cent of health bosses believe short-staffing is putting patient safety at risk.

It also emerged that doctors have been warned over shortages of dozens of life-saving medicines, *The Guardian* reported on November 18. They included treatments for cancer, heart conditions, Parkinson's disease and mental health problems.

Mr Johnson seemed determined to repeat his 'get Brexit done' slogan as many times as possible as he faced questions live on ITV.

On the NHS, his favourite line was that more investment was needed, 'but we can only achieve that if we have a strong economy'. The mantra dates back years and was used by David Cameron to justify public spending cuts in the run-up to the 2015 election.

At the time, warnings were made that a plan to ring-fence the NHS budget would not go far enough in meeting increased demand for healthcare. Five years on, the NHS provider sector ended 2018-19 more than £570m in deficit, and warnings are again being made over future funding.

NHS England figures for October showed that fewer than 75 per cent of patients were treated, admitted or discharged within four hours at major 'type 1' A&E departments in England.

The Health Foundation said the figures showed the NHS in England is 'desperately struggling to stay afloat' because of insufficient funding and shortages of staff and equipment.

NHS privatisation and the US

In the ITV debate Jeremy Corbyn pressed home his allegation that Mr



The NHS is the battleground It's in a dire state and that's due to the Tories

Johnson would put the health service on the table in a future trade deal with the US: "You're going to sell our NHS to the United States and Big Pharma." He referred to trade talks between UK and US government officials and used information from a Freedom of Information request from Global Justice Now. Records of the meetings were initially refused by the Department of International Trade, before pages of documents were released with virtually all the text blacked out.

The group said a US-UK Trade and Investment Working Group was known to have met six times since being set up in 2017. "While the UK is not allowed to formally say that it is negotiating before it has left the EU, there is nothing to stop these talks covering much of the same ground," Global Justice Now said.

The action group is calling for full disclosure before the election, but an appeal at the Information Rights Tribunal is not due to be heard until December 12 and 13.

The impact of corporation tax cuts

Before Tuesday's TV debate, as arguments raged over which party is best placed to look after the NHS, Mr Johnson announced he would shelve a planned corporation tax cut from 19 to 17 per cent, a move which appears to contradict previous claims over the benefits of a low-tax economy.

Mr Johnson told the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) that the £6bn cost of the tax cut, planned for April next year, was better spent on the NHS and other national priorities.

Corporation tax has fallen from 28 per cent in 2010. A reduction to 17 per cent was first announced by the former chancellor George Osborne in 2016. "Britain is blazing a trail. Let the rest of the world catch up," he said at the time.

Low corporation tax would apparently boost the economy, increase business investment and allow for more spending on public services.

The theory has been supported by pro-business lobby groups often quoted in the right-wing press. On November 5, the *Express* website warned that "Labour's 'dangerous' corporation tax plan would decimate wages and send prices soaring."

Duncan Simpson, of the Taxpayers' Alliance, said: "I think they want to increase it to levels it was around 2010, about 26 percent. If there is a higher rate of corporation tax, I think that will be quite dangerous."

But the danger of reduced corporation tax has been highlighted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), which in 2017 estimated that cuts to corporation taxes were costing £16.5bn a year, or around £12.4bn if other revenue-raising measures were taken into account.

The IFS said: "Changes to corporate tax have represented some of the largest giveaways in both parliaments since 2010."

And in January this year, HMRC figures showed that each percentage point fall in corporation tax would cost £3.1bn per year, far higher than was predicted.

From hero to

Nigel Farage trashed by Tory tabloids

By Nicholas Jones

NIGEL FARAGE, for so long the hero of the Brexiteers, has finally been well and truly trashed by the Tory tabloids, his erstwhile cheerleaders.

In Boris Johnson's hour of need, Farage has been abandoned by newspapers that once went to the utmost lengths to promote his cheeky-chappie bloke-next-door image, pint of beer in hand.

When the Conservative Party is desperate for every vote to deliver Johnson's deal for the UK to exit the European Union by 31 January 2020, Farage became expendable, tossed aside into an already overflowing bin of broken Brexit promises.

"Stand down, Nigel!" was the clarification call of the *Daily Mail* (9.11.2019) as pressure mounted on the Brexit Party leader to withdraw his troops from the election so as not to split the Leave vote.

When Brexit Party candidates were pulled from 317 Conservative-held seats, there was short lull in the offensive: "Farage 'bottles it' in boost for Boris" (*London Evening Standard*, 11.11.2019);

"Nice one, Nigel ... but it's still not enough" chorused the *Daily Mail* (12.11.2019).

A partial retreat was never going to satisfy the demands of Johnson's press supporters:

"48 hours to do the decent thing, Nigel" was the *Sun's* diktat



(13.11.2019) as the Conservatives tried – and eventually failed – to persuade Farage to withdraw candidates from Labour marginals being targeted by the Tories.

Columnists had been wheeled out in a vain attempt to soft-soap the Brexit leader into making a full retreat: "Arise Baron Farage of Brexit" was Richard Littlejohn's try-on (*Daily Mail*, 12.11.2019).

Stephen Glover argued that an apparent surrender would be statesmanlike: "Patronised. Belittled. But now the real threat of Farage's legacy is ... himself" (*Daily Mail*, 14.11.2019).

Weasel words cut no ice with the battle hardened Brexiteer. By sticking to his guns, and fielding Brexit Party candidates in a total of 274 Labour-held seats, Farage has retained, for the moment, at least some degree of political leverage over Johnson.

Shared objective

In previous years, throughout the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party – and latterly the Brexit Party – media allies were all too eager to manipulate Farage in support of a shared objective to push the Conservative Party ever onward

zero!



in curbing immigration and leaving the European Union.

For almost a decade Farage was feted with double-page spreads and given the top spot for his signed columns, exposure that peaked in the run-up to the 2013 council elections and then before the European Parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019.

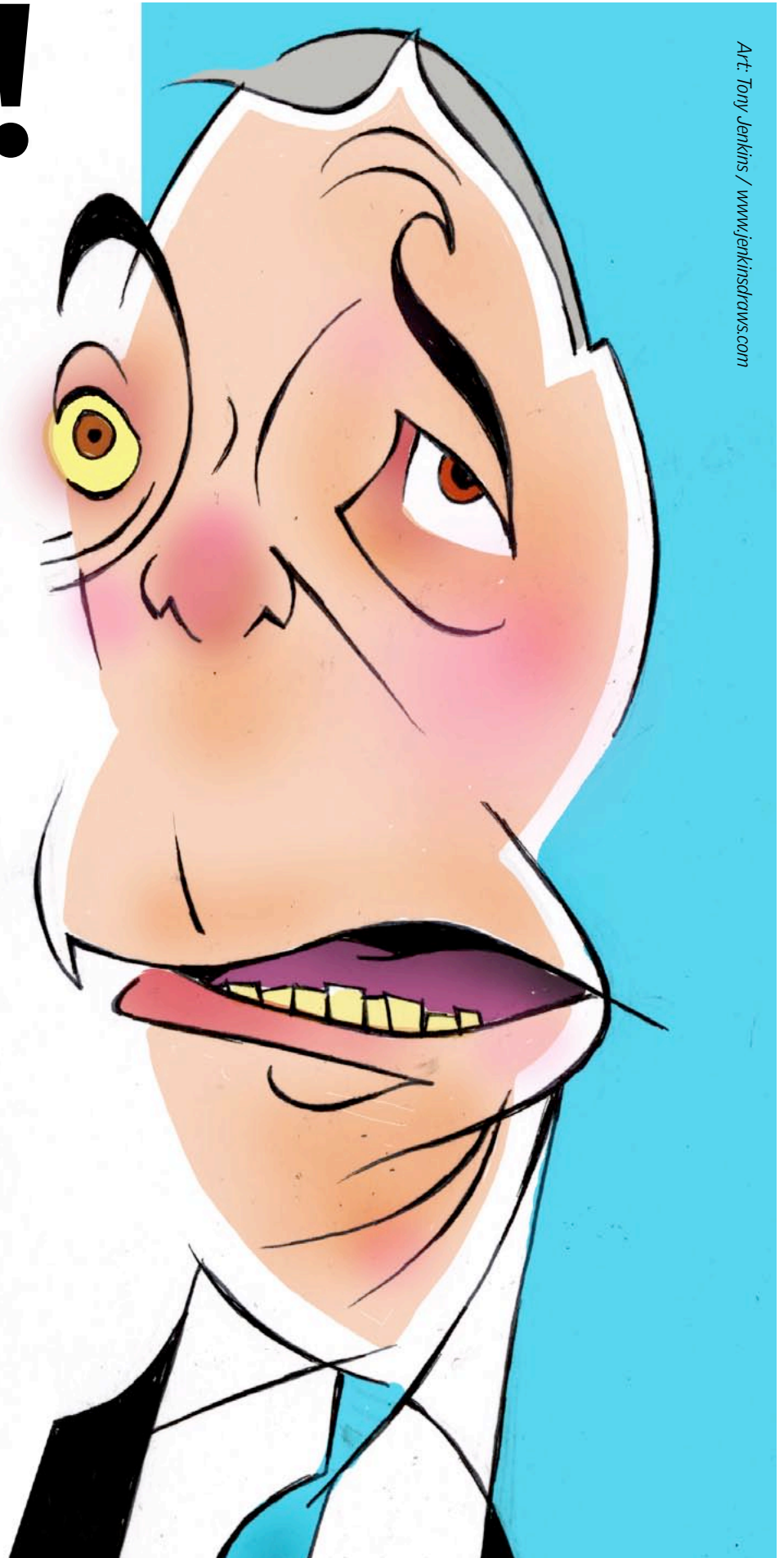
Used by Tory papers

By constantly promoting Farage in his drive to sweep up as much as possible of the anti-EU vote, the electoral success of UKIP – and then the Brexit Party – could be used by Conservative-supporting newspapers as yet another line of attack in campaigns to harden the policies of David Cameron and then Theresa May.

Until recent weeks Farage had accumulated a roll of honour in the headlines and front pages of the Brexit press that had proved far more enduring than that of any of his rivals.

On the day after the 2016 European Referendum, a photograph of a jubilant Farage, arms aloft, filled the *Daily Mail's* front page. "We're out" was the banner headline (24.6.2016).

Again in 2019, after the declaration of results in the European



Art: Tony Jenkins / www.jenkinsdraws.com

Parliamentary elections when the Brexit Party topped the poll, a picture of Farage being applauded by his supporters dominated the front of the *Daily Mail* under the one-word headline: “Earthquake” (27.5.2019).

Farage’s electoral success in May this year was the final nail in the political coffin of Theresa May and helped to ensure Johnson a two-to-one victory in the Conservative leadership election.

No longer useful

But once arch Brexiteer Johnson was safely installed in 10 Downing Street as Prime Minister, Farage’s usefulness to the Tory press was always going to be time limited.

Perhaps the one surprise was that it was his political chum across the pond who saw the writing on the wall and was the first to act:



“Trump tells Farage: Do deal with Boris” (*Daily Mail*, 1.11.2019).

The Brexit press took Trump’s cue and the Brexit leader was told in no uncertain terms that he had no alter-

native but to team up with Johnson and that if he did, they would, in the view of the US President, make an “unstoppable force”.

At the midway point in the election campaign, the Tory newspapers seem to have adopted the tactic of trying to ignore Farage and his party, in the belief that this is perhaps the best way to limit the Brexit Party’s impact in the all-important Tory targets in the Midlands and the North of England. Nonetheless the closer it gets to polling day another Farage hatchet job might be in the offing and prove too tempting for the Tory tabloids to resist.

Nicholas Jones was a BBC industrial and political correspondent for 30 years until retiring in 2002. His books include, The Lost Tribe: Whatever Happened to Fleet Street’s Industrial Correspondents?

Tory election stunt backfires as fake facts site exposed on Twitter

THEY’RE AT it again. Just weeks after the Tory press office faced criticism for posting a heavily edited video which appeared to show Keir Starmer, the shadow Brexit secretary, responding to a question with an extended silence, we have another piece of fakery.

The Conservative party was accused of duping the public after re-branding one of its official Twitter accounts as ‘factcheckUK’ during the first televised debate on ITV. It appeared to be an independent fact-checking service covering the ITV debate and issued dozens of pro-Tory tweets during the ITV debate under the factcheckUK logo.

The branding played down links to the Tory party except for a reference to ‘from CCHQ’ in small print. This made it hard to distinguish from other fact-checking services developed by independent organisations and media groups such as the BBC, *The Guardian* and Channel 4.

However the stunt was met by



Not fooling the voters. The Tory Party changed the title of its Twitter page in an effort to make it look like an independent fact-checking service.

anger and mockery on Twitter. A genuine fact-checking agency, Full Fact, said in a statement: “It is inappropriate and misleading for the Conservative press office to rename their twitter account ‘factcheckUK’ during this debate.”

The effect of this Tory stunt will have been to dupe many unknowing members of the public, who genuinely thought it was a fact-checking service when it gave opinions on

Jeremy Corbyn.

As with the Keir Starmer doctored video, it has attracted widespread publicity and condemnation.

For the people who dreamed up the stunt at Tory HQ that counts as a victory. They are not bothered about providing fair and accurate information.

Their motivation is disruption and disinformation.

UPDATES

Boris still blocking Russian influence report

■ **WE REPORTED** this story in *Issue 2* ('The Russian Money Tree', p12). Peter Osborne had this in the *New Statesman* about a *Sunday Times* report of 10 November:

"Last weekend, the home affairs correspondent of the *Sunday Times* Tom Harper and his colleague Caroline Wheeler produced a story of first-rate importance. They revealed that nine Russian business-people who donated significant sums to The Conservative Party are named in the intelligence and security committee report that Johnson suppressed on the eve of the general election campaign. Some of these business people have links with the Russian security establishment.

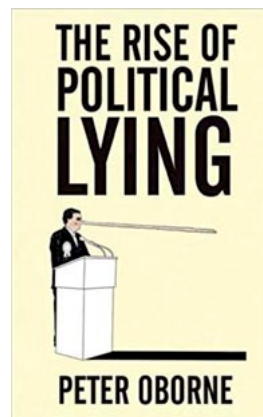
Now let's try a mental experiment. Let's imagine that the *Sunday Times* had obtained a story that nine dodgy Russian businessmen with links to Vladimir Putin had funded Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. It would have been the lead story of the *Sunday Times* and over recent days entire forests would have been chopped down in order to make way for feverish Fleet Street coverage of Corbyn's sinister Russian funders. As it is, the *Sunday Times* splashed instead on palpably fake Conservative claims about Labour's spending plans. Harper and Wheeler had to make do with page two. With the exception of the *Daily Mirror*, I have seen minimal follow-up of their brilliant scoop."

Funds for run-down towns go to Tory marginals

■ **IT SEEMS** that money from the £3.6bn fund to boost run-down high streets has been directed towards wealthier areas that are marginal Conservative-held or target seats rather than towards deprived towns. We covered this story in issue 2, p3.

A *Times* report, 13 November, 'Towns fund boosts Tory-held marginals', is tucked away on p15. Places like Cheadle, Worcester and Kidsgrove will receive cash.

Andrew Gwynne, the shadow communities secretary, commented, "This raises serious questions about the role ministers and advisers played in robbing some of the poorest towns in the country to funnel cash into Tory target seats in a scramble for votes."



The lies of Boris Johnson

■ **FIFTEEN YEARS** ago Peter Osborne wrote a powerful book *The Rise of Political Lying*. His motive for writing it was partly to document the lies the Blair administration had told about the war in Iraq.

Since then he has kept a dossier of political lies and he now believes that 'the scale of lying in the few short months since Mr Johnson became prime minister has risen exponentially to record levels'. He has now published his record of the lies, falsehoods and misleading statements made by Johnson and his colleagues on his website. He thinks that the lying taking place under the Johnson administration 'is far more serious than anything that has taken place before - much of it is deliberate, calculated and systematic'.

Peter Osborne's website is www.boris-johnson-lies.com

Withering criticism of Nichola Pease

■ **IN ISSUE 2** ('Keeping It In The Family' p12) we mentioned Nichola Pease and her key role as a long-standing board member of Northern Rock, the bank which went down in flames on her watch. She has just been appointed chairman (sic) of Jupiter Asset Management.

Patrick Hosking has a withering attack on her in *The Times Business* section, 12 November. He writes, '...the appointment looks tainted because she has never acknowledged any failings, her past has been airbrushed' and 'A few words of regret from her and of explanation from Jupiter would help before she starts her £235,000-a-year, part-time role in March.'

Pease is married to hedge-fund manager Crispin Odey. Their net worth is estimated at £775m in the *Sunday Times Rich List*.

Johnson's railway pledge a 'total sham'

■ **BORIS JOHNSON** has pledged a £500m fund to restore the 1,500 stations and 5,000 miles of track that were closed under the Beeching cuts in the 1960s. The fund would be used to restore rail networks and reduce the number of towns cut off from rail access.

Manuel Cortes, general secretary of the rail union TSSA, condemned the plan as 'a total sham'.

Labour shadow transport secretary Andy McDonald pointed out, "The Conservatives announced this policy two years ago to try and distract from the collapse of the East Coast franchise which ultimately cost taxpayers £2bn. Not one of the Beeching cuts has been restored."

Public anger at the state of the privatised rail networks is intense. Labour's policy is to bring the railways back into public ownership.

Labour videos leave Tories in shade

A SNAP YouGov poll after the ITV debate between Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn placed them close together – 51 to 49 percent respectively. But it was Labour which was most effective in getting its message out on social media according to a digital media expert.

Of the six most-viewed videos of the debate posted on Twitter by the parties or their supporter groups the first five were by Labour.

Within an hour of ITV's debate ending Labour posted a video on Jeremy Corbyn's Twitter account attacking Johnson for hiding plans to sell the NHS and focusing on the redacted document, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. This was juxtaposed with footage of Johnson shaking hands with



Audience members cued to ask questions in ITV's leadership debate on 19 November.

President Trump saying 'everything would be on the table in a UK-US trade deal'. A day later the video had had 1.2 million views.

Labour also posted footage during the debate of Johnson interrupting the BBC Breakfast presenter Naga Munchetty with the line 'It's not just on the BBC where Boris Johnson

speaks over women. It's ITV as well'. Several times in the debate he talked over Julie Etchingham, the ITV host, when she asked him to stop speaking when he ran over time.

The Tories' most successful video was the 'FactcheckUK' video stating Johnson had won the debate. This was the renamed Twitter account of Conservative campaign HQ.

These are the findings of Matt Walsh a digital media expert at the School of Journalism, Cardiff University. He said, "Labour has shown itself to be much more agile in connecting digital strategy to the other parts of the campaign. Having the document to hand and a video ready to run demonstrates joined-up, strategic thinking. The Tories are left playing catch-up once again."

Broadband is crucial public infrastructure

A YOUNGOV poll earlier this month showed support for rail nationalisation among 56 per cent of people, water at 50 percent and energy at 45 per cent.

If you are a rail commuter, fed up with overcrowded or unreliable trains and expensive train tickets, rail nationalisation looks attractive. Much better than the convoluted structure which separates track, rolling stock and operators. And the same goes for people fed up with high energy bills or water companies which fail to deal with leaks.

Now Labour has announced it will nationalise Openreach and parts of BT to provide free full fibre broadband to every home and business in the UK. We Own It have produced

some really informative material supporting this policy.

Right now only 8 per cent of UK premises have full-fibre connections. Only 40 per cent of low income households use broadband internet at home. That means teenagers struggling to do their homework. It means older people feeling isolated and alone. It means rural start ups struggling to get off the ground.

Boris Johnson wants to increase internet speeds but he will rely on multinational companies like Virgin to deliver this. They will cherry pick what they can offer to maximise profits for shareholders and demand huge government subsidies to cover rural areas. (Just like rail and bus companies cherry pick the profitable

routes in busy areas - and have to be paid vast sums to provide extra services to rural areas.)

Back in the 1980s, the UK led the world in terms of broadband development, along with the US and Japan. But in 1984 Thatcher privatised BT and in 1990 she decided that private competitors needed to be allowed to compete in the market.

The two factories that BT had built to build fibre related components were sold to Fujitsu and HP, the assets were stripped and the expertise was shipped out to South East Asia.

Check the full story out at: <https://weownit.org.uk/our-public-services/broadband>

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