

THE BBC and BREXIT

The 'Today' Programme's Coverage
of the UK General Election
6 November – 11 December 2019

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SUMMARY

This News-watch survey confirms major breaches of impartiality in the coverage of the 2019 General Election by the BBC's flagship news programme Today. The Corporation must answer five central questions:

- Why were there more Remainers than Leavers in the coverage of what was widely dubbed as 'The Brexit election'?
- Why did the clean-break Brexit perspective merit only 9 per cent of airtime when in 2016 the British people voted to Leave the EU and, according to surveys, 38 percent of the electorate want 'no deal'?
- Why did the BBC 'Reality Check' unit and Today business news focus so heavily on Brexit negativity?
- Why does the BBC never explore properly the potential benefits of Brexit and instead focuses relentlessly on perceived pitfalls?
- Why do both Ofcom and the BBC resist being more rigorous and transparent in their assessment of impartiality when public confidence is in steep decline?

The report establishes that between November 6 and December 11, 2019, in its EU-related General Election coverage, the flagship BBC Radio 4 Today programme did not meet requirements of due impartiality laid down by Ofcom and the BBC Charter.

The survey - conducted using rigorous academic methodology - is based on word-by-word analysis of almost 350 programme items involving 332 contributors and 169 interviews. The coverage totalled more than 71,000 words amounting to 12 hours and 23 minutes - 21.6 percent of Today's available airtime.

This was widely dubbed 'the Brexit election' because the central choice was between the Conservative party manifesto pledge to 'get Brexit done' and a range of parties, including Labour, who were in favour of a second referendum or Remain. In this context - because a binary choice was on offer - it would be expected that Today would achieve a broadly equal balance between the two perspectives.

The most striking manifestation of bias was that coverage was heavily weighted to those advocating Remain.

- 178 speakers - 53.6 percent of the total who appeared were broadly pro-EU, anti-Brexit, in favour of a second referendum or the revoking of Article 50. They spoke 36,384 words, 51% of the total words on the EU/Brexit
- 112 speakers - 33.7 per cent of the total - were broadly anti-EU, pro-Brexit (including the Boris Johnson deal), or opposed to a second EU referendum or the revoking of Article 50. They spoke 26,445 Words, 37% of the total words on the EU/Brexit

Ahead of the campaign, polls indicated that 38 percent of voters supported a 'no deal' Brexit amid widespread concerns that Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement did not facilitate a clean-break from the EU. Both the Brexit Party and the DUP also expressed grave reservations about the terms. Yet this perspective was held by only 31 of the 332 (9.3 percent) programme contributors who together spoke only 6,494 words (9.1 percent of the total) and they were rarely given the space to make a clear, pro-Brexit case against the Withdrawal Agreement.

This major imbalance was compounded by that more than 50 percent of the words spoken by supporters of 'no deal' were delivered by Nigel Farage across four strongly adversarial interviews in which the main intent was to accuse him of being unprincipled; scared to stand personally; the head of merely a pressure group; incoherent in his strategies; and of framing immigration policies which would stifle the economy and hobble social and health services.

The negativity towards Brexit was buttressed and worsened by so-called 'reality check' comment which disproportionately focused on that the projected timetable was insufficient, along with the imagined risks of 'no deal'. The BBC set itself up as an adjudicator of 'truth' but instead used the slot to project anti-Brexit pessimism. In addition, coverage in the programme's dedicated business news sections featured only six contributors who saw possible benefits of Brexit, ranged against 26 who were deeply cautious or still preferred Remain, with predictions of economic demise and whole sections of manufacturing industry and financial services being severely hit.

A further aspect of the coverage was bias by omission. The Today programme made extensive efforts to show why Brexit would not work, but mounted very little effort to explore the potential benefits. The only glimpses of these were confined to the interviews with Nigel Farage, a series of short soundbites with firm withdrawalists and claims from government ministers that the Johnson deal would lead to free trade and more beneficial trading terms.

An overarching concern, detailed in the opening section of this report, is that public confidence in the BBC's ability to deliver impartial news and current affairs is waning, with audiences rating the BBC fifth out of six major broadcasters. And yet, the methods used by both the BBC and

Ofcom to investigate this major concern are demonstrably inadequate, relying on focus groups that deliberately exclude those with strong opinions on Brexit or the BBC, and supported by content analysis which studiously avoids confronting the fundamental question of impartiality.

PART ONE: MONITORING STATISTICS

1.1 OVERVIEW – THE BBC, THE ROYAL CHARTER AND OFCOM

The BBC is the UK's national public service broadcaster, established under a Royal Charter¹ and operating under an Agreement with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.² The BBC has a significant audience both in the UK and globally³, and its funding primarily derives from an annual licence fee charged to UK households, supplemented by revenue from the BBC's commercial subsidiaries. This generates an annual income of approximately £3.7 billion.⁴

The 2017 Charter replaced the BBC Trust with the BBC Board, and charged the new body with ensuring that the BBC delivers its Mission and Public Purposes, while regulatory responsibility passed to Ofcom, the 'first external, independent regulator' in the Corporation's history, responsible for 'holding the BBC's performance and editorial standards to account.'⁵

The Royal Charter sets out that the BBC's Mission is, 'to act in the public interest, servicing all audience through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output'⁶ and defines the first of the BBC's five Public Purposes as:

To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them: the BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming to build people's understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world.⁷

The BBC also has additional obligations during the periods of elections and referendums. The guidelines for the December 2019 General Election stated:

To achieve due impartiality, each bulletin, programme or programme strand, as well as online and social media channels, must ensure that the parties are covered proportionately over an appropriate period and overall across the Election Period.⁸

It noted that this should take into account 'levels of past and current electoral support', with the 2017 and 2015 General Elections as a starting point, but where appropriate other factors should be taken into account, including performance in other elections, whether there were new

¹ From 1922 the BBC operated as the British Broadcasting Company, before being granted its Royal Charter in 1927. The Charter is renewed each decade, it's latest iteration is here:

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/2016/charter.pdf

² http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/2016/agreement.pdf

³ <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/annualreport/2018-19.pdf> p.167. In the UK, 91% of adults engage with BBC TV, Radio or Online each week, and in June 2019 it was reported that World Service English and BBC World News TV had increased their joint audience reach to a record high of 426 million per week.

⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284709/bbc-s-annual-income-in-the-united-kingdom-uk-by-source/>

⁵ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2017/ofcom-becomes-the-first-independent-external-regulator-of-the-bbc-today>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/mission>

⁷ http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/2016/charter.pdf p.5

⁸ https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/draft_election_guidelines_051119.pdf p.5

parties or party splits, the number of candidates standing, and ‘other evidence of current support.’⁹ The guidelines noted that the BBC’s daily news magazine programmes should ‘normally achieve proportional and appropriate coverage within the course of each week of the campaign’¹⁰ and could not rely on other outlets or programme strands to achieve impartiality.

In March 2019 the BBC’s Annual Plan promised to ‘stand up for impartiality’. It stated:

The BBC’s commitment to impartial news and information is part of our enduring contract with audiences. We cannot take that for granted, especially when the events of recent years have widened generational, political and social differences. Impartiality matters. And it matters even more at a moment when society feels so divided and divisive, so full of misinformation and aggression. Making sure all sides of a debate are heard – all different views and voices – is fundamental to our mission. We must stand up for it and defend our role like never before. It is essential if we are to continue to be the place people know they can trust to get to grips with what is truly happening in the world, and to hear the broadest range of views.¹¹

However, the Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019, published in July 2019 indicated that audiences rated the BBC fifth of six major broadcasters in respect to its impartiality, with just 58% agreeing that the Corporation’s news and current affairs coverage was impartial, lower than CNN (70%), Sky News (68%), ITV (65%) and Channel 4 (65%).¹² Ofcom’s second Annual Review of the BBC was published in October 2019 and underplayed this apparent crisis of public confidence in the BBC’s news output. It suggested that perceptions of problems with impartiality may have been shaped by discussion of BBC coverage in social media, which ‘suggests that a limited number of critical voices may have a disproportionately large influence on how BBC coverage is perceived’.¹³

On impartiality, our research found that people’s views are shaped by a range of factors, with only some relating directly to the BBC’s news and current affairs content. However, some people perceived the BBC gave too much coverage to extreme voices. Others criticised ‘false equivalence’, where equal weight was given in a debate to views with an unequal factual basis.¹⁴

The data used to inform Ofcom’s deductions contained fundamental flaws. Audience opinion had been gathered by PwC Research, using a ‘mix of workshops and friendship in-depth interviews, covering a wide range of audiences across the UK’.¹⁵ The research said that some of those questioned, ‘felt the BBC gives undue prominence to extreme political views at the expense of those in the middle.’¹⁶ But PwC’s selection methodology contained an important caveat regarding the cohort that was permitted to participate: ‘All consumed news daily/most days; No BBC

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/annualplan/annualplan_2019-20.pdf p.8

¹² https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/157914/uk-news-consumption-2019-report.pdf p.74 Only Channel 5 was rated more negatively than the BBC, at 57%.

¹³ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/173735/second-bbc-annual-report.pdf p.34

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/174066/bbc-news-review-pwc-full-report.pdf

¹⁶ Ibid. p.51

rejecters or advocates; Rejected those with strong opinions around Brexit.¹⁷ Thus, the research was distorted towards gathering 'moderate' views and participants with potentially valid and real concerns about the BBC or its Brexit coverage were disregarded from the outset. The main Ofcom report made no mention of this filtering process and elements from the audience research were presented as indicative.¹⁸

The concept of 'false equivalence', raised in the focus group sessions and duly elevated to salience within the Annual Review, is also problematic. In the months following the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, a number of senior BBC staff expressed similar concerns: that the legal obligation to give equal space to both sides during the campaign had led to inordinate space given to arguments which they believed to be spurious. In October 2016, BBC World Editor John Simpson complained that BBC News hadn't given audiences 'clear enough guidance about the lies that were being told' and said he suspected that if people had known the facts and had judged in a more balanced way the [referendum] outcome would have been a bit different.¹⁹ There were claims in the Guardian that BBC Director General Lord Hall had 'wailed' to his London dinner circuit that strict BBC balance had lost the referendum by giving too much credibility to Leave,²⁰ and one his predecessors Mark Thompson, argued that the BBC's rules on 'due impartiality' ought to be changed if we were to 'get to another referendum.'²¹ He made similar points to Andrew Marr:

And in a sense, if...if one side, you know, produces an eminent, you know, economist, the other side produces, you know, Coco the Clown, they're sort of treated as if they're somehow equal. So I think there may be a case for looking at the rules for how referenda are...are covered in...in broadcasting.²²

Former Controller of BBC Radio 4, Mark Damazer, agreed. In an article for Prospect he noted that, from the Remainers' perspective, 'the BBC's output is riddled with "false equivalence," giving equal time and respectability to Brexit arguments that have no facts to support them.'²³ Stewart Purvis, formerly CEO of ITN and an Ofcom content regulator, said in an article for the Royal Television Society that, since the referendum, Remain campaigners had turned against the Corporation:

The complainants no longer seemed to trust the corporation. "False equivalence" became their battle cry when Leavers were offered the chance to rebut what Remainers saw as accepted facts and consensus opinions. Anti-Brexit campaigner Gina Miller now believes

¹⁷ Ibid. p.6

¹⁸ The PwC researchers were careful to outline how the various focus groups had been weighted in terms of age, background, and religious view, but there was nothing to indicate that the cohort had been balanced in terms of Leave/Remain.

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeRP2buuvsk>

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/05/tackle-bbc-bias-make-plain-see-nick-robinson> In the article Jenkin says, 'After the Brexit vote last June, Robinson's boss, Lord Hall, went round the London dinner circuit wailing that BBC balance had "lost us the election". It had given too much credibility to Leave.' It is assumed, given the context of the article, that Jenkin (or Hall if the quote is direct) meant 'referendum' rather than election. The BBC responded, "The words attributed to Tony Hall in the Guardian are not his; he has never made any such statement or assertion; they do not reflect his view in any way; and, the BBC has no regrets about its coverage of the campaign." <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/04/simon-jenkins-lifts-lid-bbc-chiefs-dinner-circle-wailing-brexit/>

²¹ Radio 4, The Media Show, 31 August 2016

²² BBC1, The Andrew Marr Show, 11 September 2016, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11091603.pdf>

²³ <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/mark-damazer-bbc-brexit-coverage-bias>

that “it seems to have got much worse since the EU referendum, this idea at the BBC that you have got to give equal weight to both sides, even if one side is telling a lie”.²⁴

It is impossible to determine from the PwC research if the ‘false equivalence’ claims were spontaneous, original thoughts from focus group participants, or if those making this particular point had been exposed to this regular post-referendum ‘battle cry’ in some form and were simply repeating it.

Nevertheless, it is significant that Ofcom decided to specifically highlight this concern in its main report. The concept of ‘false equivalence’ is politically contentious. It is predicated a patronising hypothesis: that audiences are somehow too intellectually inept to weigh up competing arguments and come to an informed conclusion, that they would be unable to recognise, autonomously, the difference between ‘Coco the Clown’ and ‘an eminent economist’. It suggests that there were incontrovertible ‘truths’ or ‘facts’ during the referendum campaign, when so much competing argument from both sides was based on projection and prediction.²⁵ It implies that opinions were formed or changed only within the campaign period, and not in the years and decades preceding the referendum. And, perhaps most crucially, it relies on the concept that the BBC’s referendum coverage was meticulously balanced – when research undertaken during the campaign by News-watch and others, indicated that the Corporation had actually failed to provide equal time and space to speakers from the two sides, as was their legal obligation.²⁶

In addition to the information gathered PwC Research’s workshops, Ofcom’s Annual Review of the BBC also included a formal monitoring component²⁷, undertaken by researchers at Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture, a department with strong historical and existing links to the BBC.²⁸ The Director of the School of Journalism, Richard Sambrook, a former BBC Director of Newsgathering, has referred to himself as ‘strongly Remain’²⁹ and opined, ‘The only options for Brexit are painful v pointless. My moneys [sic] on painful.’³⁰ Also on the senior management team are Professor Jenny Kitzinger, who tweeted before the 2016 referendum, ‘So much to lose by Brexit. Not just economic costs’³¹ and in October 2019 attended a ‘People’s

²⁴ <https://rts.org.uk/article/stewart-purvis-challenges-brexit-political-coverage>

²⁵ The most widely quoted example is the slogan used by Vote Leave on their battle bus, ‘We send the EU £350 million a week, let’s fund our NHS instead’, but there were equal warnings by Remain including the Chancellor warning of a punitive ‘emergency budget’ on the day after a vote to leave the EU, job losses and a drop in house prices, none of which transpired.

²⁶ Despite the narrative established by the BBC and other commentators, evidence shows that its referendum coverage was *not* actually as balanced as it claimed. For example, News-watch’s survey of Radio 1’s Newsbeat during the period the referendum guidelines were in operation found that audiences were 1.5 times more likely to hear a voice supporting Remain than Leave, and Remain supporting politicians were given twice as much airtime as their counterparts from the Leave campaign (<http://news-watch.co.uk/radio-1s-newsbeat-october-2016/>) This was supported by research from Cardiff University into the BBC’s News at Ten, discussed in more detail later in this section.

²⁷ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/174205/bbc-news-review-content-analysis-full-report.pdf

²⁸ The Department has provided content analysis to support a number of ‘Impartiality Reviews’ for the BBC Trust, including the Prebble Report: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/editorial_standards/impartiality.html During the current survey, Today delivered a live edition from Cardiff University on 15th November. Presenter Justin Webb noted that a ‘good mix of people’ were in the live audience, ‘including some who are from the very excellent and long-established journalism school here at Cardiff University, including the offspring of Today presenter.’ The Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Culture shares a building with the headquarters of BBC Wales. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-50117558>

²⁹ <https://twitter.com/sambrook/status/980492868350611456>

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/sambrook/status/1090220299960967169>

³¹ <https://twitter.com/JennyKitzinger/status/865539669936570368>

Vote march against Brexit³²; and Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen – who conducted content analysis for Stuart Prebble's 'Impartiality Review' for the BBC Trust, in which the EU was one of the three subject areas selected for review³³ – has tweeted about 'uncontrollable weeping'³⁴ following the referendum vote, and in response to comments from Nigel Farage that the country might be headed for a 'half-Brexit', commented, 'Great news: we may only be half-screwed.'³⁵

Cardiff's supporting paper for the 2019 Ofcom Annual Review of the BBC was entitled, 'The Range and Depth of BBC News and Current Affairs: A Content Analysis'³⁶, and surveyed a range of BBC and non-BBC programmes and online content over a three-week interval between 3 June and 21 June 2019.

The Cardiff study was authored by Professor Stephen Cushion, previously lead researcher on four of the BBC 'Impartiality Reviews' for Ofcom's regulatory predecessor, the BBC Trust.³⁷ Professor Cushion also oversaw a survey of the main evening news bulletins on the BBC, ITV, C4, C5 and Sky during the 2016 referendum campaign, and in October 2016 penned an article based on its findings for The New Statesman, entitled, 'Broadcasters were biased during the EU referendum campaign - but not in the way you think'.³⁸ The article said:

This interpretation of "due impartiality" was, in this sense, both even-handed and one-sided. The Leave and Remain camps received equal time, but we ended up with an argument that privileged Conservative arguments on both sides.

However, when more detailed information was published in The European Journal of Communication,³⁹ in May 2017 it revealed that the Leave and Remain campaigns had not actually received the 'equal time' as had been initially claimed and widely publicised. Professor Cushion's data showed that on BBC News at Ten there had been a 9% differential in favour of Remain-supporting on-screen sources, it had been the least balanced of the five sampled programmes.⁴⁰ While the points made about the Conservative Party's dominance of the referendum debate broadly correlated to News-watch's own research during this period, it is significant that this potentially explosive point – that the BBC had failed to meet its legal

³² <https://twitter.com/JennyKitzinger/status/1185550518866894850>

³³ http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/breadth_opinion/content_analysis.pdf

³⁴ She used the phrase twice: <https://twitter.com/KarinWahlJ/status/747546493930901504> and

<https://twitter.com/KarinWahlJ/status/747543538141904896>

³⁵ <https://twitter.com/KarinWahlJ/status/794173696504107012>

³⁶ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/174205/bbc-news-review-content-analysis-full-report.pdf

³⁷ <https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies/CaseStudy.aspx?id=17644>

³⁸ <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/staggers/2016/10/broadcasters-were-biased-during-eu-referendum-campaign-not-way-you-think>

³⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5482388/>

⁴⁰ (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0267323117695736> Page 214, Table 2. (Speakers marked as 'Unclear' by Cardiff have been discounted, to provide a clear differential between Leave and Remain in this calculation) and the BBC was the least balanced of the five broadcasters sampled. (BBC News at Ten: 8.9% differential in favour of Remain; ITV Evening News: 5.1% differential in favour of Leave; Channel 4 News, 4% in favour of Remain, Channel 5 News, 5.8% in favour of Remain, Sky News, 8.4% in favour of Remain. Again, speakers marked unclear by Cardiff have been discounted to provide a clear Leave/Remain differential.)

obligation to deliver equal coverage to the Leave and Remain campaigns in one of its flagship programmes – was not seen to be a discovery of any great import.

The researchers working under Professor Cushion on the Cardiff paper for Ofcom's 2019 Annual Review of the BBC included Ph.D candidates who have, variously, published online comments such as 'No Deal now most likely outcome. We will have a few days of fruit and veg, a few weeks of drinkable tap water. #Brexit redefining shitshow day by day', have used hashtags such as #Brexitshambles and #Brexshit, posted images of a 'Queers Against Brexit' banner, and altered their social media profile pictures to feature overlays of the 12 stars of the European Union flag.⁴¹

Of course, it does not necessarily follow that those with strong political views on the EU or Brexit should be precluded from conducting research in this area, and one would hope that those charged with undertaking the research for Ofcom approached their investigation objectively. But certainly the inclusion of those with highly partisan views, both in the research team and among the senior management of the Cardiff School of Journalism requires attentiveness to the possibility of confirmation bias, both in regards to the gathering of data and any subsequent interpretation of the results.

In many respects, Ofcom's remit to Cardiff appeared studiously intended to avoid any overt examination of impartiality. This was curious, given the public disquiet on the issue as illuminated by the audience research conducted for the Annual Review. The Cardiff paper explained that its project was designed to 'provide an evidence-based assessment of the *range* and *depth* of journalism across different platforms and news'⁴², and the parameters as decided by Ofcom were such that:

Our study was *not* designed to examine the impartiality of news reporting from the BBC compared to commercial media. This would require a more systematic analysis of how news reporting was informed by sources over a period of time.⁴³

The Cardiff investigation duly focused on arguably less pressing concerns⁴⁴ such as the balance between 'hard news' and 'soft news' across programmes and outlets, along with 'the proportion of internal and external hyperlinks' used by media organisations in online reporting. The paper also incorporated four case studies, on the themes of: The Conservative leadership contest; Brexit; Health and Education in a devolved UK; and Climate Change.

⁴¹ Various tweets in the public domain from the Cardiff researchers.

⁴² https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/174205/bbc-news-review-content-analysis-full-report.pdf p.1

⁴³ Ibid. p.15

⁴⁴ In addition to the aforementioned research which showed that only 58% of those surveyed believed the BBC to be impartial, Ofcom's Terms of Reference for the Annual Review of the BBC said, 'In previous research, people have raised concerns about potential BBC bias on both sides of the political spectrum. This has been reflected in the complaints we have received: during our first full year regulating the BBC, the most common type of complaint about its content related to impartiality. (https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/139905/bbc-news-review-terms-of-reference.pdf p.6) It is unclear to what extent the division between 'hard' and 'soft' news, or the use of hyperlinks are matters of concern to BBC audiences.

Although the Brexit section included a quantitative component, it was impossible to discern, from the statistics as they were presented, the names or position of those contributing to news as ‘sources’ – UK politicians, for example, were not separated according to their or their stance on Brexit.⁴⁵ This prevented the checking of coding accuracy, and drawing additional conclusions from the data, for example by exploring the proportion of time and space awarded to speakers on the Leave/Remain or ‘Deal/No-deal’ dichotomies. By contrast, Cardiff’s case study on Climate Change in the same document presented a table which provided exactly such information: the names of directly quoted sources, their party or position, and whether they were critical or supportive in tone towards the government’s 2050 emissions target.⁴⁶

The Cardiff researchers’ main conclusion in its section on Brexit was that there had been an insufficient range of voices from the EU and its member states during their three-week survey interval:

Only the BBC outlets directly sourced the EU, and when they did, they used only five sources to represent the 27 member states. The range and depth of Brexit coverage would have been enhanced had it more regularly counterbalanced the claims of UK politicians with comments from EU or member state officials.

This finding, of course, sharply contradicts News-watch’s own longitudinal analyses of BBC content over two decades, which has consistently revealed a disproportionate weighting towards pro-EU sources (including, indeed, direct sources from the EU and its other member states) along with an ongoing reluctance to adequately reflect the levels of public support for Brexit. It was impossible to discern, from Cardiff’s research as it was presented, whether these long term trends were also apparent in their monitoring interval, or if the relative brevity of their survey produced a statistical aberration. Deeper questions concerning which voices were heard and in what proportions were concealed by the decision to employ broad (and therefore vague) categorisations, and hampered by Ofcom’s ‘specific brief’ which instructed Cardiff to avoid assessing directly matters of impartiality.

Yet, in spite of its clear limitations, the inclusion of Cardiff’s paper in the Annual Review at least demonstrated Ofcom’s understanding of the necessity for a formal monitoring component, including both quantitative and qualitative analysis. After all, without such assessments, the performance metrics delivered in the Annual Review would have been based largely on focus groups and anecdotal comments from a cross-section of viewers, listeners and industry professionals.

⁴⁵ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/174205/bbc-news-review-content-analysis-full-report.pdf p.101

⁴⁶ Ibid. pp.140-143

1.2 THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

On 23 June 2016 the UK held a referendum on the question: 'Should the United Kingdom Remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?' The result was that 51.9% of voters chose to Leave the EU, and 48.1% chose to Remain. Nine months later, the Conservative government invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union, and set in motion a two-year timetable for withdrawal, which would include negotiations between the UK and EU.

In November 2018, it was announced that the UK and EU negotiating teams had reached an agreement in principle on a Withdrawal Agreement. Subsequently, then-Prime Minister Theresa May presented this to the House of Commons. Key elements of the deal included: a transition period to negotiate the nature of the future relationship between the UK and EU; a financial settlement or 'divorce bill' of £39bn paid to the EU from the UK; a backstop arrangement to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland, which would keep the UK in the customs union and require Northern Ireland to follow single market rules until a free trade agreement was reached; and a political declaration sketching out the future relationship between the UK and EU, focusing primarily on trade and security.

The Withdrawal Agreement was opposed on two fronts: by former Remainers who opposed Brexit entirely or wished to maintain close post-Brexit ties to the EU, and by former Leavers who believed that the Irish backstop would serve as a means of keeping the UK tied indefinitely into an open-ended customs arrangement. The Irish backstop proposal was strongly opposed by the Democratic Unionist Party, who saw it as weakening Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom through the creation of a regulatory border between the region and the rest of the UK.⁴⁷ The government attempted to pass the legislation three times in a series of 'meaningful votes' between January and March 2018, but failed on each occasion. A short extension was thus granted to Article 50, and this was later lengthened, at a meeting of the European Council in April, until 31 October 2019. This meant that the UK was obligated to take part in the European Parliamentary elections, given that there appeared little prospect of the Withdrawal Agreement being ratified before MEPs took their seats in July.

The 2019 European Election saw The Brexit Party, fronted by former UKIP-leader Nigel Farage, secure the most votes and become the largest single national party in the European Parliament.⁴⁸ Both the Labour and Conservative parties suffered substantial losses. On 24 May, the morning after the vote, Theresa May announced her resignation as Prime Minister, stating that it would

⁴⁷ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/why-are-dup-mps-still-opposed-to-theresa-mays-deal-37960360.html>

⁴⁸ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/national-results/united-kingdom/2019-2024/>

always remain 'a matter of deep regret' that she had failed to deliver Brexit.⁴⁹ Two months later, Boris Johnson became Prime Minister, after defeating nine other candidates in the Conservative leadership contest. He promised in a radio interview that he would deliver Brexit on 31 October 2019, 'do or die'⁵⁰ and in his first speech as Prime Minister said that the government would meet the Halloween deadline, 'no ifs, no buts.'⁵¹ At the beginning of September Mr Johnson prorogued Parliament for an unusually long five-week period, which was subsequently overturned by the Supreme Court. The Commons approved the Benn Act, to force the government to delay Brexit if the Withdrawal Agreement was not approved by the deadline. The Act was supported by 21 Conservative MPs, including two former Chancellors and a number of high profile, senior politicians, who were subsequently expelled from the parliamentary party.⁵²

A revised Withdrawal Agreement agreed between the EU and UK on 17 October 2019. An analysis by the Guardian revealed that less than 5% of Theresa May's original deal had actually been renegotiated: only 15 pages of the 293 page document had been changed, along with some alterations to the non-binding political declaration.⁵³ The key difference in the amended Agreement related to the controversial Irish backstop. Under Boris Johnson's revised deal, the backstop was replaced by a customs border down the Irish Sea, the country would maintain close regulatory alignment with the EU, and a mechanism was established by which Northern Ireland could unilaterally leave the proposed arrangement.⁵⁴ The accompanying political declaration said that both sides would work towards a Free Trade Agreement, and a high-level meeting would be held in June 2020 to assess progress. The text also included 'robust commitments to ensure a level playing field' on matters including state aid, competition, employment standards and tax.⁵⁵ Commentators noted that although the political declaration was non-binding, both sides were committed to 'use their best endeavours, in good faith' to deliver on its intentions, and, as such, the commitment might prove difficult for Boris Johnson to circumvent.⁵⁶

On 22 October, the government voted by a narrow majority to approve, in principle, Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement.⁵⁷ However, a motion to expedite the bill into law in just two days, was rejected immediately after. A week later, Boris Johnson, having previously failed to secure parliamentary support for a snap general election, introduced a bill to the House of

⁴⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48395905>

⁵⁰ <https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/conservative-party/boris-johnson/news/104838/boris-johnson-vows-deliver>

⁵¹ <https://news.sky.com/video/prime-minister-says-he-does-not-want-an-election-11800888>

⁵² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-49563357>

⁵³ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2019/oct/18/how-much-johnson-great-new-deal-actually-new>

⁵⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-50083026>

⁵⁵ <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-brexiteer-deal-explained-2/>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/29/enacted>

Commons designed to circumvent the Fixed Term Parliament Act. The bill required support from only a simple majority of MPs, and was passed into law in a single day, setting the date of the election as Thursday, 12 December 2019.

1.3 MAIN UK PARTIES IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION

The major parties⁵⁸ contesting 2019 General Election, listed in order of the total number of votes received, along with summaries of their stated positions on Brexit, were as follows:

Conservative Party, 13,966,565 votes

The Conservative Party had polled fifth in the May 2019 European Election and Prime Minister Theresa May subsequently tendered her resignation. Boris Johnson was elected as Mrs May's successor against nine other candidates, following five ballots by Conservative MPs and a final vote by the general membership of the Conservative party. Mr Johnson had been a prominent figure in the Leave campaign during the 2016 referendum, and the Conservatives, under his stewardship, contested the 2019 Election under the banner 'Get Brexit Done', promising to bring back the Withdrawal Agreement Bill to Parliament before Christmas, and to achieve Brexit by the end of January 2020. All 635 Conservative candidates standing in the election had pledged to back the Prime Minister's Brexit deal.⁵⁹

The Conservatives achieved a 43.6% share of the vote, up just 1.2% since the previous election in 2017, but a slump in the Labour Party's vote saw the Conservatives return 365 of 650 MPs to the House of Commons, an increase of 48 seats on the previous general election in 2017, and an overall parliamentary majority of 80 seats.

Labour Party, 10,269,076 votes

The Labour Party's Brexit policy was decided by delegates at its party conference in September 2019. The party's manifesto included a section entitled, 'The Final Say on Brexit', in which it promised to renegotiate the Withdrawal Agreement Bill within three months and within six months put this deal to the public 'alongside the option to remain.'⁶⁰ The manifesto stated that Labour 'rules out a no-deal Brexit', and attacked the Conservatives' failure over three years as 'a shambles of repeated delays and uncertainty.' It claimed that Boris Johnson's deal was even worse than Theresa May's and would leave the UK £70 billion worse off by 2029 and leave

⁵⁸ Defined here as those parties receiving more than 100,000 votes

⁵⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-election-johnson/uk-pm-johnson-all-conservative-election-candidates-pledge-to-back-my-brexit-deal-idUSK8N1XQ0QU>

⁶⁰ <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Real-Change-Labour-Manifesto-2019.pdf> p.89

the NHS 'to the mercy of a trade deal with Donald Trump.'⁶¹ The document also set out plans for a permanent customs union with the EU, close alignment with the single market and dynamic alignment on workers' rights.

As the campaign progressed, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn faced growing pressure to confirm whether he would vote Leave or Remain in a second referendum. In a special edition of the BBC's Question Time on 21 November, Mr Corbyn announced that he would adopt a neutral stance in any such referendum.⁶²

Labour's 'Red Wall' across the North of England and Midlands crumbled as marginal seats swung to the Conservatives, including Tony Blair's former Sedgefield constituency. The Labour Party's vote share fell to 32.2% from 40.0% in the election two years previously, and the party returned 202 of 650 MPs to the Commons, a loss of 60 seats from the 2017 election.

Liberal Democrats, 3,696,423 votes

After receiving the second largest vote share in the European Election earlier in 2019, the Liberal Democrats campaigned again on an unambiguous 'Stop Brexit' platform, promising to revoke Article 50 and to thus to prevent Britain leaving the EU, without another referendum. The manifesto stated that they were the 'strongest party of Remain', and claimed that staying in the EU would secure a £50 million 'Remain Bonus' which could be used to invest in schools and to tackle in-work poverty.⁶³

As the campaign progressed, the 'Revoke' policy proved to be unpopular amongst even traditional Liberal Democrat supporters. On 25 November, the FT quoted a party insider who said that the mood inside the Lib Dem camp was of 'concern, close to despair' and there were worries that taking a hardline stance on Brexit had started to backfire.⁶⁴ The former Liberal Democrat leader Vince Cable told the Today programme on 30 November that the policy was 'a distraction, and not a very helpful one', and he added that given the party was unlikely to win a Commons majority, their focus ought to have been on securing a second referendum.

The Liberal Democrats received an 11.6% share of the vote, up from 7.6% in the 2017 general election, but returned 11 MPs, one fewer than the 2017 general election.

⁶¹ Ibid. p.89

⁶² BBC1, Question Time, 21 November 2019, 7pm

⁶³

https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/57333/attachments/original/1574258742/Lib_Dem_Manifesto_2019.pdf?1574258742 p.9

⁶⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/b47696d4-0f9b-11ea-a225-db2f231cfcae>

The Scottish National Party, 1,242,380 votes

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon launched the SNP's election manifesto with an aspiration to keep Scotland in the EU. The document outlined the party's support for a second referendum on Brexit with 'Remain' on the ballot paper and noted that Scotland had voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU but had been 'completely ignored by Westminster'.⁶⁵ The document argued that Brexit would 'go on for years' as the UK tried to negotiate trade agreements with the EU and countries around the world.⁶⁶ The manifesto promised that the party would work with others across Scotland to 'escape from Brexit', and would support the revocation of Article 50, if the only other choice was a 'no deal' Brexit.⁶⁷

The SNP fielded 59 candidates and received a 3.9% share of the vote, up from 3.0% in 2017. The party secured 48 seats at Westminster, an increase of 13 MPs.

Green Party of England and Wales, 835,579 votes

The Green party's manifesto outlined its position as 'a proudly pro-European party' who were unequivocally campaigning for Britain to remain in the EU, and intended to 'play a leading role in mobilising a positive pro-European movement that has young people at its heart'.⁶⁸ The document noted that the party's single MP, Caroline Lucas, was co-founder of the campaign for a 'People's Vote', and that any Green MPs elected would champion their constituents' right to a 'final say' on any Brexit deal, with Remain as an option on the ballot paper. In a section entitled 'Transforming the European Union', they set out plans to allow MEPs to initiate Europe-wide legislation, to increase the transparency of the European Institutions, campaign against the wasteful transfer of staff and operations between Brussels and Strasbourg, and reform the Common Agricultural policy so that it promotes more sustainable farming methods.

The Green Party fielded candidates in 472 constituencies and received a 2.7% share of the vote, an increase of 1.1% from the 2017 general election. It retained its single MP.

The Brexit Party, 644,257 votes

The party, headed by former UKIP leader Nigel Farage, was launched to contest the European Elections in May. It won that election by some margin, securing a 30.5% share of the vote and won 29 of the UK's 73 seats in the European Parliament, on a manifesto which had opposed Theresa May's Withdrawal Deal, opposed the £39 billion 'divorce bill' demanded by the EU, and called for a Brexit on World Trade Organisation terms. In October 2019, Mr Farage, on

⁶⁵ https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/www.snp.org/uploads/2019/11/11_22e-SNP-Manifesto-2019-for-download.pdf p.4

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/Elections/Green%20Party%20Manifesto%202019.pdf>

his LBC Radio programme, criticised Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement, accusing the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier of trying to corral the UK into 'a sort of associate membership of the European Union'.⁶⁹ At the Brexit Party's campaign launch on November 1, Mr Farage criticised the Conservatives' promise to 'Get Brexit Done':

Boris tells us it's a great new deal - it's not, it's a bad old treaty and it's not Brexit. Boris Johnson's deal gives us all of the burdens of EU membership but no say whatsoever. And it will not get Brexit done... it will lead to a campaign to ask to rejoin, a campaign which if put to a referendum I have no doubt would actually succeed."⁷⁰

Mr Farage announced that he would be prepared to stand down his candidates in Conservative controlled seats, in return for Mr Johnson cancelling his Withdrawal Agreement, which Mr Johnson flatly refused.⁷¹ However, on 11 November, amid growing concerns among withdrawalists that the Brexit Party would split the Leave vote and enable a Labour victory⁷², Mr Farage announced the Brexit party would not stand in 317 seats won by the Tories in 2017, effectively creating a 'Leave alliance.'

On 22 November Mr Farage launched the Brexit Party's 'contract with the people' for the general election. The manifesto called for a 'clean-break Brexit' which would allow the UK the freedom to shape its future, by taking immediate control of laws, borders, money, fishing and defence. The document also opposed any extension of the Brexit transition period.

The Brexit Party fielded candidates in 275 seats, secured 2% and returned no MPs to Westminster.⁷³

Democratic Unionist Party, 244,127 votes

The DUP manifesto said it was committed to a Brexit deal that works for the whole of the UK 'and does not leave Northern Ireland behind.'⁷⁴ It said that the proposals as they were currently framed were not in Northern Ireland's longer-term interests, and argued that there must be unfettered access to and from the Great Britain market, or consumers would be faced with higher prices and less choice. The manifesto said that the DUP would continue to work to shape a solution in Northern Ireland's interests.

⁶⁹ <https://www.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/nigel-farage/nigel-farage-boris-johnson-not-really-brexit/>

⁷⁰ <https://news.co.uk/news/politics/brexit-party-candidates-nigel-farage-general-election-seats-boris-johnson-brexit-deal-824682>

⁷¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/01/farage-to-johnson-join-forces-or-brexit-party-will-contest-every-seat>

⁷² <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/oct/30/brexit-party-divided-over-election-tactics>

⁷³ The party did not stand in the previous general election, but in 2017 Mr Farage's previous party, UKIP, had received a 1.8% share of the vote. In the 2019 election UKIP fielded only 44 candidates and received 22,817 votes (0.1% share), and so have not been included in this summary of the 'main parties' and their policies.

⁷⁴ <https://www.mydup.com/images/uploads/dup-manifesto.pdf>

The DUP fielded 17 candidates and received a 0.8% share of the vote, a decline of 0.1% from the 2017 general election, and returned 8 MPs, two fewer than in 2017.

Sinn Féin, 181,853 votes

Sinn Féin had campaigned across Northern Ireland for Remain in the 2016 referendum, and had since argued for Northern Ireland to be given 'Designated Special Status' within the EU. Its 2019 election manifesto stated, 'There is no good Brexit' and said that the Irish solution to Brexit would be found only in Dublin and Europe. The party said that it would work to protect Ireland, the Irish economy and the best interests of all citizens from 'the disaster of Brexit and the chaos of Westminster' and 'promote Irish Unity as Ireland's solution to an English Brexit.'⁷⁵

Sinn Féin fielded 15 candidates and secured 7 seats, which, on account of the party's policy of abstention, they refused to take in Westminster. The party achieved a 0.6% vote share, down 0.2% from the 2017 general election.

Plaid Cymru, 153,265 votes

The leader of the Welsh nationalist party, Adam Price, had called in September 2019 for Brexit to be cancelled should an election be called.⁷⁶ However, at the party's annual conference, members voted in support of a second referendum, unless faced with the prospect of a 'no deal' Brexit, in which case the party would revert to policy of unilaterally revoking Article 50.

Plaid Cymru's manifesto argued that Boris Johnson's deal would 'prolong the Brexit chaos' and would lead to 'another no-deal Brexit cliff-edge' in December 2020.⁷⁷ It said that leaving the EU without a deal would place tariffs on lamb exports and 'put at risk vital supplies of medicines and fresh food.'⁷⁸

Plaid Cymru fielded candidates in 36 constituencies and returned 4 MPs. The party secured the same vote share as in the previous general election: 0.5%

Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, 134,115 votes

The Alliance Party manifesto stated, 'There is no such thing as a good or sensible Brexit', but if it were to happen then 'a chaotic no-deal must be avoided.'⁷⁹ In her forward to the document, Alliance Party leader Naomi Long claimed that the 2016 referendum had been 'tainted by lies and dark money'. She said the extension that the Alliance Party had led the call for a 'People's Vote' with Remain on the ballot paper.

⁷⁵ https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2019/A4_manifestoWM2019_TOGETHER.pdf pp.7-9

⁷⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-49729831>

⁷⁷ https://www.partyof.wales/brexit_manifesto p.13

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.14

⁷⁹ <https://www.allianceparty.org/manifestos>

The Alliance Party fielded 18 candidates and gained 1 MP. It received a 0.4% share of the vote, up 0.2% from the previous general election.

Social Democratic and Labour Party, 118,737 votes

The SDLP campaigned on a manifesto entitled, 'Stop Boris, Stop Brexit.' It argued that the election presented an opportunity to 'take back control from Boris Johnson, the DUP and the rest of the Brexiteers who have sidelined our interests and ignored our democratically expressed will for three years.' It accused the Conservatives of being a 'Brexit-obsessed administration' who wanted to railroad a hard Brexit onto communities in Northern Ireland at any cost. The SDLP said they would cooperate across traditional party and community divides, 'to vote down Boris Johnson and Brexit.' On 4 November it was reported that the SDLP would step aside in three constituencies to maximise the pro-Remain vote.⁸⁰

The SDLP fielded 15 candidates and won two seats. They received a 0.4% share of the vote, up 0.1% from the 2017 general election.

1.3 SURVEY OVERVIEW

News-watch monitored Radio 4's Today programme in full from the dissolution of Parliament on Wednesday 6 November until the eve of polling on Wednesday 11 December 2019, an interval of five weeks and one day. This coincided with the period in which the BBC's Election Guidelines were in effect, applicable to all the Corporation's outlets, which set out its obligation to ensure that political parties are covered 'proportionately' during the campaign.⁸¹

Since the 2016 referendum, News-watch has published 14 full reports on a diverse range of BBC content. This has included curated programme strands⁸², podcasts,⁸³ business coverage⁸⁴, longitudinal analyses utilising data from News-watch's full catalogue of research⁸⁵, along with its more traditional surveys of flagship news programmes, coinciding with key junctures in the

⁸⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50284144>

⁸¹ https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/general_election_guidelines_221119.pdf

⁸² News-watch analysed 31 BBC Radio 4 programmes and excerpts chosen by the BBC as part of online compendium, 'The Brexit Collection' featuring pre- and post-referendum coverage <http://news-watch.co.uk/the-brexite-collection/> and monitored a day of Radio 4 programming as part of a discrete strand, broadcast a year before the departure date originally set for the UK's departure from the EU, 'Britain at the Crossroads' <http://news-watch.co.uk/2217-2/>

⁸³ Series 3 of BBC Europe correspondent Chris Morris's 'Brexit: A Guide for the Perplexed' <http://news-watch.co.uk/news-watch-survey-of-radio-4s-brexite-a-guide-for-the-perplexed-2/> and Mark Mardell's 'Brexit: A Love Story?' <http://news-watch.co.uk/news-watch-survey-radio-4s-brexite-a-love-story/>

⁸⁴ A six-month survey of Today's business slots, undertaken immediately after the referendum <http://news-watch.co.uk/business-news-2016-survey/>

⁸⁵ 'Leave and the Left' examined the BBC's coverage of left wing withdrawalists between 2002 and 2017, <http://news-watch.co.uk/bbc-bias-by-omission-leave-and-the-left-october-2017/> and a paper for Civitas 'Brussels Broadcasting Corporation?' assessed the marginalisation of pro-Brexit views between 1999 and 2018 <http://news-watch.co.uk/paper-for-civitas-the-brussels-broadcasting-corporation-january-2018/>

Brexit debate.⁸⁶ These surveys have provided evidence of a consistent and pervasive imbalance in BBC News and Current Affairs against Brexit, and a consistent lack of attention to any potential benefits of Brexit to the UK.⁸⁷ The BBC has rejected News-watch's research on every occasion, and based their defence on two fundamental points: the first is that since the referendum, the BBC has no obligation to balance the two sides of a debate, which has moved from the 'Leave/Remain' binary and is now more nuanced. The second is that monitoring itself is not a viable approach and that due impartiality cannot be measured by a methodology which includes a numerical component.

In February 2019, the BBC's defence was rubberstamped by the media regulator Ofcom, which published its adjudication on a complaint made by News-watch based on three post-referendum surveys.⁸⁸ Ofcom's second Annual Review of the BBC, in October 2019 devoted a section to a summary of this judgement.⁸⁹ In both documents, Ofcom reinforced the defence established by the BBC, and said that 'it did not consider that it was required to give equal airtime to those for and against Brexit, because the political context had moved on since the EU referendum.'

Yet, since June 2016, BBC journalists have continued to refer to politicians, members of the public and the regions and nations of the UK in terms of their position in the EU referendum. In this survey there were copious references to 'Remainers', 'Leavers' and 'Brexiters'⁹⁰ and Today's presenters and correspondents dubbed the December 2019 poll 'The Brexit Election' on numerous occasions. On 10 December, Today's Nick Robinson, outlined the contest in these terms:

There is, in truth, not one, but a series of elections taking place this week. The battle for the votes of Leavers in the north of England is matched in some ways by a battle for the votes of Remainers down south and in the capital.

Elsewhere, Today's political correspondent Norman Smith noted, 'Brexit is a very binary issue, you're either for it or against it,'⁹¹ while pollster Professor Sir John Curtice, suggested, 'So far as Brexit is concerned, it's clearly a binary choice.'⁹²

⁸⁶ Including Today's coverage of the triggering of Article 50, <http://news-watch.co.uk/today-programme-article-50-survey-may-2017/>, the 2017 general election on Radio 4's Today and BBC1's News at Ten, <http://news-watch.co.uk/general-election-survey-october-2017/>, the Salzburg and Brussels European Council Meetings and ongoing negotiations for the Withdrawal Agreement with the EU <http://news-watch.co.uk/news-watch-survey-salzburg-and-brussels-european-councils-autumn-2018/> and the first Parliamentary 'Meaningful Vote', <http://news-watch.co.uk/news-watch-survey-the-meaningful-vote-january-2019/>

⁸⁷ <http://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/BBC-Bias-Against-Brexit-News-watch-Surveys-since-the-2016-referendum-.pdf>

⁸⁸ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0028/136585/Issue-372-of-Ofcoms-Broadcast-and-On-Demand-Bulletin.pdf

⁸⁹ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/173735/second-bbc-annual-report.pdf p.52, published October 2019

⁹⁰ The 2019 General Election Survey saw 241 references to 'Remain' and similar formulations, (for example, 'Remainers', 'Remain-supporting', 'Remain-voting'), 181 references to 'Leave' and its formulations, and 13 references to 'Brexiters' in the context of how people had cast their ballot in the 2016 referendum vote.

⁹¹ Today, 28 November 2019, 6.33am

⁹² Today, 18 November 2019, 8.37am.

Thus, during the General Election the Leave/Remain divide remained solidly in place, thus contradicting Ofcom's chief defence. Although it is true that there is no longer a legal requirement to exactly balance each side of the debate, the BBC still has an obligation, under its Charter, to ensure due impartiality.

Of course, aside from during the referendum itself, News-watch has never actually categorised guest speakers along a simple binary, and the coding processes are adapted in each survey to reflect precisely the 'nuances' referred to by the BBC and Ofcom. Each survey deploys a range of analytical tools in combination: quantitative appraisals of airtime and speaker representation provide a starting point, but function as part of a rounded assessment including qualitative measures: analyses of tone, language, lines of questioning, rate of interruptions, the positioning of material within programmes, stereotyping, bias by omission, framing, semiotics and visual codes.

1.2 EU/BREXIT COVERAGE ON TODAY

News-watch bases its airtime calculations on Today's 'features'. These lie at the heart of Today: the interviews and correspondent reports that account for approximately two thirds of the programme's total airtime.⁹³ During this survey, Today devoted exactly 12 hours and 23 minutes of its feature coverage to European Election or Brexit-related themes.

	Available Airtime	Brexit/EU	Brexit/EU %
Today	57h 23 m	12h 23 m	21.6%

Since 1999, News-watch has monitored, tracked and analysed 389 full weeks of the Today programme, equating to 2,334 individual editions with a combined airtime of 6,613 hours. This longitudinal investigation has established that, prior to the current survey, Today has devoted, an average, 8.3% of its feature airtime to the discussion of EU themes.⁹⁴ This percentage has been elevated by consistently high volumes of Brexit coverage in the surveys undertaken since the 2016 Referendum.⁹⁵ The table lists the 31 surveys undertaken between September 2002 and May 2019, along with the data collected during the most recent survey.

⁹³ Focusing on these elements ensures that airtime totals are not skewed by repeated content – for example, the half-hourly bulletins, the newspaper reviews, nor by the 'non-news' elements of Today which include sports reports, weather items and trailers for other BBC programmes.

⁹⁴ The figures from Survey 25 in this table have been excluded from this calculation, given that only Today's Business News items were monitored.

⁹⁵ The average feature airtime given over to EU matters in the 24 pre-referendum Newswatch surveys was 6.9%, in the six post referendum surveys, (excluding survey 25) the average has been 24.5%, and has included two atypically short studies on specific Brexit-related events.

	Survey Date	Weeks	Total Airtime (minutes)	EU Airtime (minutes)	Proportion of EU coverage
1	September 2002 – July 2003	47	31,255	1750	5.6%
2	September – December 2003	12	7,980	455	5.7%
3	March – June 2004	13	8,216	871	9.8%
4	October – December 2004	10	6,650	365	5.5%
5	March – June 2005	15	9,975	1082	10.8%
6	October – December 2005	9	5,985	489	8.2%
7	February – June 2006	16	10,640	437	4.1%
8	September – December 2006	14	9,310	275	2.9%
9	March – June 2007	14	9,310	326	3.5%
10	September – December 2007	14	9,310	386	4.1%
11	March – June 2008	12	7,980	263	3.3%
12	September – December 2008	14	9,310	384	4.1%
13	April – June 2009	6	4,206	228	5.4%
14	September – December 2009	13	8,577	442	5.1%
15	March – May 2010	6	3,961	245	6.2%
16	September – December 2010	13	8,493	444	5.2%
17	March – June 2011	13	8,617	532	6.2%
18	October – December 2011	11	7,298	1639	22.5%
19	April – June 2012	12	7,938	1112	14.0%
20	September – December 2012	13	8,640	540	6.2%
21	April – June 2013	12	7,929	538	6.8%
22	September – December 2013	14	9,207	470	5.1%
23	April – June 2014	6	3,979	412	10.3%
24	March – May 2015	6	3,990	252	6.1%
25	June – December 2016 (Business Slots only)	26	n/a	759	n/a
26	March – Apr 2017	1	667	305	46%
27	May – June 2017	5	3,433	542	15.9%
28	October – November 2017	4	2,660	451	16.9%
29	September- October 2018	5	3,295	967	29.3%
30	January 2019	0.5	353	287	81.3%
31	April – May 2019	7	4,639	1320	28.5%
32	November – December 2019	5	3,443	743	21.6%

EU coverage during the 2019 General Election survey interval was sixth highest of any News-watch survey, with 21.6% of Today's feature item given over to EU or Brexit-related themes, and approximately 2.5 times more coverage than the long-term average.

1.4 COMPARISONS TO PREVIOUS ELECTIONS

News-watch has monitored the BBC's coverage of EU issues in the periods of the six UK general elections between 2001 and 2019. Where necessary, data has been isolated to allow direct comparisons between the 2017 election and those preceding it, analysing an identical 36-day interval in the run-up to each polling day.⁹⁶

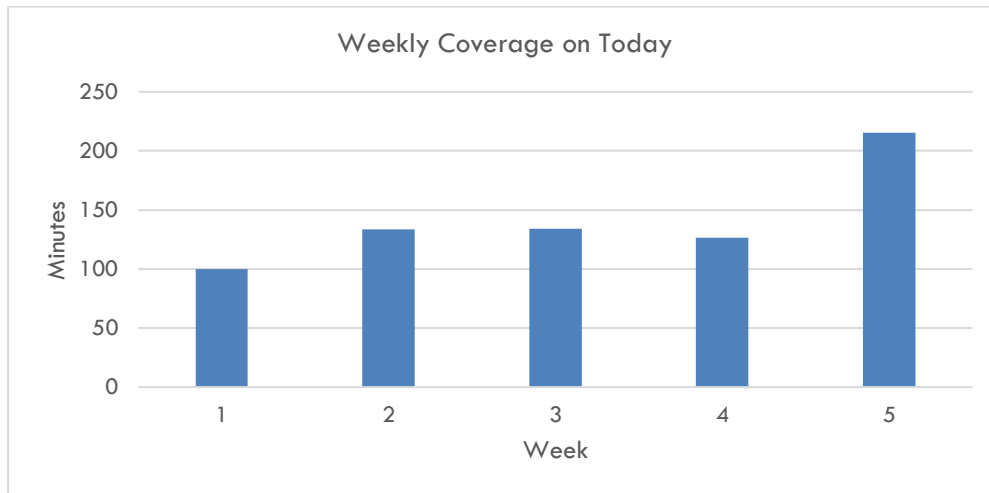
	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019
Today	n/a	4.1%	6.2%	6%	15.9%	21.6%

The figures show a third more Brexit/EU coverage on Today than during the previous General Election in 2017, three and a half times more coverage than in 2010 and 2015, and five times the coverage volume recorded in 2005.

⁹⁶ During the 2001 general election, the time between the official announcement of the election and polling day was only three weeks and three days, and therefore data collected during this survey cannot be compared directly to the other elections.

1.4 TODAY'S EU COVERAGE

Today transmitted 346 EU-related items during the survey. There were 47 bulletin reports, 55 mentions of EU stories in the 'newspaper review' section, and there were 244 'features', with a total duration of 12 hours and 23 minutes. In addition, there were 54 occasions on which EU or Brexit matters were mentioned in passing, and two references in the programme's religious affairs slot, Thought for the Day. The chart shows the amount of EU coverage broadcast in each full week of the survey.⁹⁷



As the chart illustrates, the levels of EU/Brexit coverage varied between 1 hour and 40 minutes in Week One (Thu 6 – Wed 12 Nov) and 3 hours 35 minutes in Week Five (Thu 4 – Wed 10 Dec).

1.5 SPEAKERS AND CODING

Over the survey interval, 332 guests spoke about the EU or Brexit-related themes on Today, comprising 169 interviews and 163 pre-recorded soundbites. In total, these speakers delivered 71,172 words. All contributions were analysed using the programme transcripts and coded on the contents of their contribution.

Broadly Pro-EU, Anti-Brexit, in favour of a second referendum or the revoking of Article 50:
178 Speakers (53.6%), 36,384 Words (51% of the total words spoken on EU/Brexit)

Broadly Anti-EU, Pro-Brexit (including Boris Johnson's Deal), opposing second referendum or the revoking of Article 50:

112 Speakers (33.7%), 26,445 Words (37% of the total words spoken on EU/Brexit)

⁹⁷ The survey was five weeks and a day in length, and therefore the final day of monitoring, 11 December 2019, has been excluded from the chart. There was just under 34 minutes of EU coverage on this final programme.

Neutral or Factual:

42 Speakers (12.6%) 8,343 words (12% of the total words spoken on EU/Brexit)

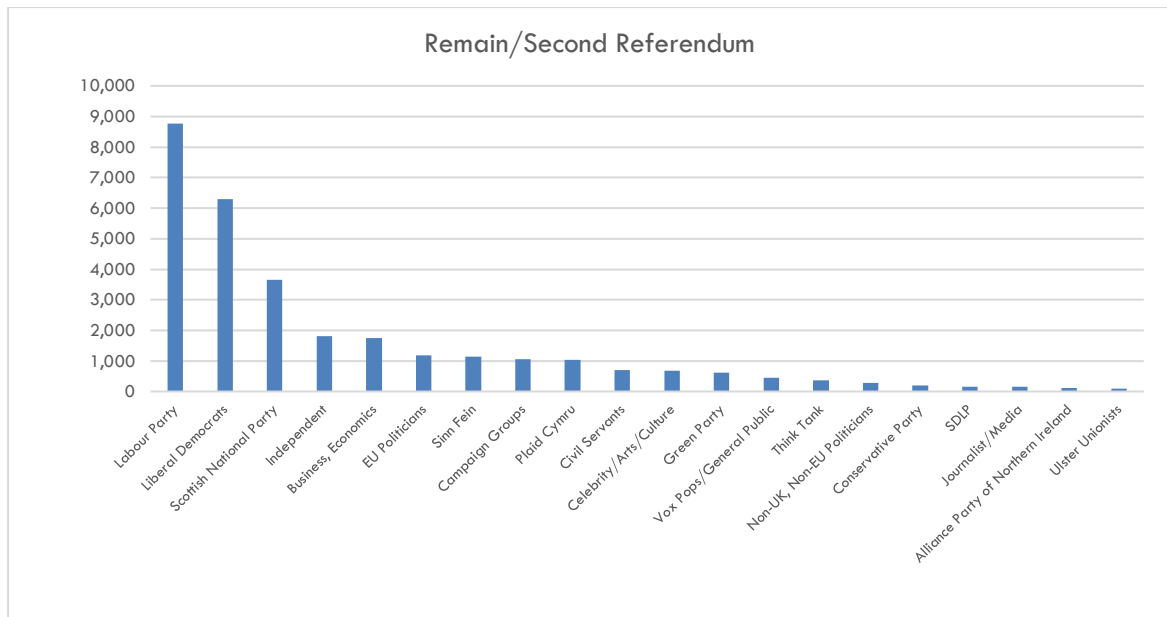
The table lists the on-air sources featured by Today during the period of the 2019 General Election campaign:

Category	Number of Guests	Words
UK Politicians	189	47,549
Vox Pops/General Public	48	2,673
Business, Economist, Financial Institution	37	6,960
Think Tank	12	2,381
Journalist/Media	9	2,066
Academic	8	1,388
EU Politicians	7	1,256
Pollster	7	2,569
Campaign Groups	5	1,361
Civil Servants	3	1,214
Celebrity/Arts/Culture	2	775
Other	3	635
Non-UK, Non-EU Politicians	1	286
Police	1	59
Total	332	71,172

The speakers invited onto the programme could be placed on a clear continuum as to their perspectives on Brexit or the EU more broadly. Coding decisions were made primarily on the contents of individual contributions, although where applicable reference was also made to official party policy and voting records, both in the 2016 and during the series of parliamentary 'Meaningful Votes' in early 2019. The categories used were as follows:

1. Remain/Revoke Article 50/Second Referendum

These guests provided the Today audience opposition to Brexit or Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Deal, by way of a second referendum with 'Remain' as an option on the ballot paper, or by revoking Article 50 unilaterally. 145 guests took this position (43.6% of contributors) and together they delivered 43% of the total words spoken during the survey interval.

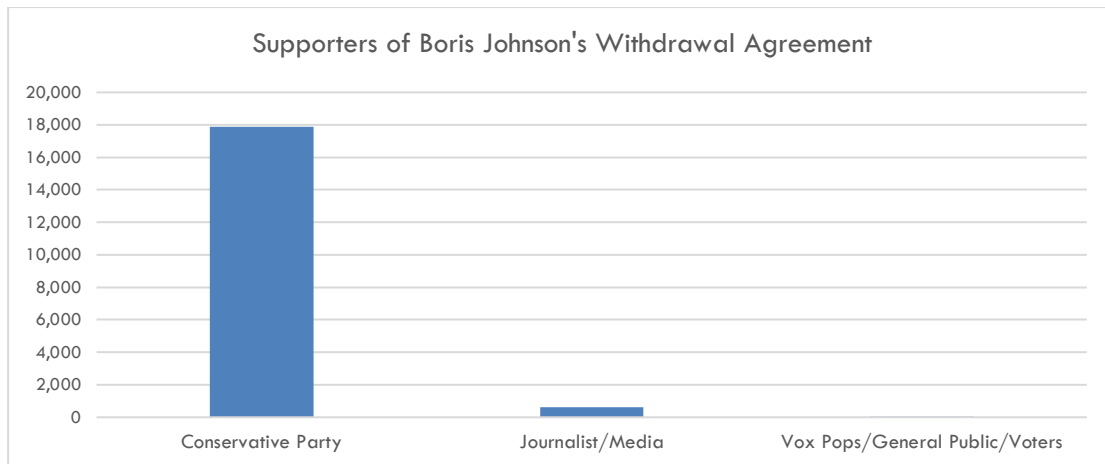


Category	Number of Speakers	Words	Av. Words per Speaker
Labour Party	42	8,759	209
Liberal Democrats	31	6,286	203
Scottish National Party	16	3,659	229
Independent	7	1,814	259
Business, Economist, Financial Institution	6	1,751	292
EU Politicians	5	1,184	237
Sinn Fein	2	1,134	567
Campaign Groups	4	1,053	263
Plaid Cymru	5	1,044	209
Civil Servants	2	699	350
Celebrity/Arts/Culture/Sport	1	683	683
Green Party	4	620	155
Vox Pops/General Public	8	452	57
Think Tank	1	370	370
Non-UK, Non-EU Politicians	1	286	286
Conservative Party	4	203	51
SDLP	1	156	156
Journalist/Media	1	150	150
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	1	116	116
Ulster Unionists	1	90	90
Unnamed Politician	2	16	8
Total	145	30,525	211

2. Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Deal

This category primarily comprised Conservative candidates who supported Boris Johnson's revised Brexit Deal, in line with the guarantee Mr Johnson had secured from all candidates before the campaign began. In addition, there were three journalists who spoke in favour of the deal, along with a very short contribution from a single Conservative voter.

60 of the 332 guests (18%) expressed their support for the Withdrawal Agreement and between them they delivered 26% of the total words spoken.

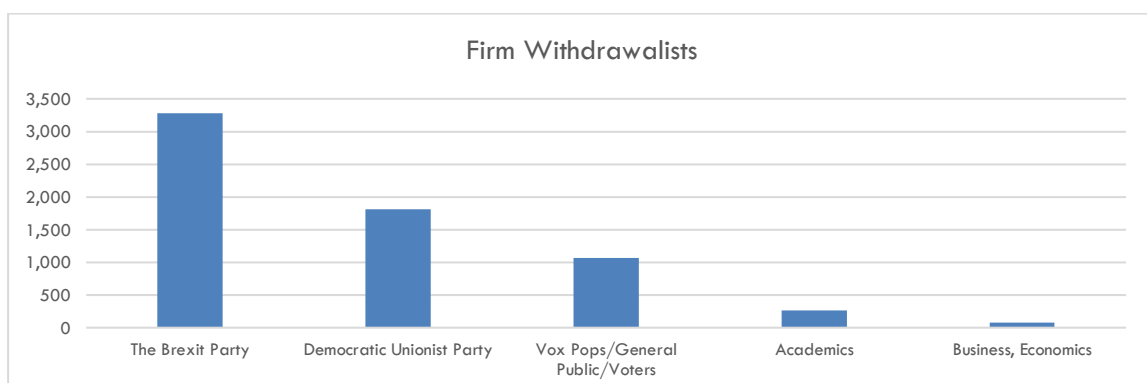


Category	Number of Speakers	Words	Av. Words per Speaker
Conservative Party	56	17,872	319
Journalist/Media	3	636	212
Vox Pops/General Public/Voters	1	25	25
Total	60	18,533	308

3. Firm Withdrawalists

'Firm' withdrawalists included those who had voted Leave in 2016 or who had moved towards this position, and who opposed Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement from the perspective that it would maintain significant political and economic ties with the EU and therefore could not be considered a 'clean break'. These speakers mainly comprised candidates, representatives and supporters of the Brexit Party and DUP, alongside members of the public. There was also a single interview with an academic, Robert Tombs and two very brief contributions from small business owners, who could equally have coded as 'General Public', had they not appeared specifically in Today's 'Business News' slot.

31 of the 332 guests (9.3%) provided listeners with this viewpoint. Together, they delivered 6,494 words, or 9.1% of the total words spoken by invited guests.

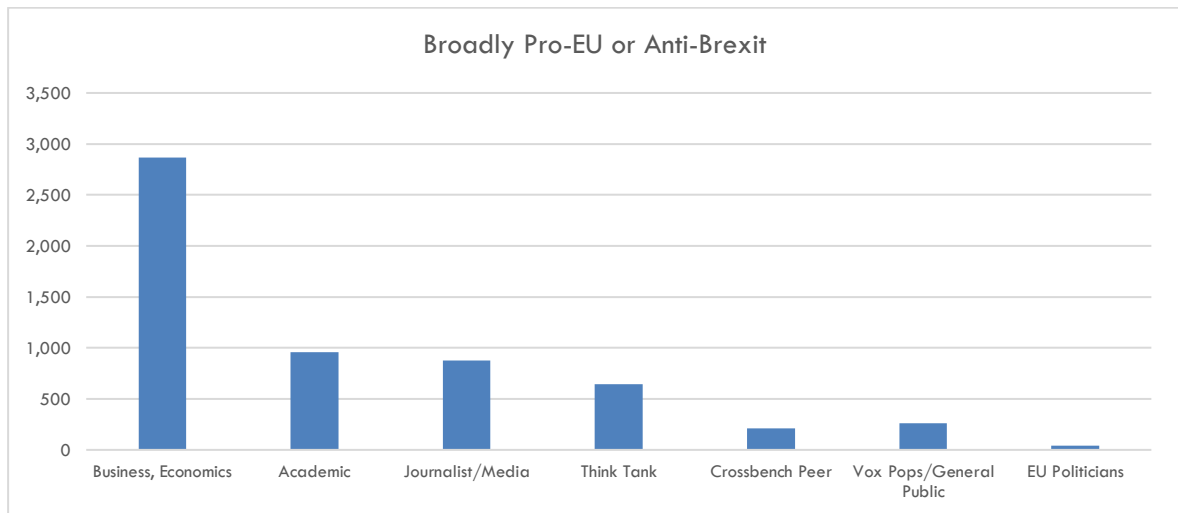


Category	Number of Speakers	Words	Av. Words per Speaker
The Brexit Party	8	3,281	410
Democratic Unionist Party	3	1,808	603
Vox Pops/General Public/Voters	17	1,069	63
Academics	1	261	261
Business, Economist, Financial Institution	2	75	38
Total	31	6,494	209

4. Broadly Pro-EU or anti-Brexit

This category included pro-EU contributors that didn't specifically advocating one of the specific positions on Brexit or on Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement as outlined previously. The category included those speakers whose commentary bolstered a pro-EU or Remain argument (or spoke negatively about Brexit) and those who supported a piece of EU legislation or proposal in the few non-election related sequences.

32 of the 332 contributors (9.6%) were included in this category and between them they delivered 5,783 words, or 8.1% of the total words spoken.

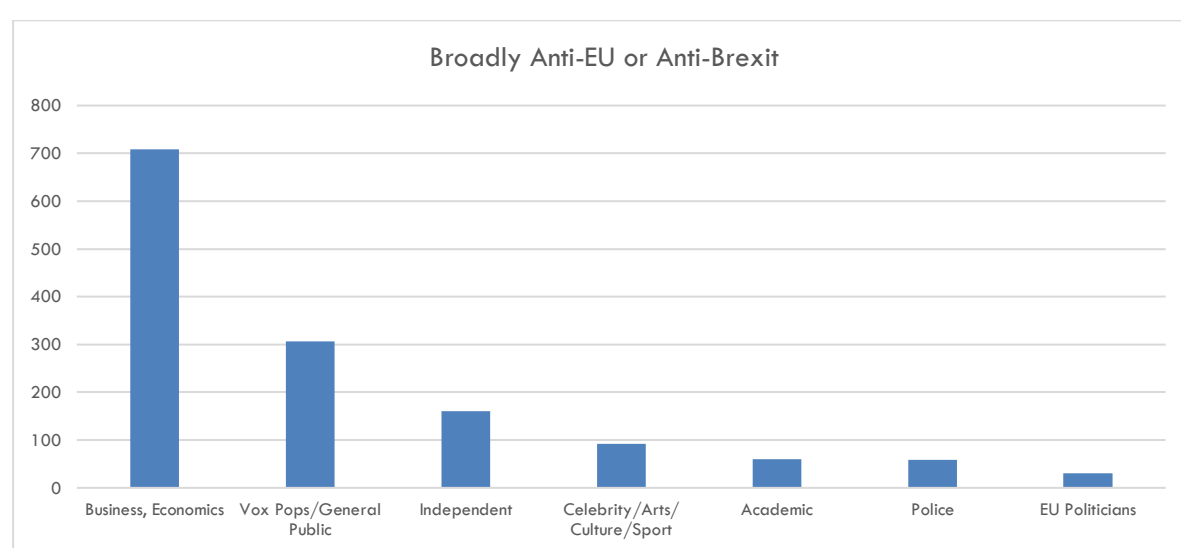


Category	Number of Speakers	Words	Av. Words per Speaker
Business, Economist, Financial Institution	14	2,869	205
Academic	5	955	191
Journalist/Media	2	875	438
Think Tank	3	644	215
Crossbench Peer	1	214	214
Vox Pops/General Public	6	184	43
EU Politicians	1	42	42
Total	32	5,859	183

5. Broadly Anti-EU or Pro-Brexit

These included anti-EU contributions that weren't specifically advocating one of the specific positions on Brexit or Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement outlined in categories 1 to 3. These included speakers whose commentary bolstered an anti-EU or pro-Brexit perspective, or who spoke negatively about a particular piece of EU legislation or proposal.

21 of the 332 speakers (6.3%) were included in this category. Between them they delivered 1,148 words, or 1.8% of the total EU word count during the survey period.

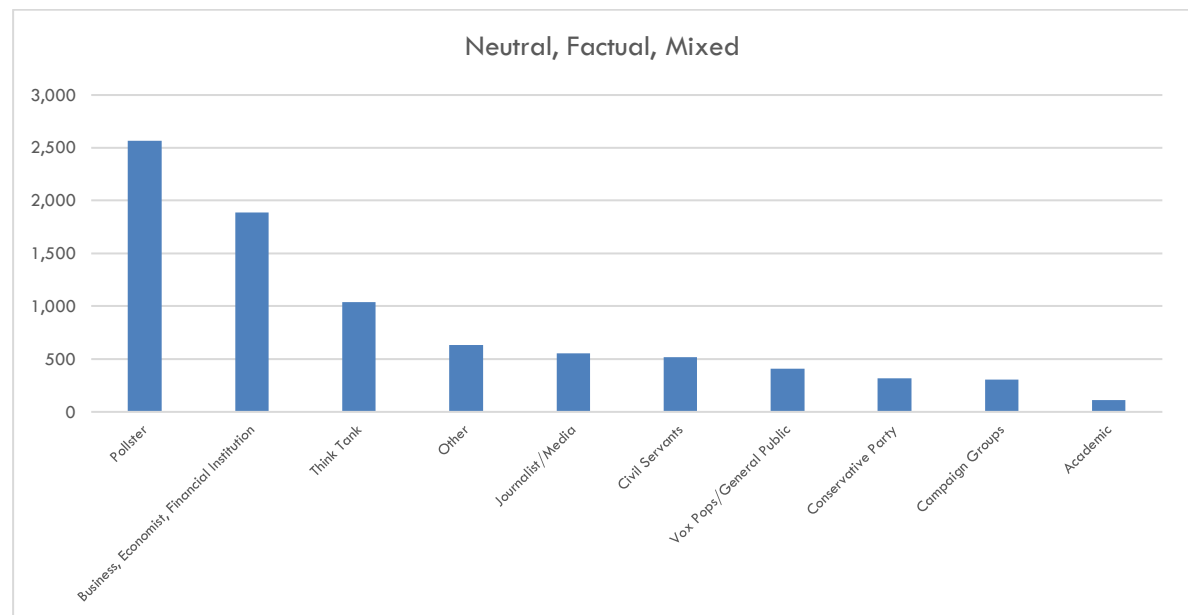


Category	Number of Speakers	Words	Av. Words per Speaker
Business, Economics	6	709	118
Vox Pops/General Public	10	307	31
Independent	1	161	161
Celebrity/Arts/ Culture/Sport	1	92	92
Academic	1	60	60
Police	1	59	59
EU Politicians	1	30	30
Total	21	1,418	68

6. Neutral, Factual or Mixed

This category comprised guest contributors who offered listeners a neutral, factual or mixed perspective on Brexit or EU politics more widely.

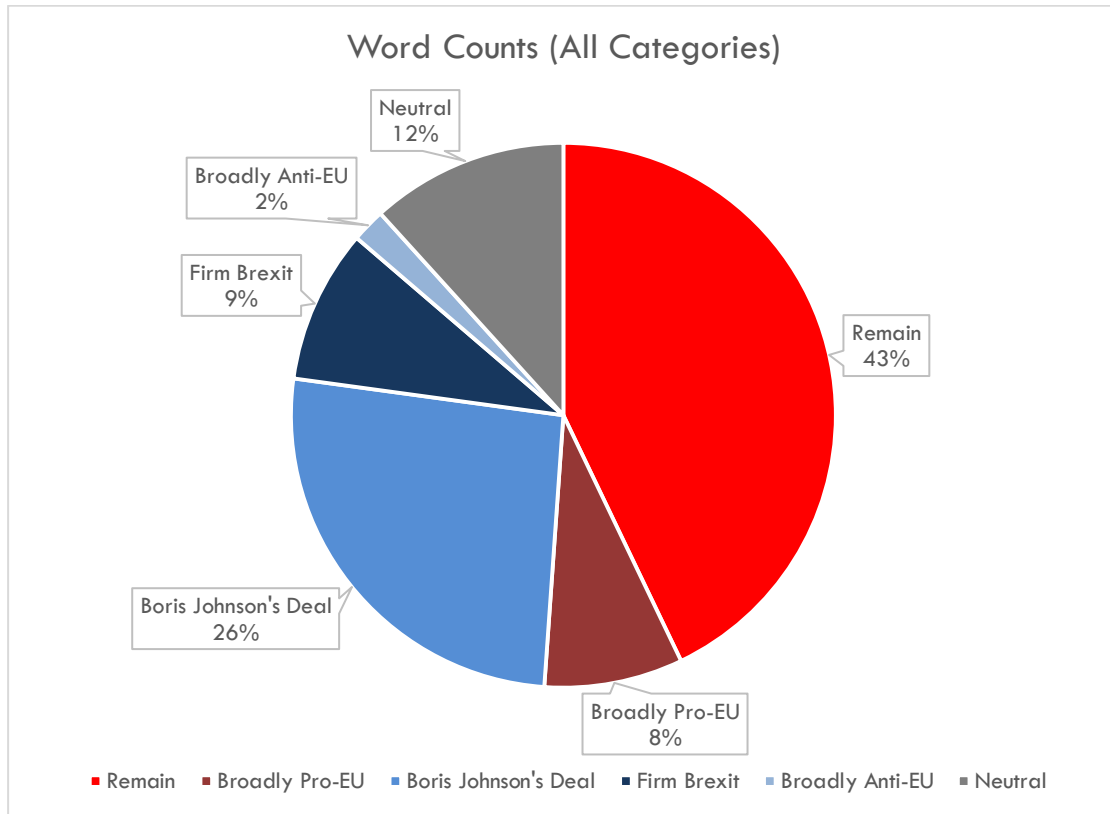
42 of the 332 invited guests (12.7%) provided listeners with a neutral, factual or mixed opinion on the EU or Brexit. These guests delivered accounted 11.7% of the total words spoken on EU themes by guests during the survey interval.



Category	Number of Speakers	Words	Av. Words per Speaker
Pollster	7	2,569	367
Business, Economist, Financial Institution	11	1,886	171
Think Tank	6	1,037	173
Other	3	635	212
Journalist/Media	4	555	139
Civil Servants	1	515	515
Vox Pops/General Public	5	410	82
Conservative Party	3	316	105
Campaign Groups	1	308	308
Academic	1	112	112
Total	42	8,343	203

1.6 CONCLUSION

The chart combines the data from the categories above and shows each as a proportion of words spoken within Today's EU coverage.



The data shows a clear weighting towards pro-EU speakers who wanted to stop Brexit unilaterally, or provide an opportunity for the public to reverse its decision through a second referendum. Around a quarter of space was taken by those speaking in favour of Boris Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement. By contrast, those who opposed the Withdrawal Agreement from the perspective of preferring a decisive, clean Brexit were marginalised within the coverage, receiving just 9% of the total airtime. And as the textual analysis in Section 2 illustrates, were rarely allowed to argue their case in detail, often being questioned on the electoral process itself, rather than Brexit policy. The proportion of firm Brexiters appearing on Today was sharply lower than during the previous General Election in 2017 as the table shows:

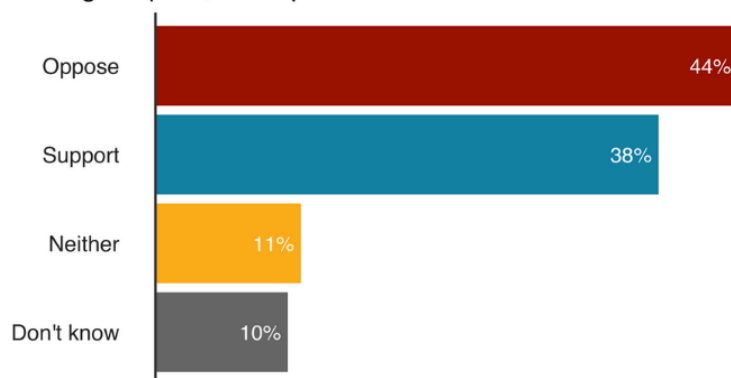
	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019
Speakers on EU	55	66	111	270	332
Brexiters	7	5	10	42	31
% Brexiters	13%	8%	9%	16%	9%

To some extent the decline reflects the changed political circumstances: during the 2017 survey nine of the 42 'firm' Brexiters had been Conservative MPs. In the 2019 campaign backbenchers from the European Research Group unified behind Boris Johnson, and all candidates committed to the party's core electoral promise to 'Get Brexit Done' and vote through the Withdrawal Agreement. This meant no Conservative guests were recorded in this category.

Advocates of a clean Brexit were marginalised in the coverage, and yet there is indication of significant public support for leaving the EU without a deal. An 'average of polls' published by BBC Online in September 2019 combined the results of polling from BMG, ComRes, Ipsos Mori and YouGov.⁹⁸

Do you support or oppose leaving the EU without a deal?

Average of polls, all respondents



Note: YouGov's poll did not include an option for 'neither support nor oppose'

Source: BMG, ComRes, Ipsos MORI and YouGov, July/August 2019

BBC

There was a substantial disconnect between the proportion of the general public who supported leaving the EU without a deal (38%) and the amount of time Today devoted to those taking this position (9%). The BBC's own Editorial Guidelines set out a clear assurance on this point:

We are committed to reflecting a wide range of subject matter and perspectives across our output as a whole and over an appropriate timeframe so that no significant strand of thought is under-represented or omitted.⁹⁹

The continued resilience in public support for a 'no deal' Brexit is striking, given the unremitting negativity towards a clean-break Brexit across the BBC's output since the referendum. News-watch surveys have consistently shown that guests opposing a 'no deal' Brexit have been

⁹⁸ The BBC's analysis also considered the polling results in terms of respondents' voting record in the 2016 referendum. It found that 73% of Leave voters supported a 'no deal' Brexit, compared to just 14% who opposed it, with the remainder choosing 'neither' (9%) or 'don't know' (6%).

⁹⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality>

awarded far more time and space in coverage.¹⁰⁰ The apparent dangers of leaving the EU without a deal have been prioritised by Today and BBC News more widely, and warnings about the severe repercussions of 'no deal' have featured regularly in commentary by correspondents and presenters.¹⁰¹

Author David Sedgewick lists a wealth of 'no deal' warnings published by the BBC since the referendum, all of them based on conjecture, on what *could* transpire:

According to the BBC news website, No Deal Brexit: Could ground aircraft; Could cause civil unrest in rural Wales; Could have 'hugely damaging' effect on football clubs, say chairmen"; Could hit house prices; Could cost North West England £20bn; Could cost farms £850m in profits; Could hit food supplies, says Stena Line; Could wipe out sheep farming in NI; Could lead to NI electricity blackouts Could cause £30bn economic hit, watchdog says; Could leave UK short of energy; Could risk children's safety, warn commissioners; Could make policing harder; Could delay NI fire service response; Could damage UK environment; Could see Isle of Man face fruit shortages; Could separate us from our pet pigs; Could put public at risk, warns Met chief; Could create 'feelings of unrest'; Could see ops cancelled, NHS trust says.¹⁰²

An editorial in the Daily Telegraph in August 2019 cautioned the BBC against such unremitting negativity and noted that a particular claim about 'no deal' on BBC2's Newsnight had turned out to be demonstrably untrue.

Economic confidence is key to a successful Brexit, deal or no deal. If the public is fed a diet of negative stories, those tales of woe will become a self-fulfilling prophecy, driving away investors and discouraging consumers. Obviously, news organisations have a duty to report the facts and, yes, to provide a fair assessment of hopes and fears. But some of the information floating around is just fake news. Some viewers of Wednesday's edition of BBC Newsnight felt that its claim that 45,000 dairy cows could be slaughtered in Northern Ireland if Britain leaves the EU without a deal was somewhat speculative. The Department of Agriculture says it has no such plans. The head of the Ulster Farmers' Union, which is a critic of a no-deal Brexit, called the BBC's story 'scare tactics'. He said the figure of 45,000 appeared to have been "plucked out of the air".¹⁰³

The Telegraph noted that, in response, the government was to launch a new 'rapid rebuttal unit' at the heart of Government . . . to provide instant responses to "media myths and half-truths" about the risks of a no-deal Brexit.¹⁰⁴

And yet the negative projections continued unabated. On 11 October 2019, the BBC's 'visual journalism team' published an article, 'No-deal Brexit: 10 ways it could affect you,' ahead of

¹⁰⁰ <http://news-watch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/BBC-Bias-Against-Brexit-News-watch-Surveys-since-the-2016-referendum-.pdf>

¹⁰¹ In the News-watch Winter 2018 survey, for example, the BBC's Europe Editor, Katya Adler, warned that airline safety could be compromised, and Political Editor, Laura Kuenssberg said that leaving without a withdrawal agreement 'might possibly feel like total chaos', while Nick Robinson spoke about the 'famous cliff edge of no deal.' (<http://news-watch.co.uk/news-watch-survey-salzburg-and-brussels-european-councils-autumn-2018/>)

¹⁰² Sedgewick D, The FakeNews Factory: Tales from BBC-land, 2020, p.111

¹⁰³ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2019/08/10/time-correct-brexit-fake-news/>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the proposed 31 October exit date, listing food shortages, energy price increases, drug supply problems, increased costs of imported goods, and falling house prices.¹⁰⁵

Theresa May's initial negotiating position with the EU was, famously, 'No deal is better than a bad deal', but in its initial reading before Parliament those on all sides believed her Withdrawal Agreement to be a 'bad deal' and it was voted down by the largest majority in modern parliamentary history.¹⁰⁶ As outlined previously, only around 5% of the deal was materially different in the Boris Johnson iteration, and many of the original concerns around sovereignty, the so-called 'divorce bill', and Northern Ireland trade remained unaltered in the revised text. Former Today editor Rod Liddle, writing about the original Withdrawal Agreement spoke about the problems inherent to the transition period:

We will have to obey the EU's laws and rules, and be subject to the Commission and the ECJ as now. The big difference is that we will no longer have a vote or voice in the EU institutions. So no vote or veto against EU law changes which damage the City, or against the Commission's use of State Aid controls to suppress our competitiveness.

But in the 'Brexit Election' these points were rarely broached by Today. The debate was largely between those who supported the deal and those who didn't want to leave the EU at all. As is explored in greater detail in Part 2 of this survey, even when those holding the firm Brexit position were invited to appear, they were rarely given the space to make sustained arguments for their position – of the 31 firm Brexiters, 21 gave contributions of under 100 words.

The BBC was bound during the campaign period to provide 'proportionate' coverage to candidates, which meant that parties who were critical of Boris Johnson's deal (The Brexit Party, DUP and UKIP) were in the minority in terms of number and expected vote share. However, just 57% of contributors to the programme's EU coverage were politicians, the public support for 'no deal' could have come by way of contributions from the 143 non-politically aligned guests, and not had any impact on the balance between individual parties. Yet, Today resolutely failed to reflect all strands of public opinion on the matter of the Withdrawal Agreement, and shaped its agenda to exclude those who might challenge Boris Johnson's deal from anything but a Remain/Revoke perspective.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-47470864>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jan/15/theresa-may-loses-brexit-deal-vote-by-majority-of-230>

PART TWO: CONTENT ANALYSIS

SUMMARY OF ISSUES RAISED BY PRO-BREXIT COVERAGE

The analysis in section two focuses on four primary areas which illustrate the range of bias against Brexit. A summary running log of all programme items is also provided at Appendix III to show the context and content of these items. A document containing all the transcripts is also available on the News-watch website.

The four areas are:

- Withdrawal contributions
- The nature of Pro-Brexit deal coverage
- Reality Check features on EU themes
- EU business-related coverage

SECTION 1: WITHDRAWAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The total words delivered in this category were 6,494. Nigel Farage was interviewed four times and spoke 3,115 words. There were also interview contributions from Arlene Foster and Sir Jeffrey Donaldson of the DUP, together with historian Professor Robert Tombs, which totalled 1,970 words. The remainder came from 16 other contributors.

Most of these other contributions were minor, amounting to little more than brief glimpses of that some people, including business owners, wanted 'no deal' for a variety of reasons, and were disenchanted with either Labour policy or the Johnson deal.

In more detail:

November 7: (Nigel Farage) Nick Robinson opened by referring to a headline in the New European which suggested Nigel Farage could be Remain's secret weapon. The article <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/farage-reacts-to-the-new-european-s-secret-weapon-front-1-6362385> said that this would be because he would drive votes away from Boris Johnson by shouting 'betrayal'. Mr Farage responded to Nick Robinson by stating that the

Johnson deal did not get Brexit done. He began to explain why, but was cut off Nick Robinson asked instead if he thought Norway was not in the EU. He forcefully explained why – they did not follow the rules. Mr Farage said they paid some money and allowed free movement of people. He claimed people had voted to Leave to end that. Mr Robinson then asserted that the Johnson deal did mean leaving the EU. Nigel Farage said:

It does not mean leaving the institutions of the EU. It does not mean leaving the European Court of Justice. And it ties us, if we go down this route – and this is the absolute key to this, this is where Monsieur Barnier has been so brilliant. It would tie us to regulatory alignment for all time, in everything from financial services to fisheries to taxation. And that is not Brexit.

Mr Robinson replied that would only happen if the government permitted it – and at the moment they had not. Those points were simply the aspirations of the EU itself. Nigel Farage began to explain why that was not the case – that Boris Johnson needed to make it clear that he would fundamentally change the political declaration in two way ways, including getting rid of the clause that allowed an extension of the transition period until 2022.

Mr Robinson again interrupted to say Michael Gove (interviewed the previous day) had said it would not be extended. Mr Farage replied that such promises had already been issued many times and broken. Thus a definite exit deadline was needed, plus no regulatory alignment with the EU as part of the trade deal. Mr Robinson said that Martin Howe QC (who had campaigned alongside him for many years) said this was not true. Mr Farage said that in his article, he made no mention of the European Court of Justice and the truth was that a new trade deal would be adjudged by the ECJ. The key points were in clause 77 of the political declaration, which everyone should read. The UK would not be in charge of its own laws. Mr Robinson alleged that he would not run a full list of candidates because ‘a lot’ were pulling out. Mr Farage denied this was the case. Mr Robinson said the former candidate for Dundee had recommended voting Conservative. Mr Farage said that candidates for all parties pulled out at the last moment. He repeated that changes were needed, otherwise it would not be Brexit. Mr Robinson asked if there was a risk he was becoming the man who could not take ‘yes’ for an answer, wanted to be at the centre of this, and could not ‘give it up’. Mr Farage denied this was the case because he was not standing and was hoping that Mr Johnson would change tack. Mr Robinson said another way of looking at this was that he had stood seven times and he knew he was going to lose again; that he liked the limelight but would not risk standing. Mr Farage replied that he had only once stood when he had a chance and that had ended up with a lengthy court case. This time he had 60 events booked and would appear all over the country.

Analysis

In this exchange, Nigel Farage was able to advance – though against very tough questioning – several positive points in favour of the withdrawal perspective, or of concern to his party. He

suggested that the Johnson deal, as it stood, did not get Brexit done, and was not Brexit because it did not mean leaving the institutions of the EU, or the European Court of Justice, and forced regulatory alignment; that the UK had voted not to have the same relationship as Norway to the EU because they paid money to it and allowed free movement; that the withdrawal agreement must be changed to scrap the possibility of transition lasting until 2022; that despite what Michael Gove said about the transition, there must be an exit deadline as part of the trade deal; and that the lawyer Martin Howe was wrong about regulatory alignment not being an issue.

Nick Robinson was strongly adversarial throughout the interview. His first line of attack was to echo that Mr Farage – according to the New European – was a secret ‘Remain’ weapon’. He then prevented in the early part of the exchange Mr Farage elaborating why the Johnson deal was a problem, and pushed instead that it achieved Brexit on similar terms to Norway, which, he claimed, was not part of the EU. In raising this subject, he must have known that the EEA status of Norway – whether it is ‘out’ or part of the EU – is hotly debated among Leavers and Remainers (and on different grounds). Pushing it as proof positive that Norway was ‘out’ was a contentious approach designed to weaken Mr Farage’s position but without proper regard of the complexities. It was designed to put Mr Farage on the back foot – there was no way he could comprehensively clarify the issues involved in the time available. Of course, politicians should be able and ready to answer awkward questions, but the depth of the issues involved meant the audience was disrespected in favour of landing what Mr Robinson was clearly hoping to be a decisive negative blow about the Brexit Party stance. The exchange took up valuable airtime and did not shed new light on what Mr Farage was trying to achieve, nor show there was a contradiction in his stance.

Mr Robinson’s final two questions – the first relating to a former Brexit Party candidate urging electors to vote Conservative, the second alleging that Mr Farage was ducking out of personally standing for election because he believed he would not win – were designed to embarrass Mr Farage and to imply that he was unprincipled or scared, or both. Mr Farage was able to rebut both suggestions. But those questions, allied with the overall approach and content of the interview all showed a hostile stance common to Brexit supporters but not always deployed with the same rigour against the Remain side.

November 14: Nigel Farage explained that he was giving the Conservatives a free run in the seats they had won in 2017 because Boris Johnson had adopted a policy of going for a free trade agreement without regulatory alignment. The job of the Brexit Party was to hold him to that promise because there had been many times over the last three years when the Conservatives had not kept them. Nick Robinson asked if he had been prepared to stand down in another 260 seats. Mr Farage said they might have, but the Conservatives were only

interested in winning a majority for themselves. He did not disclose the number but said that if it had been as many as 260, they would not have been able to fight a campaign because of expenditure rules. He asserted that a deal could have instead been reached in key marginals. Mr Robinson suggested that if he had stood down in all seats, it would give Conservatives a better chance of winning. Mr Farage said that if they had trusted the Conservatives there would never have been a referendum and Theresa May would still have been prime minister. All change in the Conservative approach towards the EU had happened because of Jimmy Goldsmith, UKIP and the Brexit party. Mr Robinson said that was the point – they were a pressure group, and he knew they would not win a seat, which is why he was not running. He was using a lot of money and a lot of charisma and a lot of public attention to be a pressure group to try 'harden' the Conservative position. Mr Farage said they were not just a pressure group but even if they were they had been very successful because they had reset the Brexit agenda, got rid of a prime minister and had won the European elections. They now needed people in parliament to hold the Conservatives to account. Mr Robinson replied that if he believed his party would win seats he would be standing. Mr Farage said Arlene Foster and Nicola Sturgeon were not running for election. Mr Robinson said Ms Sturgeon was a 'bit different' because she was an MSP and First Minister. Mr Farage replied that he was an MEP and was touring the country and could not do that if he was a candidate. If he had stood in Thanet, other parties would have spent vast amounts of money against him and he would have been stuck there rather than touring Labour marginals explaining how voters had been let down. Mr Robinson then suggested to Mr Farage that in seats like Dudley North, where the MP had said Labour had let the area down and there was a majority of only 22 to overturn, he was preventing the Conservatives from doing that. That would be repeated elsewhere. Mr Farage said that in 2015 UKIP had stopped Ed Miliband winning. The 4 million votes won by UKIP had been crucial. Mr Robinson said Aaron Banks 'his old mate' had told him it was time to cash in his chips. Mr Farage said Mr Banks had given up and had not given a penny to the Brexit party. He was exhausted with the process, so it was now his job to hold the Conservatives to account.

Analysis:

Nigel Farage explained his party had decided to stand down candidates in seats won in 2017 by Conservatives because Boris Johnson was now going for a free trade agreement without regulatory alignment. He argued that other party candidates were not standing down because the Conservative Party were only interested in winning a majority for themselves and because if they withdrew more candidates, they would not be regarded as a campaign, raising finance issues. Mr Farage further suggested that he could have struck a deal with the Conservatives over tactics in key marginals. He maintained that had he trusted the Conservatives, there would never have been a referendum – change had only happened because of James Goldsmith, UKIP and the Brexit Party. He denied that the Brexit party was simply a pressure group and pointed to a

resetting of the Brexit agenda and the removal of Theresa May. The reason he was not personally standing for election was because his concentration was on touring the country and because had he stood in Thanet, the other parties would have concentrated extra resources making sure he was defeated.

Mr Robinson's questions focused on that it would be better for Brexit if all his party's candidates stood down, thus increasing the chance of a Conservative win; that Mr Farage did not believe he could win a seat, otherwise he would be standing; that the Brexit party standing in seats such as Dudley North meant the Conservatives had less of a chance of overturning the Labour majority, a pattern that would be repeated elsewhere; and that 'his old mate' Aaron Banks had said it was time to cash in his chips.

Mr Farage outlined a vigorous defence of the achievements of both UKIP and the Brexit Party, against strong suggestions from Mr Robinson that his party's policy was wrong-headed and counter-productive in terms of Brexit goals, and that his party was only a 'pressure group'. As in the earlier interview, he posited that Mr Farage was scared to stand for parliament, and also raised as a significant issue that a former close supporter (this time, Mr Banks) now believed the way forward to achieve Brexit was to vote Conservative. By contrast, when former Labour MP Ian Austen urged Labour supporters to vote Conservative because of the antisemitism in his former party, Mr Robinson suggested it was a huge step for him to be backing 'posh' boy Boris Johnson.

November 22: Nigel Farage was interviewed about the Brexit party's decision to offer a 'contract' – rather than simply a manifesto - to voters. Mishal Husain suggested the Conservatives had delivered on their manifesto pledge to hold an EU referendum. Mr Farage agreed they had but said the need was to generate trust now and his party's approach was what was required. Ms Husain suggested he personally had played a role in lowering 'trust, faith and confidence' by standing down candidates when he had initially pledged to fight across the country. Mr Farage said that was because Boris Johnson had changed his approach to Brexit. His own dedication was evidenced in that he personally had campaigned for 25 years to get the UK out of the institutions of the EU and make the UK an independent self-governing country. Ms Husain asked if he had broken promises. Mr Farage said he had not done so in his core target. Ms Husain repeated that he had broken a promise to his candidates in reducing the number of contested seats and asked why therefore the public should trust him. Mr Farage repeated that his goal all along was a Canadian-style deal. What he had done was consistent with that. Ms Husain – switching the focus – suggested he wanted 'only' 50,000 immigrants a year. Mr Farage said that was consistent with the post-war norm. Ms Husain asked for a breakdown of the occupations of incomers who would be allowed. Mr Farage said he had argued for

an Australian points system which could increase and decrease quotas according to economic need. It was also necessary to deal with a population crisis which nobody had anticipated. Ms Husain asked again how many would be allowed in from different occupations. Mr Farage suggested there were two different approaches, the first, those with a right to settle and the second those with fixed term work permits. The latter could be used to deal with shortages. Ms Husain asked if he knew how many vacancies there were in the NHS. Mr Farage asked why we were not training 'our own people'. Ms Husain said it was 100,000 NHS vacancies and 122,000 in social care and asked how they could be filled with his quotas. Mr Farage said it could be done by using work permits rather than a fixed right to settle. He added that his party did not want open door immigration policies which had no control over numbers. Ms Husain asked whether there would be 200,000 work permits. Mr Farage said ideally not – the need was also to train UK people. That we could not do so was a failure in the system (an edition of reality check then comprehensively debunked Mr Farage's claims).

Analysis:

Mr Farage argued that a 'contract' with the electorate rather than a manifesto was required to generate trust. He again defended his decision to stand down candidates in 2017 Conservative seats, repeating what he told Nick Robinson that this was because Boris Johnson had changed his approach to Brexit so that it included a free trade deal. He repeated that there had been no breach of trust in relation to his core target, which had consistently been to seek a Canadian-style deal. After Mishal Husain switched tack to ask about immigration, Mr Farage said his goal of 50,000 was consistent with the post-war norm and was necessary to deal with a population crisis. He outlined how his preferred points system could be used to ensure labour requirements in particular sectors were met by also having temporary work permits, and also said there was a need to train more UK people to fill job vacancies.

Ms Husain adopted a strongly adversarial approach throughout. She suggested that despite the 'contract', Mr Farage could not be trusted because he had broken promises, stood down candidates, and had thus also broken 'faith and confidence' with his supporters and electors. Her second line of attack was that his immigration policies would lead to labour shortages of up to a quarter of a million workers in the NHS, in social care.

Again, Mr Farage robustly defended his and the Brexit party's approach to the election and the electorate and denied that he had broken promises or trust. Ms Husain suggested that the Brexit Party's immigration policy was damaging to the care sector, thus implying that the most vulnerable sections of the population would be hit.

The negative approach to Mr Farage was amplified by that morning's Reality Check feature about immigration in which Chris Morris suggested that Mr Farage had quoted a post-war norm for incomers which was misleadingly low, stated that the economy needed immigrants, that Brexit would make not make much difference to figures, and doubted that work permits would fill a shortfall in the labour market because incomers would be better off in, for example, Germany.

December 10: Nigel Farage – said in the introduction never to have been a conventional politician - was asked why he had 'oddly' said in a leader debate that he would spoil his ballot paper, adding to that he also was not running. He replied that Boris Johnson had reneged on wanting a Canada-style deal, and if he pursued the current allegedly 'oven-ready' one, it would not get Brexit done and lead to years of further negotiation. Nick Robinson suggested that it was thus curious that he was not running against the Conservatives, giving Brexit supporters a 'total dilemma'. Mr Farage asserted that in the North, the Brexit Party was the only one that 'millions' of Labour Leave supporters would accept, they would never vote Conservative. Mr Robinson next suggested he was thus supporting a Leave deal which he thought was atrocious. Mr Farage said he was trying to prevent a second referendum at all costs and saying that voting Conservative in a constituency which had never returned a Conservative was a wasted vote. Mr Robinson posited he would not win a single seat because UKIP had not done so even though it had secured 4 million votes. Mr Farage said he was hoping for a breakthrough and claimed that a handful of seats would make a huge difference. Separately, his party had got rid of the worst prime minister in living memory as well as re-setting the agenda including stopping a second referendum. He now wanted genuine reform of the political system. Mr Robinson noted that a leader debate contributor said he could not resist being on telly. Mr Farage said he had retired in 2016 and only came back because of the failure to deliver Brexit. Mr Robinson asked if he wanted to thank Channel 4 for finding that one of his councillors had attacked Muslims. Mr Farage confirmed the councillor had been kicked out.

Analysis:

Mr Farage was able to outline his concerns that Boris Johnson had reneged on aiming for a deal which would secure a definite Brexit, and that voting for his party made strong sense in areas which had never returned a Conservative because they would vote for his party, but not Conservative. He also reiterated that the Brexit Party had made significant advances in pressuring steps towards Brexit and now wanted to oppose a second referendum at all costs.

Mr Robinson was again strongly adversarial throughout, pushing first that Mr Farage's approach was 'curious' and 'odd', that he was in effect supporting a Leave deal that he thought was 'atrocious', and that his party would not win a single seat. Finally, he drew special attention to that one of his party councillors had attacked Muslims, the implication being that the Brexit Party supported extreme, unpleasant, views. That was the final note of the interview and it added to

the impression that throughout the interviews, Today presenters regarded the Brexit Party's presence in the election as illogical and representative of a strand of opinion which was suspect.

In addition to the four interviews with Nigel Farage, there were exchanges of more than 200 words with Arlene Foster and Sir Jeffrey Donaldson of the DUP and with Robert Tombs, the historian, together with a brief one with student Emma Shaw.

November 14: Professor Tombs appeared with former British Foreign Office Permanent Secretary Simon Fraser to discuss negative claims about Brexit from Donald Tusk to the effect that it was the end of the British Empire. Professor Tombs asserted that Mr Tusk's remarks amounted to him acting like a 'jilted lover'. He added that they were silly, and that no one was taking in that way other than the Remain side. Professor Tombs said that there was nothing wrong with the UK making relationships with old friends and allies. He added that Brexit was a big setback for the EU because the UK's economy amounted to the equivalent of 18 of the smaller EU states, as well as being a major loss in military and security terms. For his part, Mr Fraser said he agreed with the substance of Mr Tusk's remarks in that the UK would have difficulty making new relationships, while the EU was a 'huge multiplier of influence'. Professor Tombs responded that despite what the Foreign Office thought, the UK's main relationship was with the US and that the EU was a 'weak player' on the world's stage. Mr Fraser – who had the last word – asserted that in a world dominated by the US and China, the UK would find that, outside the EU, dealing with the world was going to be more difficult.

Analysis:

Professor Tombs put across primarily that Donald Tusk's claims about British decline were 'silly' and those of a 'jilted lover'. He also asserted that, compared with the US, the EU was a weak player in the world, and that Britain outside the EU would be able to rekindle old relationships. He stressed that the size of the UK's economy was equivalent to 18 EU states, and that British military and security involvement was a big loss to the EU.

For his part, Mr Fraser agreed with the drift of Donald Tusk's remarks about loss of UK influence, asserted that EU membership was huge multiplier of British influence, and warned that outside the EU, life for the UK would be more difficult.

A striking aspect of Professor Tombs' observations was that they were the only positive analysis in Today's entire election coverage of the UK's possible future role and influence outside the EU. In sharp contrast, as is outlined in the analysis of Business News coverage, there were numerous occasions when it was asserted that the impact of Brexit would be negative.

November 26: Justin Webb, in the introduction to the interview of Sir Jeffrey Donaldson of the DUP, noted that his party disagreed with Boris Johnson over his Brexit agreement. Mr Webb first explored whether the DUP's disenchantment with the government stance would mean it would lead to it 'doing business' with a Labour government. Sir Jeffrey did not rule the possibility out, and also warned that if the current agreement went ahead, it would lead to further instability, would be in breach of the Good Friday agreement and lead to the imposition of a border in the Irish Sea which would increase the costs of goods imported from Great Britain. Mr Webb asked if the agreement went ahead, the DUP might support a second referendum. Sir Jeffrey said that the UK as a whole had voted to leave the EU and that was his preference. Mr Webb pushed that the Prime Minister repeated often that the agreement took the UK out of the EU. Sir Jeffrey answered that not many in Northern Ireland believed that and asserted that any prime minister who imposed such a deal would be 'very foolish'. He repeated that it would also threaten stability in the province.

Analysis:

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson claimed strongly that the withdrawal agreement would keep Northern Ireland subject to EU rules, and would create a border in the Irish Sea which would, in turn, increase the cost of consumer goods and risk damaging stability in Northern Ireland.

Justin Webb's focus appeared to be to establish whether – because of these reservations – the DUP might move towards supporting Labour's Brexit policies in wanting a second referendum. He did not explore the negatives which Sir Jeffrey asserted would impact life in the province.

December 9: Nick Robinson asked Arlene Foster, the leader of the DUP, if she thought the Boris Johnson deal was an act of 'betrayal'. Mr Robinson pushed whether she believed Mr Johnson was a liar and whether she could trust him, then suggested that if she believed Mr Johnson had betrayed the union, she had played her cards but had lost. He added that a recent poll showed that the majority of people in the unionist community wanted Remain, and claimed that this showed she spoke for only a 'small portion' of people in Northern Ireland.

For her part, Mrs Foster made very similar claims to Sir Jeffrey Donaldson about the withdrawal agreement, that there would be border checks, that Northern Ireland would not have unfettered access to UK markets, and that the majority of people in the UK had voted for Leave so that is what should happen. She refused to be drawn on whether she believed Boris Johnson to be a liar, but said he had broken his word and that she would continue to push for the best deal for the province.

Analysis:

Mrs Foster was able to assert that she and her party believed that the latest withdrawal agreement was not in the interests of Northern Ireland, would lead to the imposition of an Irish Sea border and would adversely affect trade.

Nick Robinson's focus was to push that Mrs Foster had lost, and that she now had only minority support in Northern Ireland. He also asked whether she believed Boris Johnson was a liar.

Other withdrawal contributions were:

Alex Downs of the DUP said in a package about voting intentions in Northern Ireland:

North Down is pro-union. They want to preserve the union and they know with Alex Easton, they're going to get a candidate that will help to protect the union and make North Down strong.

(He was asked whether a pro-Brexit MP was suitable for the constituency as it voted Remain)

Well, North Down was actually very close in the vote between Remain and Leave, but we're not actually getting a lot of that on the doors, it's more of a moving Northern Ireland forward, health and education, bread and butter issues. Brexit really hasn't been raised that much. I think people are going to judge me on the work that they do on the ground.

Richard Best, a baker from Wales, said:

Surprisingly, unlike Rohdri, I voted to Leave, and I'm still wanting to leave. Ideally, yes, we all want a deal, but on the flipside I'm quite happy to leave with a 'no deal' Brexit. Anyone who tells me is going to do this, it's going to do that, you know, nobody knows. It's never happened before.

Graham, said to be a Brexiteer, described Jeremy Corbyn as a 'communist berk'.

Andy, introduced as a Brexiteer, doubted that Boris Johnson's heart was in the right place with regard to Brexit.

Adam Hale, a Felixstowe port worker, said he wanted a 'no deal' Brexit.

Barbara, a hairdresser, said her and her husband had voted to come of the common market in 2016 and thought Boris Johnson was doing well.

Mark Wingfield, a Midlands business owner, said in business news the UK should make its own way outside the EU and would be stronger if it did.

Emma Shaw, a student in Northern Ireland, attacked the continued suspension of the Northern Ireland assembly, causing problems and delay for public services. She said the election would potentially have a 'huge impact' on the constitutional framework. Her fear was that the Boris Johnson 'deal' took the province into an economic 'All Ireland'.

Helen Jenner, a Brexit party candidate in Wales, said voters on the doorstep just wanted 'out', and discounted reporter Ross Hawkins' suggestion that Brexit would lead to tailbacks of hundreds of lorries at ports.

John Maytham, a voter, said he did not agree with Labour's proposal to hold a second referendum because there had already been one.

Peter Dane, another Brexit Party candidate in Wales, said 56 per cent in his area had voted to Leave in 2016, many votes coming from the Left. He was quoted as saying support was coming from both sides.

Richard Tice, the Brexit Party chairman, in an extract from a leaders' debate, said he believed that a leaving trade deal could be agreed within a year and argued it was necessary in the interests of democracy to honour the votes of 17.4m people.

Analysis: This boiled down to no more than a smattering of unconnected voices who wished for a more decisive Brexit than that on offer. Emma Shaw claimed the withdrawal agreement as it stood it was an unwelcome step towards a united Ireland; a business owner – the sole voice of this ilk – claimed that the UK would be stronger outside the EU; one voter did not like the Labour proposal of a second referendum; another that support for a decisive Brexit was coming from 'both sides; Richard Tice (in his sole Today appearance during the election, despite being Brexit Party chairman) said simply in an extract from a leaders' debate that the referendum result should be honoured; Andy, a church-going Brexiteer, suggested that the Boris Johnson approach would not result in a full Brexit; and two Brexit Party candidates asserted that voters across the spectrum wanted out, and one also doubted whether – against the reporter's suggestion that Brexit would lead to lorry tailbacks in Wales – said it would not.

These concerns were an important component in the Brexit debate which the programme did not adequately cover.

Summary

Overall, through these contributions, listeners were given glimpses of the perspective that Nigel Farage, the Brexit party, the DUP and a small selection of academic commentators, voters, candidates and businessmen had reservations about the Brexit deal on offer and wanted a different or more radical approach which secured a decisive exit from the EU.

The bulk of the points were made by Nigel Farage against strongly adversarial questioning which posited that he and his party were merely a pressure group which did not have a logical approach.

As already noted, these contributions formed only around 9 per cent of Today's coverage.

The conclusion to section 1 of the report illustrates that this was despite poll findings before the election campaign that 38 per cent of the British public supported a 'no deal' exit from the EU. The detailed analysis of the transcripts here shows that this perspective was barely broached in coverage. The election coverage was thus not duly impartial and failed to properly reflect a central aspect of public opinion in the Brexit debate.

The Today programme did not mount substantive coverage of an important part of the Brexit issue; indeed they significantly under-reported it and, in the treatment of the Farage interviews, actively sought to marginalise and trivialise its importance. The few positive points made by Professor Tombs about post-Brexit opportunities underlined that they were not properly explored with other speakers in this category.

SECTION 2: THE BORIS JOHNSON 'DEAL': PRO-BREXIT AGREEMENT SPEAKERS

The next section illustrates in detail how the programme considered the Boris Johnson Brexit deal in the main interviews about it, which were with government ministers. Together, the sequence illustrates that the main thrust of Today coverage was to suggest that even with a majority, a Johnson government would not be able to deliver Brexit by the end of 2020 because reaching a trade deal by then would be too complicated and difficult. The negativity on this front, as is outlined in the next section, was buttressed by a series of partisan 'Reality Check' features which were designed to amplify the difficulties.

Today presenters also challenged those in favour of Remain or a second referendum, but not with the same sustained vigour and negativity that was displayed in the interviews of government ministers.

A secondary theme of this category of interviews was immigration. This was clearly connected to the overall Brexit debate because the goal of Conservative policy was to replace the EU free movement of people requirement with a universal points-based immigration system which also

incorporated entrants from the rest of the world. Today's main editorial thrust here was to suggest that the new system would not work properly because it could prevent vacancies in areas such as the NHS being filled. The interview with home office minister Victoria Atkins – about the introduction of special fast-track measures to deal with shortfalls in NHS staffing – was aimed at showing that these were inadequate, and also that government policy in this domain was vague.

In summary, the primary interviews were as follows:

November 6: James Cleverly – he defended what was said by BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg to be a 'very difficult' launch of the Conservative campaign. Mr Cleverly asserted that while 'no deal' was back on the table, a trade deal would be reached in the available time.

November 8: Victoria Atkins – the focus of the exchange was whether new immigration targets would be higher or lower and whether they would damage the NHS. Nick Robinson pushed especially hard on immigration targets.

November 13: Michael Gove – he was asked whether he was happy having Aaron Banks as a supporter but not David Gauke, and whether 'no deal' was now a prospect.

November 14: Home Office minister Brandon Lewis was asked for clarification of immigration policy and targets.

November 16: In another interview of Michael Gove, the focus was on allegations that peerages had illegally been offered to Brexit Party members to stand down.

November 18: Business Secretary Andrea Leadsom was asked Boris Johnson trusted by the business community and was Brexit damaging to their interests.

November 20: Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab defended Boris Johnson trustworthiness following a leaders' debate in which the audience had laughed about whether he told the truth.

November 23: Health Secretary Matt Hancock was asked whether 'no deal' Brexit planning would resume and insisted that a trade deal was possible by the end of 2020.

November 25: Culture Secretary Nicky Morgan, discussing the Conservative manifesto launch. It was suggested to her that Boris Johnson did not have a plan for his time in office and that Brexit could not be achieved in the available timescale because the process of leaving was 'incredibly complicated'.

November 26: Michael Gove was asked 'what had happened' to the Conservative Party in the context that Lord Heseltine was recommending that people should vote for Liberal Democrats. Justin Webb pushed hard that 'nobody' on the outside believed a trade deal could be done on time.

November 28: Matt Hancock was asked whether the NHS was up for sale, Mr Hancock said it was not and asserted that in future the UK would not follow EU standards, but would evolve its own. Justin Webb repeated that 'experts' believed a deal could not be done in time.

December 3: Dominic Raab. In this interview, it was suggested to him that Boris Johnson was not holding a bilateral meeting with President Trump because he feared embarrassment. Mr Raab claimed that it was actually because the state visit was hinged on NATO. He denied there would be any privatisation of the NHS or that he had advocated it. He also said a trade deal with the EU would be possible in the timescale allowed.

December 4: Jeremy Hunt – former health secretary – denied the NHS was for sale or drug prices were on the table in a US trade deal. He added that 'no deal' with the EU should not be ruled out but asserted that a deal would be done.

December 5: Chancellor Sajid Javid was pushed on whether a trade could be done in time and whether 'no deal' was thus likely. He maintained that everything necessary would be achieved by the end of 2020.

December 6: Michael Gove was asked to defend why EU nationals would not be given a vote in a future EU referendum. He attacked Labour EU policy as a choice between Remain and 'Remain-lite'.

December 7: Nicky Morgan was pushed on that Irish EU trade commissioner Phil Hogan had warned that a trade deal could not be achieved in time. She was also asked about why Boris Johnson had joked about telling the truth. She denied that the Johnson exit deal would separate Northern Ireland from the UK.

December 9: Rishi Sunak, Chief secretary to the Treasury, was asked if achieving a trade deal would be much more complex than was expected and whether 'no deal' planning would resume. Nick Robinson posited that it was difficult to trust the prime minister's word in the context of growing concern that customs checks would be introduced on goods passing between the UK and Northern Ireland. Mr Sunak said it was down in black and white that this was not the case.

The interviews in more detail were:

November 6: James Cleverley. this was based on that the Conservatives had been through a very difficult day 'insulting the dead', and 'disrupting a rape trial', plus 'fake news' in a doctored Conservative party video. James Cleverley said the choice was of getting Brexit done or delay. There was then a focus on Jacob Rees-Mogg and the rape trial, then Nick Robinson asked about the 'fake news' video. Mr Cleverly maintained it was legitimate. Mr Robinson said it was a lie. This was a substantial part of the interview. Mr Robinson then switched to alleging the Conservative Party had caused the delay in Brexit and suggested it was dither, delay and chaos.

Mr Cleverly claimed Boris Johnson had negotiated a deal and put it back to parliament but it 'had lurched back' to bad habits. He repeated that the choice was between the Johnson deal and delay. Mr Robinson then asked if 'no deal' was back on the table. Mr Cleverly said that was the default position, but added that was not what he wanted – a deal could be done quickly. Mr Robinson suggested that the party was trying to reach out to 'hardliners' backing Nigel Farage while he, as party chairman, was prepared to kick out people like Ken Clarke, illustrating that the party was not a broad church. Mr Cleverly asserted that the Cabinet had very diverse views, including passionate Remainers. He repeated that a deal could be rapidly be done.

Laura Kuenssberg commented that party chairmen were sent out to deal with disasters. The Conservative campaign had started with bad alchemy . Their goal was to focus on getting Brexit done but had not done so. It had been a 'tricky' start.

November 8: Home Office minister Victoria Atkins – who it was said was appearing because the Home Secretary had refused – reacted to Baroness Finlay's attack on immigration rules which, she claimed, were hindering the flow of immigrant labour into the NHS. Ms Atkins claimed that the government's fast-track scheme for NHS workers would help attract more NHS staff and was part of a twin-track approach which also included new medical centres. Nick Robinson suggested that the system was narrowly confined to doctors and nurses when there was a need for other categories such as physiotherapists, porters, chefs and cleaners. Ms Atkins replied that the scheme did apply to other job roles, but there was also a need for UK people to apply for them. Mr Robinson claimed that the rules of the scheme meant that 60,000 of the current NHS staff would not be eligible to come to the UK. Ms Atkins said:

Well, we are very much in the process of developing the immigration policy. I mean, you know, this is a new opportunity, a brand new opportunity for us to develop immigration policy as we in the UK would like it. Under the EU we have been bound by their rules and regulations. And this is one of the many reasons why it's important that we win this election, get a Conservative majority government so that we can get this stage of Brexit sorted and move on to these really important topics that we're talking about.

Mr Robinson observed that if she wanted people to vote for her party, they would probably expect there to be an immigration policy and asked if she could say what it was. Ms Atkins said it would be a points-based system. Mr Robinson suggested that meant nothing and asked what numbers would be. He repeated the question twice more. Ms Atkins said it would attract the brightest and best. Mr Robinson repeated his question and asked if numbers would be higher or lower than now. Ms Atkins replied that under Labour, they did not have the 'brightest and best' approach and numbers would go up. She refused to be drawn on numbers of her party's policy, and said simply the needs of the country would be met, while also ending free movement of people. Mr Robinson said that for years there had been a target figure and asked how many years in a row it had not been met. Mr Robinson then said it had been 37 months and asked if

the government would apologise. Ms Atkins said her party wanted Brexit because it would end free movement and allow better planning. Mr Robinson repeated that the government had not solved the problem despite many promises. He suggested Theresa May had been against a points-based system and asked again if she wanted fewer or more immigrants. Ms Atkins replied that Theresa May's speech had been good, she wanted to listen people like the Migration Advisory Council and there were complexities to consider.

November 13: In the context of an earlier interview with David Gauke, Michael Gove was asked how comfortable he was in a party backed by Aaron Banks and Nigel Farage's closest allies but rejected by Mr Gauke. Mr Gove said Mr Gauke was wrong in what he said about the election – it was a straight choice of either having Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister and referendums on the EU and Scottish independence and getting Brexit done, thereby releasing extra funds for the NHS, the police and education. Nick Robinson asked if he accepted Mr Gauke's point that 'no deal' was back on the table because the 2020 deadline for a trade deal would not be met. Mr Gove said he was wrong and there would be a withdrawal deal which safeguarded the rights of UK citizens and also a political declaration which would lead to free trade. Mr Robinson commented that a deadline had been set which could not be met, and experts such as David Gauke agreed it was 'impossible'. Thus 'no deal' was back. Mr Gove replied that a deal had been secured despite people saying it was impossible. Mr Robinson said that Boris had previously said about October 31 that he would die if it was not the leave date, but he had not and thus had made a fool of himself. Mr Gove said many people had said Boris Johnson would not get a deal but he had. A free trade deal would also be secured by the end of 2020 because the political declaration had significant detail of the nature of that relationship. Mr Robinson asked if that effort failed whether 'no deal' would be back on and he had warned as Environment Secretary that 'no deal' would lead to a 40 per cent tariff on lamb sales. Mr Gove confirmed that he had been concerned about the consequences of 'no deal', but that prospect had now been removed. Mr Robinson claimed he was still puzzled why he would not accept that 'no deal' was a possibility. Michael Gove replied:

It's a hypothesis and it's a hypothesis which has been put by people who have consistently . . . not you, I think it's fair to say Nick, but others who have consistently sought to raise bogeys and to make people's flesh creep when the reality has been our Prime Minister has managed to secure a deal which puts us on a path towards, not just free trade and friendly co-operation with the EU, but also good trade deals with other countries and other regional trade blocs, which will enable us to, not only lower the price of goods in this country for consumers, but also ensure that companies have the opportunity to expand into new markets, provide people with good, well-paying jobs and job security.

Mr Robinson insisted that bogeys were being raised by Philip Hammond and Amber Rudd and David Gauke. He was comfortable with the support of Aaron Banks but not them. Mr Gove said that Brexit arguments did not need to be re-heated because there was an oven-ready Brexit

deal. Mr Robinson shifted focus and suggested the Conservative Party had conducted itself chaotically over Brexit. Mr Gove said the only way of avoiding that was to have a Conservative majority so that government could be made to work again. He blamed the problems of the last two years on the refusal of some of parliament not to honour the Brexit vote. Mr Robinson replied:

Well, you had a Conservative majority in 2015, after you warned of chaos under Ed Miliband. You see, why I ask you this is the Prime Minister's got some colourful language in a speech today. He warns of onanism, which for those who are not familiar with the Bible, may not realise is a posh word for self-gratification. Would that word not be better applied to those of you who have obsessed with our membership of the European Union, rather than getting on with the people's priorities in the last five years?

Mr Gove said the only way of avoiding more self-gratification was through a Conservative majority. (Mr Robinson then switched to questions about alleged Islamophobia in the party).

November 14: Nick Robinson, interviewing Home Office minister Brandon Lewis, said that Victoria Atkins had 'struggled to answer' a simple question of whether immigration would be higher or lower. Now the party had made clear it was cutting immigration but not by how much, nor had revealed its exact plans. Mr Robinson asked if previous targets were now dead. Mr Lewis said that with free movement still in place, and no legislation yet through parliament, he was not setting 'some arbitrary target'. His party needed a majority to cut numbers and end free movement, as well as setting up a points system which would be 'fair and equal to the entire world' and would be in tandem with the Migration Advisory Committee, who were already preparing a report. Mr Robinson suggested it always was a 'daft target' because it tried to measure the difference between entrants and leavers, the latter of which could not be controlled. Mr Lewis said the same figures would be used so that people could see that the government had control. He admitted previous Conservative policy had been a let-down, but Labour now wanted to let in people from all over Europe through free movement. He re-emphasised that leaving the EU would end free movement and allow the creation of a fair points-based system. Mr Robinson suggested that a points system sounded detailed, but there were no details yet. Mr Lewis said it would be methodical and sensible. Mr Robinson noted he was attacking Labour over free movement, but in reality that would not be in the manifesto. Mr Lewis argued that what Labour wanted would lead to at least 840,000 coming here, and that was a low estimate. His figures were also based on what Labour had allowed in 2005. Mr Robinson said the Conservatives had also allowed free movement.

November 16: Mishal Husain asked why people should believe Michael Gove's target of planting 20 million trees. Mr Gove said they would achieve it because the Committee on Climate Change wanted increased levels of planting. Ms Husain said that current planting was not at

that level and previous government promises had been broken. Mr Gove said this was because the CAP prevented it, the money involved went instead to farmers. He added:

I'm just explaining now. I was Environment Secretary after we'd left the European Union (sic). I argued that we should. One of the reasons why I argued that we should is I wanted that money to be spent on environmental enhancement and the Conservative policy is to use that public money for public goods, to support tree planting, to support the restoration of peatland, to suck carbon out of our atmosphere and to provide new habitats for biodiversity. And across the political spectrum, whether people argued for Leave or Remain, there are very few people who argue that we should maintain the unfair, unjust and un-green Common Agricultural Policy. It's one of the big benefits of leaving the European Union, and it will allow us to meet these tree planting targets, which will ensure that we . . . we deal with the climate crisis that we face . . .

He added that the only way of changing this was to back getting Brexit done. Mr Husain then asked him if he was happy that a police investigation into Brexit Party allegations of offering peerages in return for candidates standing down should proceed. Mr Gove claimed that what was being alleged was nonsense. Mishal Husain said Ann Widdecombe was prepared to swear that offers had been made. Mr Gove said he did not believe the claims were true, and he understood the Brexit Party decision to stand down in some seats was unilateral because they did not want to prevent a Conservative majority. He added that such things should be considered appropriately, then claimed that after the election, the government would be consulting with all parties about the relationship with the EU and so there had been no pacts, but had been conversations with other parties. He was not aware of any offers of peerages but could see there could be a miasma of speculation.

November 18: Against the background of the CBI conference, Andrea Leadsom was interviewed. Nick Robinson first observed that Boris Johnson was trying to woo the leaders of corporate Britain with the promise of small tax cuts, and in the knowledge that big business did not want cuts in immigration because they feared it would cut off the supply of workers 'they need to run factories and farms, pubs, cafes and restaurants'. He suggested to Andrea Leadsom that they had ignored pretty much everything business had been saying for four years. Ms Leadsom said this was untrue – she had been talking to business about how to get Brexit done, which is what they wanted, because not getting it done was devastating because investment decisions could not be made. Mr Robinson claimed they did not want Brexit, did not want the referendum, wanted a customs union and preferred Theresa May's deal to that of Boris Johnson. Ms Leadsom said that was not true, either, the CBI did not have a vote (the people did) and did not want to argue against the referendum result. Mr Robinson claimed Carolyn Fairbairn had consistently argued for a customs union. Ms Leadsom replied that other business bodies had a more nuanced position and wanted to help – with the Conservative Party – in the search for other markets outside the EU. The government was focused on helping business and new measures would be announced. Ms Leadsom added that it was vital to reform business rates to help expand markets.

Ms Leadsom added that there was a need for reform of immigration so that it allowed in from anywhere those who were qualified to work here and were needed by the economy, and not just those from the EU who could come here because of free movement. Mr Robinson pointed out that immigration from outside the EU was 261,000 despite being something the government could control. Ms Leadsom said a points system would change that. Mr Robinson pointed out the government had been in power for nine years and had not controlled numbers. Ms Leadsom said again that a points system would change that. It would enable the UK to be fair to all the world and that people who came here would contribute to the NHS rather than just receiving benefits. Mr Robinson said this could have been done over the past nine years but had not. Ms Leadsom said it could not because the UK had been a member of the EU. Mr Robinson replied that numbers from other than the EU could have been controlled. He added that the CBI wanted immigrants and asked if the government would provide them. Ms Leadsom said that at home there would be a skills revolution and there was also the very trusted Migration Advisory Committee which was advising on what business needs were. Mr Robinson suggested the Conservatives were asking for votes when they had broken every promise on immigration and was not saying what the new system would look like. Ms Leadsom said it was clear what the immigration system would be, an Australian points system. Mr Robinson claimed that was 'slogans'. Ms Leadsom said that people would have to meet certain criteria in order to come to this open and tolerant country. They would also have to pay for public services.

November 20: Dominic Raab appeared after a leaders' debate. Justin Webb suggested it was bleak when the Prime Minister talked about truth and people laughed. Mr Raab said that audiences had varied views, but what mattered was a YouGov poll which showed that Boris Johnson was 'more prime ministerial than Jeremy Corbyn. Mr Webb said the poll did not show he was thought more trustworthy. Mr Raab said there were various findings, but the key was the one he had raised and that was because his party was promising to get Brexit done. By contrast Mr Corbyn could not say whether he was for or against leaving the EU. If he won, there would be two referendums including a deal with SNP on Scottish independence. That would be bad for the economy. (The next part of the interview was also about trust – the Conservative decision to change their Twitter 'handle' for the duration of the debate.)

November 22: Chief Secretary to the Treasury Rishi Sunak said Conservatives had built more council homes 2010-16 than in the entire Labour government period. Brexit needed to be achieved so that other policies supporting housing could be introduced. Nigel Farage was interviewed about the Brexit Party's 'contract'. Mishal Husain suggested the Conservatives had delivered on their manifesto pledge to hold an EU referendum. Mr Farage agreed they had but said the need was to generate trust now and his party's approach was what was required. Ms Husain suggested he personally had played a role in lowering trust, faith and confidence by standing down candidates when he pledged to fight across the country. Mr Farage said that

was because Boris Johnson had changed his approach to Brexit. He personally had campaigned for 25 years to get the UK out of the institutions of the EU and make the UK an independent self-governing country. Ms Husain asked if he had broken promises. Mr Farage said he had not done so in his core target. Ms Husain repeated that he had broken a promise to his candidates in reducing the number of contested seats and asked why therefore the public should trust him. Mr Farage repeated his stance to seeking a Canadian-style deal. What he had done was consistent with that. Ms Husain suggested he wanted 'only' 50,000 immigrants a year. Mr Farage said that was consistent with the post-war norm. Ms Husain asked for a break-down of the occupations of incomers. Mr Farage said he had argued for an Australian points system which could increase and decrease quotas. It was necessary to deal with a population crisis which nobody had anticipated. Ms Husain asked again how many would be allowed in from different occupations. Mr Farage suggested there were two different issues, the first those with a right to settle and the second those with fixed term work permits. The latter could be used to deal with shortages. Ms Husain asked if he knew how many vacancies there were in the NHS. Mr Farage asked why we were not training 'our own people'. Ms Husain said it was 100,000 NHS vacancies and 122,000 in social care and asked how they could be filled with his quotas. Mr Farage said it was by using work permits rather than a fixed right to settle. He added that his party did not want open door immigration policies which had no control over numbers. Ms Husain asked whether there would be 200,000 work permits. Mr Farage said ideally not – the need was to train UK people. That we could not do so was a failure in the system.

November 23: Justin Webb suggested that despite Boris Johnson's claims of an 'oven-ready' Brexit, Rishi Sunak had said 'no deal' planning would resume after the election. He asked Health Secretary Matt Hancock why this was the case. Mr Hancock said the NHS had done its 'no deal' planning, and was fully prepared, , but there was going to be a deal. He had not seen what Mr Sunak had said, but re-asserted that a deal would be done. Mr Webb outlined what Mr Sunak had told the Telegraph, that 'no deal' was a possibility and that measures might have to be set up to deal with customs. Mr Hancock said a trade deal was deliverable. Mr Webb interrupted again to say that 'no deal' planning was reasonable because 'people' and 'a lot of experts' were worried that there was not going to be the time to reach a trade deal. Mr Hancock repeated that a deal could be done in time. Mr Webb asked if 'no deal' planning had been stopped, and asked whether, for example, plans were in place to transport drugs by air if necessary. Mr Hancock replied that plans were ready, and added that Jeremy Corbyn's stance on Brexit would not wash with voters.

November 25: Nicky Morgan was interviewed by Mishal Husain about the Conservative manifesto, which she said was 'designed not to frighten the horses' because of the party's high poll lead. She suggested that – in line with Andrew Dilnot stating that the document was 'remarkably unambitious' – 'you can't help being left with the impression that he said something

about having a clear plan at the point he entered Downing Street, which turns out not to be true?'. Ms Morgan said there were lots of points, including 20,000 more police officers and getting a deal with the EU. Ms Husain suggested that the central claims that Brexit would be done by the end of January were untrue. Ms Morgan said the first part would be done on time, but it had been frustrating to voters that it had taken three and a half years. Ms Husain, noting that Ms Morgan had been involved in the Malthouse Compromise, asked whether a trade deal could be done in a calendar year. Ms Morgan replied that a lot of work was already going on and the trade deal would be done as quickly as possible. Ms Husain invited Ms Morgan to outline the number of different elements of the economy would be involved, then suggested it was all going to be 'incredibly complicated'. She said:

You'll need to get thoughts from businesses and different sectors of industry. You'll need to have a negotiating mandate that's put to . . . that's put together. And many parts of that could be incredibly contentious, so different businesses and different sectors of industry start to say what they want, what they do (*sic, means 'don't'?*) want, which is why the idea that Brexit is going to get done and get completed and go away as an issue and that people have certainty seems very far off from reality?

Ms Morgan replied that people wanted as the first stage to leave the EU, the next stage was complicated and amounted to a 'big step' but the civil service was ready for it. The alternative was delay and a Scottish referendum under Jeremy Corbyn.

(Afterwards, Laura Kuenssberg said the intention was not to 'scare the horses', and Nicky Morgan had now 'sort of' admitted that the second stage after leaving the EU would be an 'enormous challenge' and there was a 'great deal of scepticism' as to whether it could be done to the 2020 deadline.)

November 26: Justin Webb said the DUP had been in a position of 'some power' but could not stick with Boris Johnson over his Brexit deal. Sir Jeffrey Donaldson first did not rule out doing business with a Labour-led government, but then said that no party in Northern Ireland supported the government's Brexit deal. He claimed that if it was imposed, there would be further instability and would fundamentally change the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain in breach of the Good Friday Agreement. He added that the Prime Minister also needed to look again at the idea of creating a border in the Irish Sea. Mr Webb asked if that went ahead, the DUP might support a second referendum if it addressed the specifics of their concerns. Sir Jeffrey said the party's preference was for leaving the EU because that is what the UK as a whole had voted for. He added that he would not commit to anything else at this stage. Mr Webb suggested that the Prime Minister repeated quite often that his deal did take the UK out of the EU. Sir Jeffrey said that not many people in Northern Ireland believed that because it created a border and would add significantly to the costs of Northern Irish business trading with the UK, and to consumer costs. He had said he would not support a border in the Irish Sea but had now done so. Any prime minister who imposed such a deal would be very foolish indeed.

Mr Webb asked why. Sir Jeffrey claimed it would be a threat to stability, and he repeated points made at the opening. Michael Gove, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, was interviewed Lord Heseltine's plea for Conservatives to vote Liberal Democrat. Justin Webb asked if this led him to wonder, 'oh my goodness, what has been done to our party?'. Mr Gove first said he admired Lord Heseltine's record as a minister, then said he disagreed with his advocacy of further EU integration, including the single currency. He was thus wrong in his analysis and the need was for a Conservative government to get Brexit done and avoid further referendums. Justin Webb said Lord Heseltine believed it was not possible to get Brexit done, the UK would be allowed into the boxing ring, but that was all. Mr Gove claimed that the bout could be over by January 31 if there was a Conservative majority because all the party's candidates wanted to leave the EU. Mr Webb said that would be just the beginnings of a trade deal 'which absolutely nobody on the outside' believed could be done 'by the end of 2020. He cited Ivan Rogers, the former diplomat, who had said the UK would arrive at a cliff edge faced with a 'highly asymmetric deal on the EU's terms, or no deal.' Mr Gove claimed that Mr Rogers had always been sceptical about the Conservative Party's abilities. Mr Webb said he was quite right about that in relation to the Withdrawal Agreement being easily done. Mr Gove replied that Boris Johnson had changed the WDA, despite such doubts. Mr Webb then claimed Mr Johnson could not win with the trade deal because the EU would want 'an awful lot of things' that the UK would not give and vice versa. It would thus take years 'as it generally does'. Mr Gove said there was a big difference now because the accompanying political declaration set out the broad structure of what was wanted by the UK and the EU itself. It would be free trade with cooperation on issues such as security and science. Mr Webb asked what would happen to the UK's services and whether they would have free access to the EU. Mr Gove said that services did not currently have a single market, but it was likely that there would be no tariffs, quotas or restrictions on volume. He claimed:

Well, when we talk about services, one of the things that some argue are that we should stay in the single market. I think that's Lord Heseltine's position. But everyone in financial services, or almost everyone in financial services recognises that you cannot be in the single market for financial services and to be a rule taker with the rules for our financial services sector set by people outside this country, without our having a say. And actually, there is a bright future for services outside the European Union. It's the case that we can actually innovate. We are a centre for what's called Fintech, financial technology. Our advantages as a services economy can be leveraged outside the European Union. We cannot just invest in financial services growth, but we can also make sure that our creative sector and other sectors of our economy can flourish outside the bureaucratic strictures of the European Union.

November 28: An interview with Matt Hancock was prefaced with comment from Faisal Islam that, although the NHS might not be up for sale in a US trade deal, the extent to which pharmaceuticals being on the table had not yet been disclosed. Mr Hancock said the documents about the US talks disclosed by Labour showed the NHS was not up for sale. Justin Webb suggested that pharmaceutical pricing was being discussed. Mr Hancock said he was trying to

keep drug prices down, and they were currently, for example trying to negotiate that with a new cystic fibrosis drug. He repeated that drug pricing and the NHS would not be on the table. Mr Webb said that there seemed to be an imbalance between what the US would talk about and the UK. Mr Hancock again asserted that this was the case. Mr Webb asked if the UK would be in lockstep with EU standards rather than those of the US. Mr Hancock replied that the UK would not be in lockstep with the EU. Mr Hancock replied that UK standards, for example on animal exports, would be tougher than the EU's. Mr Webb asked if the UK would bow to pressure from the US to reduce standards. Mr Hancock repeated that standards in the UK would be higher than elsewhere in the world, and the UK had always led the way with such standards. Mr Webb asked whether a US deal or an EU deal was a priority. Mr Hancock replied that both were. Mr Webb said trade 'experts' did not believe this was possible, you had to align with one side or another. Mr Hancock said he did not agree and suggested the UK had done deals with lots of countries at the same time. Mr Webb then asked if he wanted Boris Johnson to be interviewed by Andrew Neil. Mr Hancock replied that he was not involved in such discussion, but his party had a great message to sell. Mr Webb pushed that it would be easy for the Prime Minister to fit the interview in. Mr Hancock replied that he was not in charge of the Prime Minister's schedule, but had made 84 constituency visits while running the NHS. Mr Webb said he had not been sure about the interview. Mr Hancock replied it should not be read one way or the other.

December 3: Nick Robinson suggested these were curious times because President Trump would not have a one to one meeting with Boris Johnson during his visit to London. Nick Robinson asked Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab if he was embarrassed by the presence of Donald Trump. Mr Raab said not and pointed out he had a one to one meeting with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Mr Robinson pushed that Mr Johnson not having a bilateral meeting with President Trump made him the first British prime minister to behave in this way. Mr Raab said Mr Johnson's role was to bring all of the NATO parties together, while Jeremy Corbyn believed NATO should shut up shop and regarded Hezbollah as his friends. Mr Robinson noted he had made a political point, then asked again if there would be a bilateral. Mr Raab repeated that Mr Johnson's role was not to hold bilateral meetings but to bring NATO together. Mr Robinson claimed that opponents were saying that Mr Johnson's job should be ensure the NHS and pharmaceuticals were taken of the US trade talks agenda. Mr Raab said it was absolutely clear there would be no privatisation of the NHS, no dilution of consumer protection and the UK wanted US drugs at the cheapest possible price. The fact that Jeremy Corbyn wanted to talk about this showed he had no plans for the economy or Brexit. Mr Robinson said that people raised it because they were not sure whether they could trust the Conservatives, and claimed that it was not long since that he, Mr Raab, had written a pamphlet in which advocated hospitals being run privately. Mr Raab denied he had advocated the privatisation of the NHS. Mr Robinson pushed that he had advocated that the NHS should take advantage of the extra efficiencies private companies

could provide. Mr Raab explained that what head meant was that companies such as Costa coffee could run outlets in hospitals rather than doctors and nurses. He was not arguing for privatising clinical services. The expansion of PFI in the NHS had actually occurred under Labour. Mr Robinson maintained he had wanted private companies to run hospitals. Mr Raab again denied that that had been his intent and asserted that in the meantime Mr Corbyn wanted a hung parliament. In the final section, Nick Robinson asked whether a 'no deal' Brexit was back on the table. Mr Raab replied that Britain would leave on January 31 and a trade deal would follow on time because provisions were already being made for that through Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan. Nick Robinson claimed that 'lots of people' had warned that a trade deal could not be made in the available timetable and noted that Mr Raab had threatened in the past that 'no deal' must be on the table. Mr Raab repeated that a deal could be done on time with the backstop removed.

December 4: Martha Kearney suggested that possible rises in drug pricing as a result of a trade deal with the US was a difficult area for the Conservatives. Former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said that despite what Labour claimed, the documents showed that the NHS was not for sale. It was Labour policies that would damage the NHS. Ms Kearney asked whether as health secretary he had said drug pricing should be off limits in US trade talks. Mr Hunt replied that it was absolutely clear that drug prices were not on the table. Changing subject, Mr Kearney asked whether Mr Hunt believed that the government should not rule out 'no deal'. He replied that the prospect was not ruled out in order to get a good deal, but would not happen because senior EU officials such as Michel Barnier were saying there would be a 'basic deal' by the end of 2020. People claimed it was not possible but it was.

December 5: In her introduction to an interview of Chancellor Sajid Javid, Martha Kearney said the possibility of 'no deal' remained in the EU trade talks. She suggested to Mr Javid that the slogan 'get Brexit done' worked on the side of a bus, but that was only divorce and there was a lot more to do after that. Mr Javid said Brexit would be achieved on January 31 and then a detailed trade deal would follow by the end of 2020. Ms Kearney claimed it would be a very tight timetable because the other EU countries had to approve it. Mr Javid replied that the outline had already been worked out. Ms Kearney claimed that the devil in trade talks was in the detail. Mr Javid accepted that detailed discussions were necessary, but added that the EU had said if it worked for the UK, it worked for them, and this meant there would still be a close economic relationship, while also allowing the UK to take back control of borders and laws and money. Ms Kearney asked what tariffs he wanted for the car industry. Mr Javid said it would be a deep and comprehensive relationship with zero tariffs and quotas. Ms Kearney returned to the shortness of time and again asked how a deal would be possible. Mr Javid repeated that this was because there was already an agreement in principle. The only thing that could stop it was a hung parliament. Ms Kearney which country had achieved an EU trade deal in a matter of months. Mr Javid asked back whether any country had left the EU like the UK with matters

fully aligned. The answer was none. Ms Kearney suggested that the 'very point' was that the government did not want to stay aligned. Mr Javid agreed that was the case but said there was alignment at the point of departure and that was thus different from any other EU trade deal. Ms Kearney noted that David Gauke had said that divergence meant complexity and that a deal would thus take time. Mr Javid said he liked Mr Gauke but claimed he was wrong. Ms Kearney claimed the deal meant there was a border in the Irish Sea, then that 'no deal' still remained a possibility. Mr Javid said he was confident of a deal, and asserted that the possibility of 'no deal' was extremely remote. Ms Kearney pushed her point again several times, and added that the CBI 'the employers' organisation' had said recently that 'no deal' would put the brakes on UK growth and realise the worst fears of business. Mr Javid replied that nobody wanted a 'no deal' Brexit and business wanted uncertainty to end by a deal going through, no matter what their views about Brexit were. Ms Kearney repeated again that 'no deal' uncertainty was still there. Mr Javid repeated that the government was delivering an exit from the EU.

December 6: Martha Kearney, in the context of the final leaders' debate, asked why the government was opposed to giving EU nationals a vote in a future EU referendum. Michael Gove said he wanted EU nationals to be welcome, but pointed out they had never voted in general elections and thought it would be unfair to allow them to do so in future. Ms Kearney said the argument was that they would be affected by a referendum and therefore should vote. Labour believed this was simply a question of democracy. Mr Gove claimed that Labour position was an assault on democracy and ignored the referendum result by favouring Remain. He confirmed he was accusing Labour of fiddling the referendum result. Ms Kearney pointed out that political correspondent Iain Watson had pointed out this was not the case because the choice would be between leave and Remain in a deal negotiated by Jeremy Corbyn. Mr Gove argued the proposal had been made because most in Labour favoured Remain and the choice in a second referendum would be between Remain and Remain-lite as Labour wanted to stay in a customs union following single market rules. This would mean that the UK could not take advantage of Brexit. Ms Kearney suggested Jeremy Corbyn would be flattered because Mr Gove seemed to be suggesting the election result was on a knife edge. Mr Gove agreed that it could be.

December 7: Mishal Husain noted that the EU trade commissioner, Phil Hogan, had warned that there was no way of knowing how long it would take to reach an EU-UK trade deal, and that the UK faced a 'steep learning curve'. Culture secretary Nicky Morgan said that such negotiations were obviously complex, but Boris Johnson had previously been told that a new withdrawal agreement would not be possible and had achieved it. Ms Husain suggested a trade deal was more complex and repeated Mr Hogan's reservations. Ms Morgan noted that by contrast, Michel Barnier had said a deal could be done and repeated the government was determined to reach a deal as well as pointing out that Jeremy Corbyn wanted two further referendums,

creating further delay. Ms Husain said that Labour maintained the EU referendum would be held within three months. Ms Husain then said:

Is it a mark of . . . is it a mark of leadership to respond to a question that is about politicians who lie and what should happen to them with a joke, as Boris Johnson did? His response was that they should be made to go on their knees through the Chamber of the House of Commons, scourging themselves with copies of their offending documents. Do you think that was the right way to respond to a serious point about consequences for politicians who lie?

Ms Morgan replied that it was not a joke, but observations at the end of intense political debate. Ms Husain pressed that he seemed to be jokey about a serious matter. He had replied light-heartedly to a serious question about lying. Ms Morgan said if voters did not like remarks they could change or withhold their vote. Ms Husain said Mr Johnson could have said that those who lie or mislead should apologise. Ms Morgan said lots of other things were being raised on doorsteps, such as when Brexit would happen. Ms Husain pointed out that a document from the Treasury showed the withdrawal agreement had the potential to separate whole swathes of Northern Ireland from the UK's internal market, with serious political consequences in the province. Ms Morgan said the document did not say that. Mr Husain said it did. Ms Morgan asserted that the Prime Minister had said Northern Ireland would leave the EU customs union, though the issues could not be finally resolved until a trade deal was reached. The whole purpose of the election was to end the paralysis that had prevented Brexit happening. Ms Husain changed tack and suggested that the documents about the NHS and a US trade deal pushed by Labour had been leaked by Moscow. Ms Morgan said this was potentially a serious matter and was being investigated.

December 9: Nick Robinson said:

If Boris Johnson's electoral gamble comes off this week, if he secures the majority he craves, it will be thanks to the power of just three words: get Brexit done. The only slogan which most voters say that they can remember. But doubt is being cast on the Prime Minister's promise that it all will soon be over by a document leaked to the Financial Times, marked Official Sensitive, which was circulating around Whitehall last week. Written by officials in the Brexit department, DexEU, it outlines serious doubts about whether the infrastructure, systems and staff will be ready to deliver that promise.

He asked Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Rishi Sunak, if he accepted that as an EU trade deal had not yet been done, many of the biggest questions about Brexit had still to be answered. Mr Sunak replied that people were focused on delivering the result of the referendum. People had said the Prime Minister would not get a deal but he had, so the choice before the people was that if they wanted Brexit delivered, the most important thing was a Conservative majority. If that happened, the UK would leave the EU at the end of January. Mr Robinson repeated that it might not be possible to leave by the end of 2020. Mr Sunak repeated that people had said Boris Johnson would not get an EU deal but he had shown he had the ability to negotiate well. Having a deadline concentrated minds, and the government had agreed with the EU that the

timetable was deliverable. Mr Robinson repeated that he wanted to know if infrastructure systems and staff would be ready. Mr Sunak said there was a committee chaired by Michael Gove and claimed he was personally impressed by all the preparations. The UK was in good shape to deal with the trading arrangements and all other things, and what would happen next was very exciting, including a new immigration system. Mr Robinson asked if 'no deal' planning would resume. Mr Sunak insisted it would not be needed because there would be a deal. Mr Robinson claimed he had told the Telegraph that 'no deal' planning would resume and said he was now not clear whether it would or would not. Mr Sunak said the Europe Exit Operations Committee, for example, wanted a new immigration system, something that needed planning. Mr Robinson asked again whether it would plan for 'no deal'. Mr Sunak repeated that the UK would be leaving at the end of January with a deal. Mr Robinson asked if there could be no trade deal. Mr Sunak said there would be a trade deal. He maintained it was already there in quite a lot of detail, and it talked about an ambitious, comprehensive trading relationship with close cooperation on security and economic matters. But the detail could only be entered with the election of a majority government. Mr Robinson opined:

You're effectively asking people to believe in the Prime Minister, trust in him, to believe in his words. Here's the difficulty, isn't it? Which is the arguments opened again about the Northern Ireland border, in which Treasury officials say there'll be some form of checks when goods travel between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. DexEU officials say there'll be some form of checks. We heard on this programme from the chief executive of Manufacturing Northern Ireland. He says there'll be some checks. The Prime Minister says there won't be, and you're saying we should believe him and not all of those other people?

Mr Sunak said the document itself said in black and white that Northern Ireland would have unfettered access to GB and would be part of UK customs territory. Mr Robinson said that did not mean no checks. Mr Sunak repeated that the prime minister was unequivocal about there being no checks and no new barriers to trade and the document facilitated this. Mr Sunak said it was a good deal which allowed the UK to leave the EU and for Northern Ireland to benefit from trade deals which the UK signed. The agreement meant taking back control of borders, which was why a majority Conservative government was needed. Mr Robinson said:

I'm only rushing in because I want to give you the chance, and I'll have to be brief, I'm afraid, on immigration. We also heard earlier on the programme from people saying, look, controlling immigration is one thing, but a committee of bureaucrats telling businesses who they can and can't hire, often with a delay of months, if not years, while they come to a view, that isn't the action of a business-friendly government is it?

RS: No, actually, we will have much faster processing of visas. And we want an immigration system that's responsive to the needs of our economy and society and actually responsive to what business wants. But the point is we will have a system which allows us to be in control. I can come on your programme, the immigration minister can come on your programme, be accountable for the decisions that we are taking. We can only do that if we leave the EU and then seize control of our borders and our immigration policy, we can only do that . . .

NR: (speaking over) Understood.

RS: . . . with a majority government that gets Brexit delivered by the end of January.

NR: Back on message.

Conclusion: These interviews of government ministers were vigorous and confrontational and were designed to hold the government to account. In overall terms, such an approach would be expected in a general election as part of legitimate journalistic inquiry.

However, detailed scrutiny of the questioning shows that there was a very narrow and sustained focus on whether an EU trade deal could be achieved in the allotted time, and thus whether the Conservative Brexit policy was either viable or honest.

In sharp contrast, the programme running log shows that very little editorial effort was expended on asking Remainers or those supporting a second referendum if their equivalent policies would have a negative economic consequence, and whether the continued delay over Brexit-related issues would be damaging in other ways.

And there was also no exploration with ministers or others of the potential benefits of Brexit. Today followed the Labour agenda of suggesting a US trade deal would have a strongly negative impact on the NHS, and that food standards would be diluted, but did not look at what the potential benefits of such a deal (discounting the negative claims about the NHS).

Thus overall, the editorial approach to the Brexit 'deal' was strongly and unduly negative, and did not bring into consideration in other inquiry to a sufficient extent the corresponding negativities of Remain.

Another dimension of this was that Today did make special efforts – unlike with the clean-Brexit or withdrawal case – to show weaknesses in the arguments for Brexit. These were framed through the choice of bulletin material, editorial comments or decisions to bring on to the programme non-politicians who had strong reservations about Brexit.

Examples of this sustained negativity towards Brexit from the running log include:

November 6: There was strong emphasis in bulletins that the Conservative campaign had got off to a negative start because of Jacob Rees Mogg's allegedly negative comments about Grenfell Tower residents. He had been 'forced to apologise'. Yesterday in Parliament focused on claims that the government was allegedly wrongly delaying a report about Russian influence on British politics. Mark Davenport, Northern Ireland political editor, suggested that the DUP support of the government had built up frustration among the 56 per cent of the province who supported Remain. Laura Kuenssberg, discussing James Cleverley's defence of the Conservative party's 'tricky' campaign launch, said party chairmen were sent out to deal with disasters. David

Dimbleby, publicising his forthcoming Panorama programme about Brexit, claimed he had never seen the country so divided.

November 7: Bulletins mentioned that retired Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley had warned that extremists 'of the right' were seeking to exploit divisions in society opened up by Brexit. There was also an interview of Sir Mark in which he outlined his concerns more fully and a correspondent voice report. Also in the bulletin, former Conservative Heidi Allen warned about the danger of a 'no deal' Brexit. Nick Robinson suggested that former Labour MP Ian Austen – in urging a Conservative vote – wanted a 'posh old Etonian' to run the country.

November 12: Hillary Clinton, former US presidential candidate, was interviewed in the 8.10am slot and claimed that Brexit showed that authoritarianism was on the rise and had engendered a dangerous atmosphere.

November 13: Bulletins stressed that former Conservative David Gauke was warning that 'no deal' would not be good for the country, and that Aaron Banks had urged Nigel Farage had urged that the Brexit Party should withdraw its candidates to ensure a Conservative victory. The David Gauke story was the focus of that day's coverage. (There was brief mention also that Tom Harris, a former Labour MP, was urging party supporters to vote Conservative). The Tom Harris story was much less prominent, with Nick Robinson also noting that for Labour, Boris Johnson was 'loathsome' and the prospect of Brexit 'very damaging'.

November 14: It was reported in bulletins that Donald Tusk, the European Council President, had urged voters to continue to oppose Brexit and had warned that the UK would become a second rate power if Brexit happened. Adam Fleming amplified Mr Tusk's concerns in a separate correspondent item. Chris Mason reported – also in the bulletins – that Home Office Minister Victoria Atkins had repeatedly been unable to answer whether her party wanted immigration figures to be lower.

November 15: Bulletins outlined that the Conservatives had dismissed claims from Nigel Farage that members of his party had been offered peerages to stand down. The story was further explored with Lord Falconer – who said a police investigation must be held – and Michael Gove, who played the allegations down.

November 18: Bulletins, focusing on the CBI conference, stressed that 'many business leaders' thought there was insufficient time to negotiate a full trade deal by the end of 2020. Kate Nichols, of UK Hospitality, was asked whether controls on EU workers would 'devastate' her industry. She replied it would create a severe block on investment and expansion.

November 19: Correspondent James Landale suggested that the Conservatives were not clear on the impact of leaving the EU would have on relationships with the EU, the US and China. Norman Smith noted that Conservatives had been criticised for re-branding their website 'Fact Check UK' for the duration of the leaders' debate.

November 22: John Pienaar, discussing the Brexit party contract with voters described a 'clean break' Brexit which 'many others' called 'the hardest possible Brexit that could be conceived'. Andrew Harding, discussing the latest developments about the Chagos Islands said that after the Brexit vote, the 'traditional allies' in the international community had deserted Britain and wanted them returned to their peoples.

November 26: Bulletins said that Lord Heseltine had urged members of his party to vote for former Conservative MPs standing as independents, or for the Liberal Democrats. Norman Smith commented that Lord Heseltine's intervention showed how Brexit had eviscerated 'the old centre ground in politics', had polarised debate and had shattered party loyalties.

November 27: Bulletins outlined in detail SNP's contention that 'getting Brexit done' was an illusion. Nick Robinson, discussing the appointment of the new European Commission, noted that there was real scepticism in the commission about a trade deal being reached by the end of 2020. James Naughtie, noting that the Conservative campaign in Scotland was focusing on independence rather than Brexit, claimed that colleagues further south might wish for that too.

November 28: Naomi Smith, of the Best for Britain group, said that despite an opinion poll showing a 68-seat Conservative majority, her analysis of tactical voting indicated that less than 120,000 votes cast correctly could prevent a 'Brexit majority'. She also posited that less than 100,000 votes had put him in Downing Street. Justin Webb countered that people did not want to do what she said and that was indicative of the failure of her campaign. Ms Smith replied that this was not true because polls showed Remain was in the ascendant. Minette Batters of the NFU argued that regulatory divergence from the EU on food standards was both dangerous and not in the public interest. Economics correspondent Faisal Islam said there was confusion about what was on the table in the US trade talks.

November 29: In bulletins, Kevin Connolly noted that Donald Tusk – who had said there was a special place in hell for Brexiteers – would be replaced as President of the European Council by a man who wanted Brexit done but who would defend the EU's position vigorously in negotiations. Sir Alan Thompson, the former UK permanent NATO representative, opined that Europe needed to take more responsibility for its future and be less dependent on the US military and NATO. There needed to be a long-term roadmap for building European military strength.

November 30: Chris Cook, of Tortoise News – which is strongly opposed to Brexit – cast strong doubt on that Brexit could be achieved and suggested that the Conservative approach would lead to tariffs and considerable delay. By contrast, Labour wanted to be part of a customs union and that could be ‘settled immediately’. He also maintained this was ‘the Brexit election’ and that would apply to all future elections. Molly Scott Cato of the Green party said – unchallenged – that the Trump-Johnson nexus was working for the US in Britain, ‘rather than the prime minister representing British interests’.

December 3: Bulletins said that the visit of Donald Trump had ‘prompted’ opposition parties to warn about the negative impact of a post-Brexit US trade deal, and outlined their concerns. Norman Smith claimed that Number 10 was viewing Donald Trump’s presence with real apprehension because ‘he represent the unpredictable’. He further claimed that nervousness was creeping into Downing Street about the poll results.

December 4: Norman Smith asserted in bulletins that reassurance from President Trump that the NHS would not be on the table in trade talks might not work because ‘for many voters I suspect Donald Trump is toxic full stop’.

December 5: Norman Smith commented that ‘not a lot of people’ said Brexit would be done because the next phase of trade talks was more difficult and complex.

December 7: John Casson, a former British ambassador, commenting on the resignation of Alexandra Hall, head of the Brexit team in the US because she could not peddle ‘half-truths on behalf of a government I do not trust’, said the truths about Brexit were complex and did not easily fit on the side of a bus, and that Brexit involved hard choices.

December 9: Ben Wright , discussing political campaigning, focused on the Conservatives and confirmed there was little sign of actual voters on the battle bus. He suggested that the Boris Johnson approach was aimed at party activists, unlike past elections when leaders had ‘plunged into crowds’. Laura Kuenssberg commented that the Prime Minister was not doing himself any favours in not admitting there were extra checks affecting Northern Ireland in the deal with Brussels. She claimed that he had agreed there would be some checks when the deal had been signed but now refused to do so.

December 10: In bulletins, Iain Watson opined that ‘party strategists’ believed Boris Johnson was now vulnerable on issues of trust following his reaction to being shown a picture of a four-year-old boy on a hospital floor (waiting for treatment). Norman Smith said the incident had been a ‘bucket of cold water’ on the Conservative high command. Actor Hugh Grant claimed that the country now wanted to Remain, had been asked to vote on a very complex subject, wanted to

tactical voting to win a Remain majority and suggested strongly that Boris Johnson did not tell the truth.

December 11: Faisal Islam, economics correspondent, suggested that the business community had been quiet about the election, with the exception of the car industry, who had said they were 'fighting for preservation'.

SECTION 3: REALITY CHECK EU-RELATED CONTENT

The full transcripts of this strand are at Appendix I

In the EU-related coverage, two dominant themes in this strand were attacks on Conservative projections about Brexit and immigration. Strand presenter Chris Morris used the slot to mount multiple doubts about whether the UK could leave the EU by the end of 2020, as was being projected.

Doubts were raised about elements of the policy of other parties, but to a lesser extent. Examples were that Chris Morris noted that the CBI thought Labour's spending plans threatened to crack the foundations of the economy; that the Green party's spending plans would break EU rules; that the Liberal Democrat aspirations to spend a further £50 billion on education was based on money not yet collected; that Labour's house building plans relied on huge amounts of imported labour; that Labour's claims of the NHS having an extra £500m a week of savings by not agreeing a US trade deal were a 'little suspect'; that the documents about the NHS which Labour had procured did not say that – as the party had claimed – that the NHS would be privatised in consequence of the UK-US trade deal; and that Labour's anti-austerity claims of the level of income loss since 2010 were not based on representative household income figures.

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On immigration policy in the wake of Brexit, Mr Morris asserted that:

- the majority of entrants to the UK were not from the EU, so the ending of free movement was not the main issue leading to high numbers;
- that net immigration figures were lower in the past – as had been claimed by Nigel Farage – because a lot Britons were then leaving the UK. He stressed that the current high numbers of incomers were not from the EU, so Brexit would not make a huge difference. He added that economy needed immigrants, pointing out that a third of jobs

in construction were held by EU nationals, and also that the NHS relied on overseas labour. If a points and work permits system was introduced – as suggested by Mr Farage – the ‘trouble was’ that these immigrants might be attracted elsewhere, to countries such as Germany, who were actively trying, he claimed, to attract those deterred by the Brexit debate.

Analysis: Mr Morris attacked both Conservative and Brexit Party measures to contain levels of immigration. His reasoning was that they would not work, because the economy needed overseas labour and also that concerns about numbers were based on false use of data and false optimism about the efficacy of a points and work permit system. Such ideas are in circulation, but they are matters of opinion based on forecasts and opinion, rather than fact. Mr Morris made no equivalent attempt to scrutinise Labour or SNP’s frequent claims on the programme that current levels of immigration were necessary for the economy, and so his attacks on the Conservatives did not afford due impartiality to that part of the Brexit debate.

The most sustained doubt in Reality Check was about whether Brexit could be achieved by the end of 2020, as was repeatedly claimed by the Conservative Party. Mr Morris also suggested that the Conservative Party was putting stress on their phrase ‘getting Brexit done’ in order to divert attention away from other policy issues, in other words that the party was deliberately misleading the electorate. Alleged problems with the Brexit policy were raised on eight separate occasions:

November 18: Chris Morris said that Boris Johnson was promising Brexit but this was unlikely to happen because the UK had to negotiate its future relationship with the EU. The CBI wanted to know what terms they would be trading with the EU in a year’s time and about immigration policy.

November 25: Chris Morris said (at length in reaction to an interview with Nick Morgan) ‘getting Brexit done’ could not be drilled into, and was likely to lead to disappointment. He maintained that confidence in business would not be restored until more details emerged and that the next year would be dominated ‘by the rush to a trade agreement’, and so other policies on the NHS and the economy would not be tackled. He said the time allotted to the deal was not enough and the year would be ‘fraught and frenetic’ and could lead to ‘no deal’. Brexit was not going to be done in the timescale .

His points across almost 400 words of detailed analysis included:

- Getting Brexit done would not restore business confidence because that would not happen until the precise terms of the trading with European neighbours was established:

- 'Trade experts' said the timetable was too tight to achieve a trade deal by the end of 2020 because the haggling involved was too complicated;
- That the fishing industry feared it was going to lose out to bigger sectors of the economy, and there would be tremendous lobbying right across industry. The upshot would be a 'no deal' or framework that did not actually deal with trade across the Straits of Dover.

Analysis: Chris Morris delivered in emotive language a long set of reasons why Brexit seemed impossible to achieve in the timeframe available. Much of his reasoning was based on negative speculation. The only definite source he pointed to was unnamed 'trade experts'. Undoubtedly, some in the business community thought in this way – and indeed many such figures appeared in Business News. But others thought differently and Mr Morris did not bring alternative perspectives into his analysis.

December 3: Chris Morris, querying Dominic Raab's claim on the programme that it would be possible to strike a trade deal with the EU by the end of 2020, said it was going to be 'extremely tight' and be – in the time available – 'pretty unambitious' with the possibility that it could be knocked off course by issues such as fishing or 'the status of Gibraltar'. He noted that a Changing Europe report talked of the feasible outcome being that the deal would only cover goods with no or only limited provisions for services 'and services are extremely important to the UK economy'. Mr Morris added:

But a lot of what might happen next year also depends on the UK accepting what are known as level playing field provisions, which means sticking close to EU rules on things like workers' rights and environmental protection. And that's where the other trade deal comes in, because Donald Trump, of course, has made it pretty clear that he wouldn't look kindly on any future UK trading relationship with the EU, which would bind the UK close to EU rules on all sorts of things, because he wants to drag the UK much closer to the American orbit.

Analysis: Chris Morris, this time in reaction to Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab's assertion that a Brexit trade agreement beneficial to the UK could be achieved by the end of 2020, delivered further comments which suggested it would not happen. This time he claimed that the EU would bring into the equation potential sticking points such as the status of Gibraltar. He added that a report by the group UK in a Changing Europe – which is arguably a strongly pro-EU think-tank¹⁰⁷ – suggested that any deal would only cover goods, and not the services that were

¹⁰⁷ <http://news-watch.co.uk/bbc-bias-a-progress-report/>

'extremely important to the UK. Finally he also claimed an obstacle to the deal would be the EU's insistence that the UK must adhere to its own trading standards and regulations. All these points were speculation. Mr Raab had already been challenged about his views in the interview that day; now, without the opportunity of a response, Today decided to cast further doubt on that Brexit was achievable.

December 5: Chris Morris said that Sajid Javid had appeared to suggest that both Brexit and a trade agreement were 'oven ready'. Mr Morris pointed out the EU Trade Commissioner believed it could be done in theory but it would be difficult, and the UK did not even have a trade agreement because that was not allowed until after the UK had left. He added that most trade agreements tried to bring people together, but the UK wanted to move apart; that another issue was that full market access would be difficult when the trade rules were moving apart; that the post-Brexit deal was also about security, immigration, fishing and education; and that the possibility of 'no deal' in this overall context really mattered to businesses.

Analysis: More reasons were postulated by Chris Morris why a trade deal would be difficult to achieve and was not, as Mr Javid had claimed, 'oven-ready'. This was because the EU's Trade Commissioner said so, and because trade agreements normally tried to bring people together, but this would take them further apart. He turned the negative screw further by adding that 'full market access' (to the EU countries) would be made even harder because regulations were moving apart, rather than together; that the agreement would have to cover raft of other important (substantial) issues such as security; - and finally implied that the 'no deal' prospect created by all these problems was a severe worry to business. As with Mr Raab, Mr Javid had already been challenged strongly on his claims about a deal being possible in his interview. The 'Reality Check' was designed editorially to cast further strong doubt on that Brexit would be possible and this was based on the selective approach and opinions of Mr Morris. All his suppositions were based on that ways around the various issues would be difficult. Due impartiality was not afforded to other perspectives.

December 6: Chris Morris said Michael Gove's claim that EU nationals should not have a vote in a future referendum did not stack up because he did not know how they would vote. He claimed he had met EU nationals who were in favour of leaving the EU. He did not produce any figures to back his claim.

Analysis: Mr Morris found another peg to attack the Conservative approach to Brexit. He argued that Michael Gove was wrong to believe that EU nationals would vote against a future referendum about Brexit, if they were given the vote, based on what was apparently purely personal opinion. Michael Gove had been challenged on his views by Martha Kearney but Christopher Morris found another way of doubting his position which was based on opinion rather than fact.

December 7: Chris Morris suggested that Boris Johnson had landed a blow in the leader debate by linking Mr Corbyn to terrorism, but added that the Prime Minister had doubled down on dubious claims about Northern Ireland and his Brexit deal. He had found a way back to 'get Brexit done' several times but Mr Morris claimed his supporters would be disappointed when they found out what he actually meant. The truth was that neither had a simple solution to Brexit, but the Conservatives had a better slogan.

Analysis: Chris Morris again attacked directly the idea that the Conservative claims about getting Brexit done were accurate by claiming that his assertions about Northern Ireland not needing customs checks were 'dubious'. Similar claims were being made by opponents of the deal, but the Conservative ministers said that this was a misreading of the withdrawal agreement. Mr Morris was siding with his opponents.

December 9: Chris Morris claimed that on border issues – to the extent that this was a Brexit election – the Conservatives were saying 'trust us' but the biggest issue of the election would be left with 'an awful lot of questions left hanging'. The Conservative argument was that they had surprised by people by getting a deal and could do it again. Mr Morris commented that he had achieved a deal but 90 per cent was the same as before and what he had changed was not going down well at all with Arlene Foster in that there would be border checks, as was stated in the agreement. Nick Robinson interjected that the FT story based on a Treasury leak said it would be 'a major challenge' to deliver Brexit on the current timetable. Mr Morris said it would be because it was about employing more staff, putting new systems in place and potentially paying tariffs on goods moving between the UK and Ireland. It was a system never put in place before. It would be a big bureaucratic exercise and there was concern in Whitehall that there would not be enough time to do so.

Analysis: Mr Morris repeated his partisan claims of December 7 and added another Brexit obstacle, that, in his view, Brexit could not be achieved in the claimed timeline without creating a hitherto untried big bureaucratic system of border checks which would require more staff. This is what the DUP had also claimed on the programme, but which was specifically denied by government ministers; Mr Morris was thus again using his platform to reinforce doubts about Brexit.

December 11: The early part of the sequence was taken up by saying Labour estimates of household income losses since 2010 were not based on representative data, and that Conservative claims about the number of hospitals they would build were exaggerated. Chris Morris again said that Brexit would have to be done in record time and predicted that even if it was legally done in January, it would still be on the agenda for years to come, and would also prevent the Conservative party from concentrating on other policies

Analysis: In the final edition of Reality Check, Mr Morris repeated what he had already said many times about Brexit and the withdrawal agreement: that the timetable for a trade deal was insufficient, spelling out this time that ‘it would take years’.

REALITY CHECK CONCLUSION

The purpose of Reality Check, according to the BBC, is to hunt down false and ‘fake’ news¹⁰⁸, and to expose it. That is a high aim, but a difficulty is that ‘facts’ are seldom uncontested, especially in the political and economic arenas. John Humphrys, the former Today presenter, and Rod Liddle, former editor of the Today programme, have both expressed severe reservations about the ethos, operation and findings of the unit in books recently published. Their key criticisms are contained in Appendix appendix to the report. John Humphrys noted:

The creation of a Reality Check correspondent seems to me to contain an internal contradiction. That’s partly because of the wording. What do we mean by ‘reality’? It’s like ‘truth’ and raises the same question: whose truth? So let’s substitute ‘fact’ for reality. The BBC has a programme on Radio 4 called More or Less devoted entirely to checking claims made on a seemingly endless range of subjects by all sorts of organisations, most of them entirely reputable, and the way those findings are reported in the media. It almost always concludes that either the ‘facts’ were dubious in the first place or the way they were presented (often on other Radio 4 programmes) was hugely misleading. I speak from personal experience. Like most of my colleagues, I’ve been bang to rights. But let’s assume that we call Chris (Morris) our ‘Fact Check’ correspondent. Wouldn’t work would it? Because much of the time we are asking him to check assumptions as much as ‘facts’ and, as I have tried to demonstrate, the assumptions about this or that claim on the effects of Brexit can be highly contentious. And what message are we delivering to the listener? Are we telling them that Chris can be believed in a way that no other contributor can be? And if so, why do we choose one set of ‘facts’ or one ‘reality’ over another? If we are effectively telling the listener that anything which has not had to be given the once-over by Chris can be trusted without question, what does that say about the various claims that he has not been taking the trouble of ‘checking’? For all those reasons and more I was often uneasy at the way we made use of Chris.

During the general election, as is detailed in the opening section, claims about Brexit-related issues were tested on numerous occasions, and all the main parties but the SNP were singled out for concern. Without question, however, as the above analysis shows, Conservative claims about achieving Brexit by the end of 2020 were the most heavily scrutinised. Chris Morris found numerous reasons why in his view, those claims were dubious or false. It boiled down to that the government believed the deal could be achieved by the end of 2020, but he said the process would be ‘fraught and frenetic’ and would take years because trade deals were normally about coming together whereas this one was about growing apart.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/jan/12/bbc-sets-up-team-to-debunk-fake-news>

Were his doubts legitimate and indeed 'real'? The problem is that it was impossible to know as each pronouncement by him was made on the basis of pessimism. Nor can they be known until the end of 2020, or at such time as the trade talks flounder. What appears to be the case is that Chris Morris simplistically and zealously sided with those such as the EU who said the deal could not be done. In arriving at such a position he was relying not on 'facts' – epistemologically there cannot be future facts – but only prediction, or opinion and speculation. At the same time, he was actively disbelieving those who claimed otherwise.

On this basis, the decision by the BBC to set up the Reality Check unit was arguably based on hubris, on that the BBC has such power, ability and resources to somehow determine what cannot be known in the present time. By contrast, true scientific inquiry is anchored in that the humblest of experiments - if it comes up with a verifiable result that confounds accepted theory – can bring a whole edifice of belief crashing down, even if has previously endured for centuries.

In that context, it can be concluded that the purpose of the BBC's Reality Check unit in relation to Brexit was to perpetuate and give false authority to the Corporation's antipathy towards Leave established in numerous post-referendum News-watch reports. In a general election period, this was not acceptable and was not a duly impartial approach.

SECTION 3: BUSINESS NEWS

The full transcripts of EU and Brexit related coverage in Today's Business News sections are in Appendix II

The Today programme's Business News section is a discrete part of the programme with its own presenter, but is also an integral part of its overall fabric. During an election period it thus has a clear duty to be duly impartial. In an election which was centrally about Brexit, this would be expected to include pro-Brexit perspectives as well as those against.

Today Business News conveyed a plethora of anti-Brexit concern, but only tiny glimpses of the opinions of those who were optimistic. They included a West Midlands business owner who thought it would help his trade prospects, and a spokesperson for Reed International who asserted that caution about Brexit was dissolving. In addition, there were short points from pundits that the economy might enjoy some improvement after Brexit had happened.

A core point of concern is that there were only six guests who clearly made points which could be regarded as positive about Brexit, ranged against 26 who were broadly negative.

There were special features which seemed to be designed to show how difficult Brexit would be and how much fear of the consequences there was. These included consideration the future of

the car industry, the doubts of the CBI, the institute of Directors and the British Chambers of Commerce; and business prospects in the West Midlands and Northern Ireland.

Was this a reflection of business opinion duly impartial and properly balanced? The CBI, which claims to be representative of the business community, but provides no information on its website which proves that it is, has opposed Brexit from the outset and on the Today programme said it wanted to keep regulatory and customs or 'frictionless' alignment with the EU as part of any Brexit 'deal'.

But other leading industrial and business figures have been pro-Brexit from the outset, and in this period made news announcements why this was the case. No stories featuring them, or positive stories about post-Brexit prospects were featured in the programme.

Ranged against withdrawal were predictions that because of Brexit, research and development in the steel industry would end; that Brexit uncertainty was slowing the economy; mention that Moody's had reduced the UK credit rating because of Brexit-related problems such as a lack of predictability in economic activity; that because of Brexit economic growth in the 2020s would slow to less than 1.5 per cent; that the CBI, if Brexit happened wanted it to be 'good' (later elaborated as 'frictionless' trade, implying current arrangements or similar); that Brexit had been divisive for the business community; that the Institute of Directors wanted immigration to continue at current levels; that Brexit had caused 'extreme volatility' in the value of sterling; that production in the car industry could fall by a third, with investors looking at countries other than the UK; that a drain of financial companies to locations outside the City of London would continue because of Brexit; that the prospect of 'no deal' at the end of 2020 would damage business confidence; that the Scottish economy had shrunk because of Brexit and was holding back investment; that a huge concern of business was that 'no deal' was still on the table; that Brexit uncertainty could be the reason for the suspension of the UK's largest property fund and was the latest in a succession of such problems following the 2016 referendum; that sterling was weak because of the prospect of 'no deal'; that a business in the West Midlands was under threat because Brexit would reduce export opportunities; that all businesses in the West Midlands believed the Brexit had caused a hiatus in growth, with no decision being taken about investment; that, according to the head of a brewery, things had been 'gummed up and slowed down' and had sapped consumer confidence; that Brexit uncertainty was the biggest problem being faced by a lock-making company, and was holding back investment; that, according to an aerospace manufacturer, Brexit would make their products more expensive to import (because of tariffs); that, according to the British Chambers of Commerce, Brexit-related immigration policies would hit business, post-referendum forecasts of economic performance had been wrong – the figures were 'bad', and any post-Brexit bounce would be slow; that, according to Manufacturing NI (Northern Ireland), a leaked Treasury report revealed that customs checks would operate at the Irish border; that, according to the Institute of Economic Affairs, business since the referendum

had faced a slow puncture with business investment stalling; and finally, that, according to the Institute of Directors' membership the transition towards Brexit would be difficult and needed government assistance.

The levels of negativity were buttressed by the approach of the Business News presenters, who accepted most negative predictions with little or no challenge, and framed questions which often assumed that the worst outcomes were inevitable. Martha Kearney, for example, in a link, took it as certain that Brexit had caused the demise of the UK's biggest commercial property fund; and Dominic O'Connell – in one of the longest business news interviews – did not register any doubts about the prediction of Mike Hawes of the Society of Motor Manufacturers that up to one third of UK car production could be at risk.

Analysis: Previous News-watch surveys have highlighted systematic bias against pro-Brexit perspectives in Today's Business News slot. This negativity continued during the 2019 general election campaign. There was clear editorial effort to convey news about Brexit which was negative, and many figures with an axe to grind in this respect were given platforms to express their views. Was the negative coverage justified because the programme was affording due impartiality to the business news agenda? Of course, many business figures have deep hostility to Brexit and are worried that it will hit exports through the imposition of tariffs. But as already noted above, numerous business owners think otherwise. It is the job of a the BBC to ensure that during a general election, special effort is made to achieve balance in areas of controversy. This was dubbed by many – including BBC presenters and correspondents – as 'the Brexit election'. In that context, much more editorial effort should have been dedicated to ensuring a greater range of views about Brexit itself and post-Brexit economic prospects. Such gross imbalance as is registered here should not have occurred.

APPENDIX I: 'REALITY CHECK'

1. CRITICISMS OF 'REALITY CHECK'

Former Today presenter John Humphrys made the following points about the Reality Check segment in his memoirs:

It's safe to say the BBC devotes more effort to checking claim and counterclaim in the new, post-Brexit world than it ever did before. Some of that is to do with the way the referendum was conducted by each side and some of it is to do with the new 'fake news' era in which we live. One illustration was an interview I did in November 2018 with Peter Lilley, the former Tory Cabinet minister and now a member of the House of Lords and a leading Brexiteer.

He had come onto Today to promote a new report from the European Research Group which we were promised would 'explode the myths of leaving the Customs Union'. It ended up in a pretty angry ding-dong with Chris Morris, the Reality Check correspondent for BBC News.

Chris is one of our best correspondents: incredibly hard-working, utterly dedicated to his job, a first-rate broadcaster and reporter and very bright. Exactly the right man to have in such a tricky job. My problem is that I'm not convinced there should be such a job. The creation of a Reality Check correspondent seems to me to contain an internal contradiction. That's partly because of the wording. What do we mean by 'reality'? It's like 'truth' and raises the same question: whose truth?

So let's substitute 'fact' for reality. The BBC has a programme on Radio 4 called More or Less devoted entirely to checking claims made on a seemingly endless range of subjects by all sorts of organisations, most of them entirely reputable, and the way those findings are reported in the media.

It almost always concludes that either the 'facts' were dubious in the first place or the way they were presented (often on other Radio 4 programmes) was hugely misleading. I speak from personal experience. Like most of my colleagues, I've been bang to rights.

But let's assume that we call Chris our 'Fact Check' correspondent. Wouldn't work would it? Because much of the time we are asking him to check assumptions as much as 'facts' and, as I have tried to demonstrate, the assumptions about this or that claim on the effects of Brexit can be highly contentious. And what message are we delivering to the listener? Are we telling them that Chris can be believed in a way that no other contributor can be? And if so, why do we choose one set of 'facts' or one 'reality' over another? If we are effectively telling the listener that anything which has not had to be given the once-over by Chris can be trusted without question, what does that say about the various claims that he has not been taking the trouble of 'checking'?¹⁰⁹

Former Today Editor Rod Liddle delivered a more scathing attack on the Reality Check team:

The Corporation now had a new trick up its sleeve: a 'reality checker' by the name of Chris Morris. His job was to pop up and tell viewers who, of the debating politicians, had their facts right. But of course he is no less imbued with the same bias as his employers: Mr Morris spouted the BBC's pro-remainer line almost every time he opened his mouth. The former Conservative minister Peter Lilley, now Lord Lilley, crossed swords with Morris after Morris had been wheeled out to refute everything Lilley had said about negotiating a free trade deal. It was clear, from their heated exchange, that these were simply two sides of an argument and that Mr Morris was no more rooted in reality than was Peter Lilley. As Lord Lilley said shortly afterwards: 'He [Morris] systematically argued the Remain case and defended their Project Fear scare stories. The one thing he did not do was bring in any new

¹⁰⁹ Humphrys, John. *A Day Like Today: Memoirs* (pp. 227-229). HarperCollins Publishers. Kindle Edition.

facts. My central claim was that if we leave the EU Customs Union but have a free trade agreement with the European Union, our businesses have little to fear.'

Morris had previously been responsible for a five-part radio series, *Brexit: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Mr Reality Checker used twenty-four main interviews for this unbiased, unpartisan delectation – of which eighteen were speaking from an anti-Brexit perspective. Only 7 per cent of the words throughout the course of this series were spoken by people who were in favour of doing what the country had voted to do – leave the European Union. I heard this series. It could not have been more biased if it had been presented by Lord Mandelson.

Morris and the Reality Check team are used by the BBC to deliver a verdict on everything – and it is my contention that they do so from an invariably partisan, liberal position, in common with almost all of the BBC's output. In the case of Brexit, I think that assertion is very clearly proven. But even if they were not institutionally biased, the 'reality check' operation is a patently absurd and insultingly simplistic confection. As I'm writing this, the BBC Reality Check team – a mere handful of people – are pronouncing the sole truth on the following disputatious issues: Donald Trump's speech regarding wage growth in the USA (Trump's lying, natch); have the Oscars fixed their diversity problem? (Nope); what does a World Trade Organization no deal exit mean for Britain? (Plague, killer bees, death); rent control – does it work? (Sometimes, up to a point); and does dry January lead to binge February? (Sorry, I'd lost the will to live by this point and read no further.) And that's just today. Just one day in the lives of the tiny Reality Check team. It must be hugely comforting, if you are a credulous idiot, to know that despite all the enormous contention in this teeming, complex, fissiparous world of ours, there are five people sitting in New Broadcasting House who are the sole repositories of the truth about absolutely everything, less mere oracles than actual gods. The only pristine guardians of what is correct.

Quite how this makes the likes of Laura Kuenssberg or Jon Sopel, both eminent BBC correspondents, feel is beyond me. Are they not speaking the truth, when they report from Westminster or Washington? Should they not be subject, after each two-way with Huw or John, to an analysis by the Reality Checkers, so that we can know for sure they're not lying? I suspect the reality-check stuff was brought in following those remainer gripes during the referendum campaign, and also as a kind of backstop, if you'll excuse the term, against that awful thing, fake news. But 'fake news' is very often simply news that some people of a certain political disposition – right or left – merely wish was untrue. The uncomfortable truth is that there is no single discernible truth – and certainly not when we're dealing with predictions for the future made by institutions with skin in the game.¹¹⁰

David Sedgewick's book, *The Fake News Factory*¹¹¹ devotes a full chapter to 'Reality Check', covering Chris Morris's negative reporting on the possibility of a post-Brexit trade deal between the UK and the US, focusing in detail on a 'Reality Check' sequence from the *Today* programme in July 2019 in which Chris Morris contested claims from the US Ambassador regarding the safety of American chlorinated chicken. The 'Reality Check' sequence was challenged by Professor David Paton, Chair of Industrial Economics at Nottingham University Business School¹¹² who pointed out that Chris Morris had made 'the 'rookie error of comparing two statistics measuring completely different things' – comparing estimates of total salmonella illnesses in the US, compared with recorded lab reports in the UK. Mr Paton noted:

Virtually every element of Chris Morris's 'Reality Check' was either flat out false or based on a seriously incompetent use of statistics.

¹¹⁰ Liddle, Rod. *The Great Betrayal*. Little, Brown Book Group. Kindle Edition.

¹¹¹ Sedgwick, David. *The Fake News Factory: Tales from BBC-land* (p. 217). Kindle Edition.

¹¹² <https://briefingsforbritain.co.uk/fact-checking-the-bbc-fact-checkers/>

The BBC's Reality Check unit conceded their error:

We have deleted our tweet about the US ambassador's claim on food poisoning because we wrongly compared US estimated figures with UK confirmed figures.¹¹³

2. SUMMARY OF EU-RELATED 'REALITY CHECK' CONTENT IN 2019 ELECTION SURVEY

November 14: Chris Morris said that the majority of entrants to the UK were not from the EU (59,000 out of 219,000), so ending free movement was not the main issue in high numbers. He added that the Liberal Democrat claims about their 'success' in the European elections were misleading.

November 18: Chris Morris said that Boris Johnson was promising Brexit but this was unlikely to happen because the UK had to negotiate its future relationship with the EU. The CBI wanted to know what terms they would be trading with the EU in a year's time and about immigration policy. He noted that Carolyn Fairbairn had said that Jeremy Corbyn's policies threatened to crack the foundations of the economy.

November 19: Chris Morris noted that the level of deficit required for Green party spending broke EU rules. He said the biggest issue was whether spending £100 billion a year would achieve the party target of zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2030.

November 20: Chris Morris said that much of the fall in capitation for schools targeted by Liberal Democrats had occurred when they were part of the coalition. He said the money that the party was planning to spend on education was not yet in the government's possession, and their claims that it would be £50 billion could not be verified.

November 21: In Reality Check, Chris Morris suggested that Labour's pledge to build more housing relied on importing 'a huge amount of construction workers' from abroad whether from the EU or elsewhere. Mr Morris also suggested that the slogan "Get Brexit Done" would divert attention away from other policies.

November 22: Chris Morris claimed that net immigration figures were lower in the past because a lot Britons were leaving the UK and stressed the current high numbers were not from the EU, so Brexit would not make a huge difference. He added that economy needed immigrants, pointing out that a third of jobs in construction were held by EU nationals. In future, the 'trouble was' that these immigrants might be attracted elsewhere. Mr Morris also claimed that Brexit party ads suggesting that 5 million Labour voters wanted Brexit were untrue because the actual figure was between 3 million and four.

November 25: Chris Morris said (at length) 'getting Brexit done' could not be drilled into, and was likely to lead to disappointment. He maintained that confidence in business would not be restored until more details emerged and that the next year would be dominated 'by the rush to a trade agreement' and so other policies on the NHS and the economy would not be tackled. He said the time allotted to the deal was not enough and the year would be 'fraught and frenetic' and could lead to 'no deal'. Brexit was not going to be done.

November 28: Chris Morris said that Labour claims of £500 million a week of savings to the NHS through not agreeing to a US trade deal were 'a little suspect' and would only come about if a 'disastrous' trade deal was struck. He added that the US talks had included drugs pricing.

December 3: Chris Morris, querying Dominic Raab's claim on the programme that it would be possible to strike a trade deal with the EU by the end of 2020, said it was going to be 'extremely tight' and be – in the time available – 'pretty unambitious' with the possibility that it could be

¹¹³ <https://twitter.com/BBCRealityCheck/status/1114164511521628160>

knocked off course by issues such as fishing or 'the status of Gibraltar'. He noted that a Changing Europe report talked of the feasible outcome being that the deal would only cover goods with no or only limited provisions for services 'and services are extremely important to the UK economy'. Mr Morris said that a lot happening over the next year would depend on the 'level playing field' provisions – sticking close to EU rules on things like workers' rights and environmental protection. He said that Donald Trump had made it 'pretty clear' that he wouldn't look too kindly on any future UK trading relationship with the EU, because President Trump wanted to drag the UK much closer to the American orbit.

December 4: Chris Morris said that the Labour focus on Trump and the NHS was like Groundhog day and he noted that the claim of extra spending of £500 million a week on drugs was not as prominent. Mr Morris suggested that US drug companies did want access to the UK market and were lobbying for changes in procurement practice. He commented if a blanket ban was imposed on a deal covering drugs and agricultural products, then it could be asked how useful a trade deal would be.

December 5: Chris Morris said that Sajid Javid had appeared to suggest that both Brexit and a trade agreement were 'oven ready'. He pointed out the trade commissioner believed it could be done in theory but it would be difficult. And the UK did not even have a trade agreement because that was not allowed until after the UK had left. He added that most trade agreements tried to bring people together, but the UK wanted to move apart; that another issue was that full market access would be difficult when the trade rules were moving apart; and that the possibility of 'no deal' really mattered to businesses. He added that Brexit party Facebook adds, as well as targeting Labour Leave voters, was also trying to appeal to wavering 'Tories' in seats they had not won in decades.

December 6: Chris Morris said Michael Gove's argument about EU nationals having a vote in a future referendum did not stack up because he did not know how they would vote. He claimed he had met EU nationals who were in favour of leaving the EU. He did not produce any figures to back his claim.

December 7: Chris Morris suggested that Boris Johnson had landed a blow by linking Mr Corbyn to terrorism, but added that the prime minister had doubled down on dubious claims about Northern Ireland and his Brexit deal. He had found a way back to 'get Brexit done' several times but claimed his supporters would be disappointed when they found out what he actually meant. The truth was that neither had a simple solution to Brexit, but the Conservatives had a better slogan. Mr Morris – discussing points about the NHS – said Mr Corbyn had done a good job targeting his core audience by using phrases such as ending austerity but the documents about the NHS did not say, as he claimed, that the NHS was going to be privatised. The question was whether he would thus have changed many minds.

December 9: Chris Morris claimed that on border issues – to the extent that this was a Brexit election – the Conservatives were saying 'trust us' but the biggest issue of the election would be left with 'an awful lot of questions left hanging'. The Conservative argument was that they had surprised by people by getting a deal and could do it again. Mr Morris commented that he had achieved a deal but 90 per cent was the same as before and what he had changed was not going down well at all with Arlene Foster in that there would be border checks, as was stated in the agreement. Nick Robinson interjected that the FT story based on a Treasury leak said it would be 'a major challenge' to deliver Brexit on the current timetable. Mr Morris said it would be because it was about employing more staff, putting new systems in place and potentially paying tariffs on goods moving between the UK and Ireland. It was a system never put in place before. It would be a big bureaucratic exercise and there was concern in Whitehall that there would not be enough time to do so.

December 11: Chris Morris again said that Brexit would have to be done in record time and predicted that even if it was legally done in January, it would still be on the agenda for years to come

3. 'REALITY CHECK' TRANSCRIPTS

Monday 11th November, 8.52am Election Reality Check

The big question yesterday was on Jeremy Corbyn's spending plans.

NICK ROBINSON: Costing manifestos sounds good, but very hard to do, Chris?

CHRIS MORRIS: It is hard to do. It's true that the Tories didn't fully cost their last one. But, you know, Labour have put out some numbers which are questionable this time round, notably the £500 million a week it says the NHS would have to spend on medicines after a trade deal with the United States.

Moves on to discuss whether anyone could cost manifestos independently.

Wednesday 13th November, 8.50am Election Reality Check (Extract)

Labour are promising to invest billions of pounds more in the NHS in England than the Conservatives if they win the election. Nick Robinson talks to BBC Reality Check correspondent, Chris Morris. Discussion of the interview earlier in the programme with Labour's Jonathan Ashworth.

NICK ROBINSON: And, briefly if you would, Chris, Mr Ashworth also said that Labour would do its best to maintain freedom of movement for NHS staff and their families, even after Brexit, if it happens, is that realistic?

CHRIS MORRIS: The trouble is, you can't really slice and dice freedom of movement. At the moment it gives all EU citizens the absolute right to live and work here and all UK citizens, obviously, the absolute right to live and work elsewhere in the EU. You can make it much easier for NHS recruits in the future, but they still need to prove their credentials. So it's not quite the same. And would they be allowed to stay, for example, once they stop working in the NHS? That's not clear. So the Tories will continue to hammer away at what exactly Labour's policy on this is. Michael Gove, who you were chatting with earlier, Nick, wrote in a newspaper this week that he regards extending free movement as extreme, dangerous and out of touch with the people. So it's a pretty clear dividing line. And I think that link between the NHS and Brexit will continue to be a defining issue in this election.

NR: Chris Morris, thank you very much indeed.

Thursday 14th November, 8.51am Election Reality Check (Extract)

NICK ROBINSON: Chris Morris is here, which means it's time for our daily Reality Check slot this morning. You've just heard we've been talking immigration policy with Labour and the Conservatives. So what are the important numbers behind the claims and counterclaims on immigration? Chris?

CHRIS MORRIS: Yeah, thanks, Nick. It's going to be a big argument, obviously, during the election about ending free movement from the EU. But it is worth looking at what immigration numbers actually tell us at the moment. In the latest numbers we have in the year ending March 2019, net migration from the EU: 59,000. That's free movement. Net migration from the rest of the world 219,000 - nothing to do with ending free movement. And the numbers from the EU have fallen very sharply since the EU referendum. The numbers from the rest of the world have been going up pretty steadily. So ending free movement in and of itself doesn't really make much difference. But the Tories, as we heard, have jumped on this Labour Party conference motion saying we will maintain and extend free movement. They say it will mean more than 800,000 new arrivals. And here's what the minister of state, Brandon Lewis, said about it a few minutes ago.

BRANDON LEWIS: You're quite right. This is from the Labour Party conference and it did pass. But it's also what Jeremy Corbyn . . .

NR: (*speaking over*) But it's not their policy.

BL: But it is also what Jeremy Corbyn himself and John McDonnell, on several occasions, including the end of October this year, has said. So I'm maybe making the mistake of believing what they're saying. We'll see what the manifesto says. Be good for them to clarify, if not. But the 840,000, I would say, is also potentially a very low estimate.

CM: He may be making a mistake. The trouble is, the 800,000-plus seems to rely on an assumption that free movement would be extended to everyone in the world. And I've just had a look at that Labour Party conference motion and that's not what it says, but it is slightly vague.

NR: It does say 'extend' though, doesn't it?

CM: It does say, so, so key question for both parties, really, what does 'maintain and extend free movement' actually mean in practice for Labour and what will be in their manifesto? And for the Tories if you're going to cut immigration, by how much and by when?

NR: Rumour has it, Chris, that from time to time, parties put some slightly outlandish claims and charts in . . .

CM: (*speaking over*) Surely not!

NR: . . . their campaign literature. I know you'll be shocked at this suggestion.

CM: We've had a few people send in examples of what looked like slightly dodgy bar charts on campaign leaflets, and quite a few of them seem to involve the Liberal Democrats. So we're going to have a look at those today we have one, a bar chart from North Tyneside, which appears to show that in the European election, the Lib Dems received the largest share of the vote, way above the Tories and the Greens. The trouble is the bar chart, the vertical bit of the bar chart stops at 10,000 votes and both Labour and the Brexit party received way more than that. So the Lib Dems actually came third.

Moves on to discuss bar charts that are not to do with the European election specifically.

Monday 18th November, 8.46am Election Reality Check

NICK ROBINSON: At around about this time each day, we bring in Chris Morris, our Reality Check correspondent to make sense of what's going on during the day's campaigning. All the big party leaders at the CBI conference trying to make a pitch to big business today, Chris?

CHRIS MORRIS: Yeah, and you know, we know what's written on the side of the PM's new bus. And no surprise there, the lines we've been given from his speech today, he's going to say, you can be sure we will get Brexit done and leave with the new deal that ends the uncertainty. We've said this before, I know we've said this before, it is worth emphasising again, though: the trouble is, leaving the EU in January, if that does happen, won't end the uncertainty because the UK still has to negotiate its future relationship with the EU. And on Mr Johnson's timetable, it has to do that in record time by the end of next year. So while the government can offer a business rates cut, a construction tax cut and so on, most CBI members want to know a) what will be the terms on which they can trade with their nearest neighbours in a year's time. And secondly, in particular, what will be in place in terms of immigration policy to allow them to recruit from abroad, especially in sectors that rely on lower skilled labour? And here's what Andrea Leadsom, the Business Secretary, said on . . . about immigration on this program a few minutes ago.

ANDREA LEADSOM: Our immigration rules will be fair to the world once we leave the European Union. What that means is, instead of being open, free access to benefits, to work and to coming here without a job to the EU, but tight for the rest of the world, what we will have is a system that can control

the . . . the types of workers that we need in our economy that can be driven by the needs of the UK economy, and that will be fair to the entire world instead of just free movement for the EU.

CM: Now, the Conservatives talk a lot about the brightest and the best coming here, which is another good slogan, and who wouldn't want the brightest and the best in the country. But as you, Nick, suggested to Mrs Leadsom, many of the needs in our economy are rather different: the construction sector, agriculture, hospitality and so on. A lot of people who are very valuable, but not necessarily highly skilled in the, in the terms that the Conservatives seem to want to attract. So I think there will be scepticism in the room for Mr Johnson. But of course, that scepticism won't just be for the Prime Minister, a lot of it will be reserved for Jeremy Corbyn after the CBI director Carolyn Fairbairn said yesterday, in her words, 'Labour might be asking the right questions about inequality, but its policies threaten' she said, 'to crack the foundations of our economy.' So that relationship with business very much a focus today.

NR: Chris Morris, thank you.

Tuesday 19th November, 8.49am Election Reality Check (Extract)

Discussion of Labour and inequality, and the Greens' proposals for tackling the climate crisis

CHRIS MORRIS: One technical problem for the Greens is that if they did have that level of borrowing, they would (*fragment of word, or word unclear*) they would be running a budget deficit far higher than EU rules allow. And of course, the Greens are very enthusiastically wanting to remain in the European Union. But I guess the bigger thing that's worth thinking about is that even if they were able to raise and spend £100 billion a year, would they really be able to achieve their target of a zero carbon economy by 2030?

Moves on to discuss Committee for Climate Change's targets for climate emissions.

Wednesday 20th November, 8.49am Election Reality Check (Extract)

MISHAL HUSAIN: Each day through the election campaign, we're looking through some of the claims from the political parties at this point in the programme, and it's regularly with Chris Morris, our Reality Check correspondent. We've been talking to the Lib Dems already this morning, Chris, and that's ahead of their manifesto launch today?

CHRIS MORRIS: Yeah. And the subject they briefed out in advance is a plan to add an extra £10 billion to school funding in England by 2024-25. But it is worth pointing out that spending per pupil in England has fallen by about 8 per cent since 2010. And much of that fall took place when the Lib Dems were in government with the Conservatives. So they can't just blame someone else. Fear not, said Leyla Moran to you earlier, Mishal, their education spokeswoman. We'll get a chunk of extra money from remaining in the EU.

LEILA MORAN: By stopping Brexit, we would create an uptick in the economy. We've taken the lowest numbers of that. It's independently . . . independent numbers and it would be £50 billion pounds in what we're calling a Remain Bonus and we would plough that into education.

CM: Now, there's a danger of spending money they don't actually have yet. Yes, the vast majority of forecasts say the economy will be larger if we don't leave the EU and the Lib Dems say they've been cautious in their calculations. But 50 billion is a convenient round number that simply can't be verified. The Lib Dems are also promising to pay teachers more and boost numbers by 20,000 over five years. But on that, it's worth heeding the words of the General Secretary of the Head teachers union, Paul Whiteman, 'The new recruits we need will not magically appear,' he says, and they won't stay if we don't also address the stress and unnecessary workload that's widespread in the system.

Moves onto the Conservatives and Labour being locked into a war on foodbanks last night.

Thursday 21st November, 8.47am Election Reality Check

Labour says it will start a housing revolution, focus is on previous interview with Labour's Angela Rayner.

CHRIS MORRIS: So if the state's going to get more involved, who's going to build all these houses? It's something you picked up with Angela Rayner. But, you know, unemployment in this country by historical standards is already low. In the latest figures, they were 1.3 million unemployed people. And it's part of its manifesto, Labour's already announcing the creation of a million new green jobs. About half of those to upgrade existing houses. So, again, who's going to build the new ones? Angela Rayner says it's all about training domestic workers, but practically, what's Labour's immigration policy going to be? Because they would have to import a huge amount of construction workers from abroad, whether from the EU or from elsewhere, if they can live up to their promises.

MISHAL HUSAIN: *(speaking over)* Which takes us back to the Brexit policy.

CM: It does. And very briefly, that's the elephant in the room. The Lib Dems say 'Stop Brexit.' The Tories say 'Get Brexit done', Labour's policy is more complex, and we saw in the debate from Jeremy Corbyn struggling to define which way he would vote in a future referendum he wants to hold, and I think that is going to continue to take attention away from the retail policies Labour wants to focus on.

MH: Chris Morris, thank you very much.

Friday 22nd November, 8.53am Election Reality Check

MISHAL HUSAIN: We spoke to Nigel Farage a moment ago about his election contract with the people, not a manifesto. Chris Morris, our Reality Check correspondent, was listening. And a lot of the conversation, Chris, was about his idea that immigration should be capped at 50,000 a year.

CHRIS MORRIS: Yeah, and it's broadly true as he sets out, that net migration was lower in the 1990s below 100,000 till about 1998, but it is a net figure. And one of the reasons it was lower then is that an awful lot of people were actually leaving, emigrating abroad. And in some years, even in the 90s, still 250,000 people a year were arriving in the country. Now, of course, well, Mr Farage has always linked uncontrolled immigration to EU membership. But actually, in current net migration figures, far more people are arriving from elsewhere in the world, rather than via free movement from the EU. So Brexit won't make a huge difference. Then, of course, there's the needs of the economy. You challenged him on vacancies in the health service. Also, roughly a third of basic construction jobs, for example, are held by EU citizens. So you could set up a system of work permits, as Mr Farage suggests. The trouble there is, will as many people want to come to fill the vacancies, we need filling, if it's only on a temporary basis? They might get better offers from elsewhere. Germany, for example, has already been trying to attract more people who it thinks would otherwise have been coming to the UK if it wasn't for the Brexit debate. So it's a complex process without easy answers.

MH: Okay, so they've got their election launch event today. What about their ads? You've been looking at those.

CM: Yeah, it's interesting. In the last few days, the Brexit Party has published a series of ads on Facebook, specifically attacking Jeremy Corbyn, and they're targeted at voters in those Labour held seats where a majority voted Leave in the 2016 referendum. I'm looking at one of the moment it says, 'Peterborough, let's tip the balance towards a real Brexit.' But in all of these ads, the main message in big letters is Corbyn has betrayed five million Labour Leave voters. But we don't think that number is correct. We've looked at it before, 5 million Labour supporters voting Leave. We've asked the Brexit Party where they get it from, but not had a response. And a series of estimates from other organisations like the British Election Study and YouGov says the real number is . . . is more like something between 3 and 4 million, not 5 million. So the pool of people he may be trying to attract may be smaller than he thinks.

MH: Chris, thanks very much.

Monday 25th November, 8.45am Election Reality Check

MH: 'We will get Brexit done in January' is right at the top of the Conservative manifesto, something I queried with Nicky Morgan, the Culture Secretary, a few minutes ago. Chris Morris is here now for our regular Reality Check on campaign pledges. What did you make of that, Chris?

CHRIS MORRIS: Well, 'Get Brexit done' is a phrase which is so deliberately bland. It doesn't have any numbers attached to it. So it is actually quite hard to drill down into. But it does carry with it, as you suggested to Nicky Morgan, the implication that once the UK leaves the EU, no one is ever going to have to worry about Brexit and its consequences ever again. Anyone who thinks that is likely to be disappointed. And it was interesting when you pressed Nicky Morgan on that, she didn't really dispute it.

NICKY MORGAN: I think a lot of people actually want to see the first big step, which is for the UK to leave the EU as they voted for 23 June 2016. But you're absolutely right to say that the second part, obviously, is building that new relationship with our friends and allies in the EU, but also with other countries around the world through trade agreements.

CM: So a first step, says Nicky Morgan, but was she slightly off message, because that's not really what the manifesto says? It says, 'Getting Brexit done will heal the political divisions in this country.' I'm not sure where that comes from, but I don't really see any evidence for it. It says, 'Getting Brexit done will restore confidence to business.' Not really the case until they know what our trading relationship with our neighbours is going to be. And it says, 'Getting Brexit done means we can focus on funding the NHS and tackling the cost of living.' But I think next year's going to be dominated by this rush to a trade agreement on the timetable the government is setting up.

MH: Which, I mean, she seemed absolutely certain it was doable in a 12 month period?

CM: Yes. And it's interesting, I think, important that . . . that the manifesto now has a written pledge in it that the government, if elected, will not extend the post-Brexit transition period beyond the end of next year. Don't forget that December 2020 date was originally set up when we were due to leave last March. So the transition was going to be 21 months. And even then, many trade experts said that's not long enough. Now it would be 11 months and even then, trade talks wouldn't begin, if we were to leave on January 31, trade talks would not begin on February 1. The European Commission has to set up a mandate for negotiation. The other 27 countries have to approve it. The European Parliament has to give a green light. So maybe mid-March, maybe late March. That gives you nine months. And if you remember just how long it took to haggle over the details of the Brexit divorce bill, £30 to £40 billion, this is a vastly larger sum of money at stake in our trade relationship with all our nearest neighbours.

MH: But also will have . . . it will be contentious here, won't it? The government says, 'This is our plan for trade in, you know, a certain sector.' I mean, lots of businesses will then have something to say about that, as they start to work out what it'll mean for them.

CM: A huge amount. And the thing about trade talks is they always lead to trade-offs. And that's why we hear a lot from the fishing industry, a very small part of the British economy, they've been given lots of promises and they fear that when push comes to shove, they will be the ones to lose out against a bigger sector of the economy. So, yes, everyone's going to be lobbying furiously. And obviously the fear of those people who run these just-in-time manufacturing chains, supply chains across Europe, is that if you get to the end of next year with no trade deal done, then you have a different kind of 'no deal'. Yes, the money would be sorted out, the Irish border would be sorted out. But the same problems we've looked at in so much detail about how would you actually trade across the Straits of Dover, where so much of the trade that Britain does . . . does is concentrated, if you have no actual written down agreed trade deal with how that's supposed to happen? So next year's going to be pretty fraught and frenetic on Brexit. It ain't going to be done.

MH: Chris Morris, thank you.

Tuesday 26th November, 8.39am Election Reality Check (Extract)

NICK ROBINSON: During the election campaign, our Reality Check correspondent Chris Morris is with us every morning, he's with us in the studio now. Chris, let's focus on that Michael Gove interview earlier in which he said, the Conservatives are saying, that if Labour comes to power and if two referenda were held, one on the EU, one on Scottish independence, that he claimed would cost £138 million.

CHRIS MORRIS: Yeah. If anything, we think that's a slight underestimate, actually. If you take the cost of the 2016 EU referendum and the 2014 Scottish referendum and you put them through the Bank of England's inflation calculator, you get a bit more than 138 million. So we think it's right. But let's not forget, the government itself spent about 100 million on its Get Ready for Brexit advertising campaign before an October 31 first deadline that never happened. And a couple of billion have been spent on 'no deal' preparation. So everyone spends money. But the Tories now want to talk about the great trade deal they say they will get with the EU next year. And when Michael Gove was asked what he would do to protect the services sector, he said this:

MICHAEL GOVE: At the moment we do not have a single market in services, even within the European Union.

JUSTIN WEBB: Would it be better or worse than it is now?

MG: Well, it would depend on, on the individual sector.

CM: Actually, there is a single market for services. It certainly has many holes in it. It's not nearly as integrated as the single market for goods, but it's more integrated than any other multi-country services area anywhere in the world. And obviously, it's one consequence of the Brexit that people voted for it, but the point about the single market for services is, it provides UK service companies with guaranteed access to the EU market that they fear they're going to lose.

Moves on to discuss Labour pensions offer to the so-called Waspi women.

Thursday 28th November, 8.54am Election Reality Check

SIMON JACK: Time for our daily Reality Check item, we've heard a lot about the leaked UK-US trade talk documents throughout the programme. Where are we with that? Chris Morris, is the NHS up for sale? What's in it? What's not in it? Where are we?

CHRIS MORRIS: Yeah, I mean, we're going to hear a lot about drugs pricing throughout the course of the campaign aren't we? So let's get some of the facts right. It is true that pharmaceutical expenditure in the United States per person is about two and a half times higher than in the UK. Drugs are very expensive. But as you suggested to the Shadow International Trade Secretary, Barry Gardiner, the Labour figure that the NHS would suddenly be paying another £500 million a week to buy medicines after a trade deal is a little suspect. He quoted to you the academic who calculated their figure, Dr Andrew Hill. What Mr. Gardiner didn't say, though, was that Dr. Hill's own paper describes £500 million a week as a crude estimate. Nevertheless, it allows Labour to say things like this.

BARRY GARDINER: We're talking about 27 billion that could be pulled out of the money that we use to pay for all sorts of services, elective surgery, all sorts of issues.

CM: But it's only 27 billion if every single drug the UK uses would suddenly have to be bought at US prices. So an absolute worst case scenario from the perspective of the NHS, and you'd have to be a pretty disastrous British trade negotiator to agree to that. Which brings us to the government view, also set out in the programme a little earlier by the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock.

MATT HANCOCK: We are totally clear about the NHS not being on the table and therefore that wasn't part of the . . .

JUSTIN WEBB: (*speaking over*) Pharmaceutical pricing?

MH: . . . discussions. Well, if you actually read the documents, the NHS in 451 pages is only mentioned four times. And the first time it's mentioned, the documents say we do not currently believe the US has a major offensive interest in this space.

JW: Actually, that reference in the documents to 'no major offensive interests' refers specifically to health insurance, not to the NHS as a whole, not to things like drugs pricing. And the government's insistence that the NHS isn't on the table comes across a little oddly, because if there's one thing these documents do tell you is that it has been on the table in the past, albeit at talks between, if you like, middle ranking officials. The Americans want it to be on the table. They always push pharmaceutical issues to the last minute. And if they take their issues off the table, they will take the issues that we want to get through off the table as well.

SJ: Thank you, Chris. See you tomorrow.

Monday 2nd December, 8.46am Election Reality Check (Marginal or Passing Mention)

Labour says it would cut regulated rail fares in England by a third if it wins the election. Chris Morris says at the end of the piece: 'So if we do get to political negotiations in the event of a hung parliament, it is worth remembering there will be plenty of other policies to talk about. It won't all be about Brexit and referendums.'

Tuesday 3rd December, 8.47am Election Reality Check

JUSTIN WEBB: Welcome back to the University of Edinburgh. We've reached the time in the morning where we test some of the claims and the language around the general election campaign. Our audience here have believed some of what they've heard and wondered quietly, politely and occasionally quite loudly about other bits of it. The lady doing her knitting, who I mentioned right at the beginning, has I think managed most of one sleeve now. So she's achieved a lot, as has Chris Morris, who's been not knitting, but listening to it all back in the studio in London. And Chris, you want to talk about trade?

CHRIS MORRIS: Yeah, I mean, there's two things kind of coming together aren't there, Justin? Firstly, can the UK really hope to complete a decent trade deal with the EU in 11 months next year if the Conservatives win the election and take us out of the EU at the end of January? And secondly, what might a trade deal with Donald Trump's America really look like and what might be on the table? On the first of those points, here's what the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, said earlier in the programme.

DOMINIC RAAB: The same people that said we couldn't do . . . that, we couldn't do a negotiation in relation to the free trade arrangement, said that we wouldn't get the Withdrawal Agreement opened, reformed, the anti-democratic backstop removed. We've got that. We've now got not only a withdrawal agreement in the Brexit deal, but we've got the template for the future relationship. And it's eminently doable. And it's not just me saying that it can be done by the end of 2020. It's the EU side.

CM: Well, what the EU has said is it's going to be extremely tight. And I think the only thing likely in the time available is a pretty unambitious trade deal with a lot still to be done, and always the possibility that it could be knocked off course by an issue like fishing or the status of Gibraltar, for example. The academic group, the UK in a Changing Europe has a report out this morning which talks of the most feasible outcome being a simple free trade agreement that might only cover goods with no

or limited provisions for services. And services are, of course, extremely important for the UK economy. But a lot of what might happen next year also depends on the UK accepting what are known as level playing field provisions, which means sticking close to EU rules on things like workers' rights and environmental protection. And that's where the other trade deal comes in, because Donald Trump, of course, has made it pretty clear that he wouldn't look kindly on any future UK trading relationship with the EU, which would bind the UK close to EU rules on all sorts of things, because he wants to drag the UK much closer to the American orbit.

DR: Chris, thank you.

Wednesday 4th December, 8.44am Election Reality Check

JUSTIN WEBB: Let's turn to Chris Morris, who we do at this time every morning, to sort fact and fiction in this election. He's, of course, our Reality Check correspondent. I suppose we should talk first about Sajid Javid, who we heard from half an hour or so ago, saying that the trade deal that we are going to do with the European Union after we have left, it will be relatively easy, because we are already aligned, Martha, suggesting that wasn't quite the case. Your thoughts are what?

CHRIS MORRIS: Well, 'Get Brexit done' is obviously a good slogan, but good slogans don't make trade agreements. Technical negotiations, trade-offs make trade agreements. And Mr Javid appear to suggest not only is the withdrawal agreement oven-ready, but so is a trade agreement.

SAJID JAVID: There's already an agreement in principle. It's already there, it's done there. It's not just my words. Take the new incoming commissioner for trade has said himself that he believes that this trade (*sic*) can be done in 2020.

CM: The trade commissioner said he believed it could be done in theory, but it would be difficult. And look, a non-binding political declaration, which is what we have, is not a trade agreement, not even in principle. There can't be an agreement yet because the EU is not allowed to even start negotiating one until after we've left. And if we do leave on 31 January, the other 27 EU countries will probably take four, six weeks maybe, even just to agree a mandate on what they should be negotiating about. Now, he says, as you suggest, we're starting from the same place in full alignment with EU rules.

JW: Yeah, we hear that a lot.

CM: And yes, we are. But the point is, most trade agreements move people closer together. We're trying to move further apart. And he didn't set out how he's going to negotiate full market access to the EU next year, while diverging from those same EU rules. Second point, post-Brexit agreements are not just about trade. There's security, immigration, fishing, education . . .

JW: (*speaking over*) Ah yeah.

CM: . . . data sharing, all sorts of things the government is promising to sort out in record time. And then thirdly, once again, Martha pressed him, but a leading Conservative again avoided saying if, at the end of the next year, we don't have that trade agreement, will you leave with no trade deal? And that's what really matters to businesses. And they know just how tight the timetable is going to be next year.

JW: If they are in a position to deliver or fail to deliver any of this. They need, of course, to win and they have a battle still. Well . . . you've been looking at the adverts, haven't you, and specifically those adverts on the . . . that appeal to people on the Leave side?

CM: Well, it's adverts . . . we're looking at Facebook adverts put out by the Brexit Party. And it's interesting, after they announced on 11 November that they wouldn't stand in Tory held seats, most of their ads on Facebook were aimed at criticising Labour, in particular talking about five million Labour Leave voters who've been let down. Now, we think that number, the number of people who voted Leave in 2016 and then Labour in 2017 is more like three and a half million, not five million. But the

point is, the focus was very much on Labour voters. But over the last few days, they've been running a variety of ads, also criticising the Tories using phrases like, 'The Conservatives can't win here, Leavers don't waste your vote' and 'If you vote Tory, you'll get Corbyn' and 'The Conservatives can't be trusted to deliver Brexit on their own.' So, still focussing on those key Labour Leave constituencies. But if you like, now wav— . . . targeting wavering Tories in, in those seats where they say the Tories haven't won in years and years. So I guess if the Brexit Party has been squeezed by the Tories in this election, and it has, in the last few days of the campaign, it looks like it's going to try and squeeze back a bit.

JW: Interesting. Thank you. Chris Morris.

Friday 6th December, 8.53am Election Reality Check (Extract)

MARTHA KEARNEY: Time, as ever, during our programme to talk to Chris Morris, our Reality Check correspondent. And we've been hearing a lot more claims from the parties today. Do they add up, Chris?

CHRIS MORRIS: Yeah, another day, more examples, Martha, of both main parties playing slightly fast and loose with the numbers, to be honest. I mean, let's start with the Tories and their complaint that Labour will fiddle a second referendum by giving EU nationals who are resident here the right to vote. I mean, I think you can find decent democratic arguments on both sides of the debate. Labour saying UK residents should have the right to vote as they do in local and European elections. And then this response a little earlier from Michael Gove.

MICHAEL GOVE: There's a basic principle of democratic fairness. It is the case that EU nationals don't vote, have never voted in general elections and therefore don't vote, have never voted in referendums like the Brexit referendum. And therefore, we just think it would be unfair.

CM: But again, it's the numbers the Conservatives are using to back up their argument, claiming Labour would rig a referendum, in their words, and that would mean Leave would need another 500,000 votes to win for a second time. And you just can't say that with any certainty. Because you don't know a) how many EU nationals would register, b) how many would actually vote and c) how they would vote. It does seem fair to assume that many would vote Remain, but certainly not all. I've met EU nationals here who are in favour of leaving the EU, but as we've seen in most days during the campaign, numbers are being used and used repeatedly to make whatever point politicians want them to make.

Moves on to discuss Labour numbers on the money they claim they will save average families.

Saturday 7th December, 7.09am TV Election Debate/Reality Check

MISHAL HUSSAIN: What did we learn last night as the two candidates for prime minister squared off against each other in Kent? Our Reality Check correspondent Chris Morris was there. Morning, Chris.

CHRIS MORRIS: Good morning, Mishal.

MH: We can cast an eye with you over what was said on three of the areas touched on in the debate: leadership, the NHS, and first of all, what was said about Brexit. There was a moment where Jeremy Corbyn held up a government paper which he said showed Northern Ireland would be separated from the UK by Boris Johnson's withdrawal deal. And this was Mr Johnson's response.

BORIS JOHNSON: I have to say, I think it's a great . . .

JEREMY CORBYN: *(speaking over)* So what's this document *(words unclear 'in my hand'?)*

BJ: . . . opportunity for our country. And it says unfettered access, I think is what it says, (*word unclear due to speaking over*) the UK market . . .

JC: (*speaking over*) It says unfettered access, then all through it questions, questions (*word or words unclear*) it will happen.

NICK ROBINSON: One at a time please.

BJ: And that is . . . and what the document also says is that Northern Ireland is part of the customs territory of the UK.

NR: (*speaking over*) Isn't, isn't that a problem, Mr Johnson, that the DUP, the unionists who were your partners, they agree with him and not you don't about all that?

BJ: (*speaking over*) They don't actually because . . . because our deal is a great deal. Well, let me just make one, one point. I do find it slightly curious, to say the least, Nick, to be lectured about the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland by a man who all his life, political life, has campaigned to break up that union and actually supported for four decades the IRA in their campaign, violently, violently to destroy it. I must say, I find it a curiosity.

NR: Jeremy Corbyn, what's your answer to that?

JC: About the Prime Minister showing a degree of honesty about the arrangements he's actually made with Northern Ireland. He spoke at a DUP conference and said there would be no restrictions whatsoever. We now know there are restrictions. He should and could have said that at the time. And so it is a question of openness on all of this.

NR: (*speaking over*) But being open, he says you've supported people who are opposed to union your whole life, you don't even believe in the United Kingdom?

JC: (*speaking over*) What I've done is always wanted to see a peace process in Northern Ireland. And that is exactly what we've got. And thank you to the Labour government that negotiated it.

MH: So, Chris, why did this particular exchange tell us?

CM: Well, I think Mr Johnson did land a blow when he . . . by linking Jeremy Corbyn to I — his support for Irish Republicanism. But but on, on the trade issue, I think, you know, not for the first time, the Prime Minister used the tactic of doubling down on something that the evidence doesn't appear to back up. So no checks after Brexit, he said, in the Irish Sea between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, even though that is what the internal Treasury document leaked yesterday says, it is what the DUP says and in fact, what his own Withdrawal Agreement says. But it seemed to be part of his message, because I lost count of the number of times that the Prime Minister managed a segue from a variety of issues back to what felt like the only thing he really wanted to say, which was, 'Get Brexit done.' I think some of his current supporters may be slightly disappointed when they find out what that actually means in practice, but it was a comfort zone for Mr Johnson. He managed to contrast it pretty effectively, I thought, for his core audience with what he called Jeremy Corbyn's mystery deal of renegotiating and then holding another referendum on Brexit. But I think the honest truth on that is that neither of them have a simple solution to Brexit, because there isn't one. But the Conservatives have a better slogan.

MH: Let's turn to what was said about the NHS. Jeremy Corbyn talked about the risks of the privatisation of the health service.

JC: Read the documents that were discussed in secret, and the government refused to release them, between themselves and the US administration about access to public services and the extension of the life of patents on medicines which would increase medicine costs in this country.

NR: Okay . . .

JC: President Trump has said many times people pay too little for US medicines around the world. That's the kind of agenda the Prime Minister wants to get involved with. That's the kind of deal they're trying to make with the US.

NR: Boris Johnson, he says you want to sell.

BJ: I have to say this is pure Bermuda Triangle stuff. We've heard it time and time again (*laughter from the audience*) from the Labour Party during this election campaign. (*applause*) You know, we'll be hearing about little green men next. I believe very passionately in a . . . I use the NHS, I love it, it's one of the most incredible things about this country.

MH: What did you conclude from that, Chris, how far did Jeremy Corbyn manage to get his point made there?

CM: Well, again, rather like the Prime Minister, I thought he did pretty well at targeting his core audience. So he was polished when it came to the focus on ending austerity and in reinvesting in public services like the NHS. I think the problem is that the broad point that somehow these documents that have been released in the last few weeks prove the NHS is going to be privatised. That's not what they say. Clearly, there's been discussion between officials in a series of meetings about the potential, about potentially looking at the pricing of drugs. That's not the same as privatising the entire health service. I think the problem for Mr Corbyn on this issue, he was confident on, on it, but will he really have changed many minds? He certainly didn't seem to create any defining moment or land any decisive political blow. And he also insisted that the proposal for a four day week would not be extended to the NHS, while John McDonnell his Shadow Chancellor has suggested early in the campaign that that is the aspiration over time. So no real clarity there. Better territory for Mr Corbyn. But again, I don't think that breakthrough moment, necessarily, that he was looking for.

MH: Finally, here's a little of what was said by the both about leadership.

BJ: I don't want to waste another year, next year and more, in, in vacillation and confusion about what sort of position Mr Corbyn is willing to take, what sort of leadership he's (*fragment of word, or word unclear*)

JC: (*speaking over*) A failure, a failure of leadership is when you use racist remarks to describe people in different countries or in our society. I will never do that (*applause from audience*) and my party will never do that.

Moves on to discuss the personal issues surrounding their candidacies for prime minister, anti-Semitism and politicians who lie.

Monday 9th December, 8.23am Election Reality Check

NICK ROBINSON: Time for our Reality Check. Chris Morris, our Reality Check correspondent, has been listening to the various interviews we've done today about Brexit and the border. And Chris, what have we learned?

CHRIS MORRIS: Well, Nick, I think we know we're going to emerge on election day with this as an unresolved issue. And the Conservatives saying, in effect, 'Trust us.' And to the extent that this is a Brexit election, it means the biggest issue of the election will be left with an awful lot of questions hanging. The main Conservative argument, which they repeat every day is, look, we did things earlier this year which surprised people, so we can do it again. Here is Rishi Sunak, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on the programme about half an hour ago.

RISHI SUNAK: People said it would be impossible for the Prime Minister to get a new deal. I mean, many people came on your show and said exactly that . . .

NICK ROBINSON: *(from earlier in programme)* Sure, but that doesn't prove that he was right once, he'll be right again.

RS: Well, I mean, I think, you know, he's, he's shown his ability to actually negotiate well and get things done for this country. And I think, you know, coming from a business background myself, having a deadline concentrates minds.

CM: I mean, yes, there was scepticism about Mr Johnson's ability to renegotiate the Withdrawal Agreement, and he did get that done. But don't forget, 90 per cent of it is still exactly the same as Theresa May's Withdrawal Agreement. It wasn't a negotiation from scratch. And the main bit that got changed, the protocol in Ireland is now, as we heard from Arlene Foster, not going down well at all in Northern Ireland itself. And we didn't really need an internal Treasury document to tell us that there will be checks between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, because that's what Mr Johnson's own Withdrawal Agreement itself says.

NR: Meanwhile, we have got more news coming from within Whitehall, this FT leak of a document that says it'll be a major strategic, political and operational challenge to deliver Brexit on the timetable currently set out?

CM: Yeah, and that's because, you know, it's, it's about employing the staff. It's about putting new systems in place. It's about implementing a complex new system of potentially paying tariffs on goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, if there is a risk of them moving on to the Republic of Ireland inside the EU and then potentially a systems of reimbursement if goods don't eventually move on to the Republic of Ireland. This is a system which has never been put in place anywhere before, really. So it's new. And obviously the question which has been raised now is what happens if it isn't ready in time? And I think the overall point is that this will be a big bureaucratic exercise. And experience suggests that implementing those kind of things well in government does take time. And clearly, there's concern within Whitehall that the end of next year is not enough time to do it properly.

NR: Chris Morris, thank you.

Tuesday 10th December, 8.46am Election Reality Check (Marginal or Passing mention)

A Reality Check on the manifesto pledges for the NHS. Passing mention of Labour having promised to focus relentlessly on the NHS in its first 100 days, but has also promised a relentless focus on trying to renegotiate a Brexit deal.

Wednesday 11th December, 8.41am Election Reality Check (Extract)

Plaid Cymru have suggested a new law that would make lying illegal

MISHAL HUSAIN: And what are the things that have come back again and again through this campaign that, you know, you and others have not managed to make go away?

CHRIS MORRIS: Are you giving me the whole of the rest of the programme or just about a minute to answer that? I mean, you know, there have been numbers that come back time and time again. I mean, Labour saying the average household has lost about £6,000 a year since 2010, when in fact, that average household has been calculated by saying you have two railcards and a two year old child. So it's not necessarily representative. The Conservatives talking about building 40 hospitals when we know they're only provided the money so far for six and building hasn't started at any of those six sites. And then, overall, 'Get Brexit done'. I mean, the Conservatives are right that if we . . . if they win and we leave in January, then legally we'll have left the EU, and we heard Michael Gove a few minutes ago saying we could then focus on the NHS and crime and so forth. But is he really saying that next year we'll suddenly stop talking about Brexit and its impact altogether, when we have to do a trade deal in record time. I

think the reality is that, yes, legally we'll have left the EU, if the Conservatives win, at the end of January. But we'll still be talking about Brexit and its impact for years to come.

MH: And the Reality Check correspondent job goes on.

CM: Someone will do it. Yes.

MH: If you haven't been totally worn out in the process. Chris Morris, thank you very much.

APPENDIX II: 'BUSINESS NEWS' TRANSCRIPTS

Thursday 7th November

6.16am Business News (Extract)

DHARSHINI DAVID: Well, listening to all of that is Sonja Laud, our markets guest this morning. She is, of course, Chief Investment Officer at Legal and General Investment Management. Good morning, Sonja.

SONJA LAUD: Good morning.

DD: This is, you know, a head scratching time for investors. How do you navigate all of this and position yourself? I mean, you know, you've got to make all sorts of judgments about the attractiveness of UK equities and indeed sterling as well?

SL: Absolutely. And obviously, although we've heard a lot already, we will undoubtedly hear a lot more over the next couple of weeks in terms of spending plans and the ideas that the two parties will bring to the campaign trail. But in terms of markets, I think it really will be a wait and see, because this is all to be put in context of the ongoing Brexit negotiations. And obviously we have seen such a disengagement from overseas investors that I don't think that they will all of a sudden come back to the investor table, only because of the upcoming general election. But nevertheless, obviously, it will give an indication on what we should bear in mind, then post the general election and the potential withdrawal agreement. So it's clearly very important for investors' attitude. And here we have to differentiate between sterling, the currency and markets, or equity markets and the bond market, because I think sterling definitely should see higher volatility on the back of whatever we hear on the campaign trail and, obviously, potentially forward looking in terms of Brexit, whereas I think assets might take a step back and wait and see what is going to unfold.

Moves on to discuss Bank of England monetary policy report.

Friday 8th November

6.17am Business News (Marginal or Passing Mention)

It does not look like it's going to be a happy Christmas for our retailers, with sales collapsing despite discounting. Interview with Maureen Hinton, retail research director at Global Data. She mentions 'uncertainty' but nothing directly on Brexit.

6.20am Business News (Markets Guest)

ROB YOUNG: The latest fashion among central bankers around the world is to cut interest rates. And some at the Bank of England are keen to stay on trend. Two members of the bank committee that sets rates have voted to cut them this week. The majority of the committee did not. But it's clear the cost of borrowing is likely to fall if the economy continues to slow down. Our markets guest this morning is Jane Sydenham, the Investment Director at Rathbone Investment Management. Morning, Jane.

JANE SYDENHAM: Morning.

RY: Is there a strong case to cut interest rates right now?

JS: I mean, the economy is . . . is . . . isn't growing particularly fast. And obviously there's been all the uncertainty around Brexit. So . . . so, I mean, if you if you put Brexit to one side and you put the election to one side, I'm sure economists will be thinking about it, or the Bank of England will be thinking about it. But of course, there are those two big events that we can't ignore. And it may be that they just want to keep their powder dry for the time being.

RY: Do you think that the bank just wouldn't cut rates because we're in the middle of an election campaign?

JS: I think that's possible and it gives them more firepower to cope with whatever the consequence of those events or that election might be, depending on the outcome.

Moves on to discuss possibility of interest rate cuts. Jane Sydenham returns later in the programme.

RY: Let's have another word with our markets guest, Jane Sydenham from Rathbone Investment Management. The European Commission said yesterday that there is worse to come for the economies that use the euro, with the powerhouse Germany probably in recession. How bad are things in the eurozone?

JS: Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, you're right to single out Germany, particularly, which has always been the powerhouse of Europe and particularly around its sort of engineering and the automotive industry. But of course, with the US-China trade war with the huge changes that are taking place in the automotive industry, the transition to electric vehicles, whether or not Germany's really repositioned itself as quickly as it should have done relative to China, there's quite a lot of pressure.

Moves on to a report in the Times on Standard Chartered Bank.

6.22am Business News, Economics Comedy Festival (Marginal or Passing Mention)

A poll last year suggested economists are trusted less than weather forecasters - can economics itself be funny? Rory Cellan-Jones visits an economics comedy festival in its 10th year in Kilkenny. David McWilliams is founder of the festival.

RORY CELLAN-JONES: But David McWilliams knows what will really attract the crowds.

DAVID McWILLIAMS: Apart from discussing the United States and China and climate change, Brexit is always a winner. You can sell tickets to Brexit. Brexit, as I always say, 'That'll fill a room.'

Monday 11th November

6.15am Business News (Marginal or Passing Mention)

A Chinese company is set to buy British Steel for £70 million. Interview with Gareth Stace, Director General of UK Steel, trade body.

The problem that we have is we have a very uncompetitive business landscape here in the UK, and that's government – government can change that.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: What are you talking about, energy costs?

GS: Well, I'm talking about energy costs, business rates, procurements – the government buying more steel from the UK – free and fair trade, and even much more support for R&D, which we're going to lose when we fall out of the EU.

Moves on to discuss what measures are required for the industry to create a favourable business landscape.

7.18am Business Update

NICK ROBINSON: How is the economy doing in the run up to election day, there was talk of a recession, but that seems to have faded. Here'd Dominic with more.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Yes, the talk of recession, Nick, came because the economy actually shrank in the second quarter, only just by 0.2 per cent. And if you get two negative quarters in a row, well, that's technically a recession. We get the third quarter numbers at 9:30 this morning. Most economists seem to think it'll be a positive number, showing growth of around 0.4 per cent. Andrew Sentance is a senior adviser to Cambridge Econometrics. He's also a former member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee. Good morning, Mr Sentance.

ANDREW SENTANCE: Good morning.

DO: We . . . it looks like we might have avoided recession. What's your take on the numbers this morning?

AS: Yes, I think if we look at the monthly figures, which the Office for National Statistics now publish and estimates by independent economists, somewhere like 0.4 and 0.5 per cent growth is quite likely in the third quarter. But that means over two quarters, however, the economy has really been growing very slowly at a rate of less than 1 per cent a year. So I think the picture that we're getting for the UK economy is not necessarily recession, but it is of slow growth.

DO: It's interesting, isn't it, because if you go back a few years, 2014, 2015, the UK was at the top of the G7 growth charts. Now . . . now we're towards the bottom?

AS: Yes. And I think it's very hard to deny that Brexit has had something to do with that. It's squeezed consumers because the value of the pound's gone down, it's put a dampener on investment, business investment is not really growing at all, and on some recent figures, it's been declining. So that has . . . that's aggravated, a sort of slowdown in growth that may already have been underway before the Brexit vote.

DO: Does that also mean that regardless of the outcome of the Brexit negotiations and the election that . . . that the run up to Brexit will cast a long shadow, that we'll be living with this for quite a while?

AS: Yes, I think my, my view of growth in 2020s, is that, you know, 1 to 1.5 per cent growth actually year on year will probably be quite good for the UK. And that's partly because of some of the dampening impacts of Brexit, but it's also because we've taken up a lot of the spare capacity in the economy. So unemployment is already at a low level. We can't continue to drive down unemployment. And that's one of the sources of growth that we normally rely on.

DO: Thank you very much, Andrew Sentance, senior adviser to Cambridge Econometrics. Those GDP numbers, 9:30.

Tuesday 12th November

7.19am Business Update (Extract)

About 4000 jobs at British Steel seem to have been saved, but what about the longer term future for these jobs? Interview with Dr Jonathan Owens, programme director at Salford Business School.

DR JONATHAN OWENS: So [the new owners] will actually look at making Scunthorpe more profitable, more operational profitable (*sic*). When we . . . if we can get a level playing field, which when . . . if and when Brexit does happen, for example, you know, at a high energy cost, which we're currently paying, which the last loan which Scunthorpe actually had to take out, which . . . which was well publicised, you know, we look at France and Germany, France are paying half and Germany are paying half. No, we're looking at, in pounds, shillings and pence, we're looking at . . . we're paying £50 million a year more than our competitors over the Channel. And this could be measured in profit, so reinvestment. So after Brexit, this may be what the Chinese are looking up in profitability.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Thanks very much. Jonathan Owens from Salford Business School.

Wednesday 13th November

6.14am Business News (Extract)

Interview with Laura Lambie from Investec on the markets. Discussion of full employment and yet inflation has seemingly disappeared from the modern economy.

LAURA LAMBIE: It is only recently we have begun to see real wage growth occurring, and that, I suspect, is to do with the CPI, the Consumer Price index that we're going to hear about later on today. There's obviously the RPI, which includes mortgage payments, which are slightly higher, but that could fuel the Bank of England, once we're through Brexit, whenever that is, to decide to boost the economy by perhaps cutting interest rates.

Thursday 14th November

6.17am Business News (Extract)

Britain has near full employment but inflation is not returning and this is a mystery. Interview with Vicky Pryce, Chief Economic Adviser at the Centre for Economics and Business Research.

VICKY PRYCE: And you've seen what's going on in Europe, too, where inflation is just over one per cent and the European Central Bank is now so worried it's starting quantitative easing again.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: So if they can't hit their inflation target and inflation has gone away, should the central banks change what they are doing?

VP: Well, people are talking about, maybe changing inflation targets. But the reality is, when you look at what they are doing, they haven't really themselves, the Monetary Policy Committees, or whatever they are in other parts of the world as well, it's not them who have brought the inflation down, it's not by being clever and doing anything at all. It's really just the world environment.

DO: Bigger forces, bigger forces are at work.

VP: Yes, and right now, of course, we have a slowdown in the world economy that's taking place. We've seen oil prices, which we thought were going to start rising, in fact, coming down. And also, of course, what happens in the UK and has been happening and the Brexit may intervene, is that you can find more people to hire from elsewhere. So you're not constrained the way you used to be in terms of having a labour force that was immovable, if you like. That was it. And therefore, wages immediately rose when demand was there and was getting higher.

DO: Hmm, an explanation for missing inflation. Thanks very much, Vicky Pryce from the Centre for Economics and Business Research.

Monday 18th November

6.14am Business News (Extracts)

All three main party leaders are going to be making their pitches today to the business world at the CBI conference. Introduction by Dominic O'Connell says the voice of business has not featured heavily in the election campaign so far, 'nor for that matter in the Brexit debate.' Interview with Carolyn Fairbairn, Director General of the CBI.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Mr Johnson, I think in his speech, it's being said, is going to talk about how the CBI really wanted to remain in Europe. And of course, Jo Swinson from the Liberal Democrats is offering exactly that. Perhaps she is a speaker who'll be closest to the hearts of most of the people in this room?

CAROLYN FAIRBAIRN: Well, I mean, the CBI hasn't spent a minute of the last three years trying to overturn the result of a referendum, to be absolutely clear. We've been trying to get a good Brexit. I mean, what we are hearing from the Liberal Democrats is they are saying they want to be the party of business. Well, that is great. You know, we're looking forward to hearing again, what they have to say. So, you know, it does feel as though business has now come centre stage in this election. And, you know, the policies that we're hearing really matter.

DO: Does Mr Johnson owe you an apology? I mean, going back to that Brexit discussion, he did say 'f*** business', when it came to debate about Brexit.

CF: Well, I think, I think . . .

DO: I wonder why you're even giving him time on the platform, actually, if he's that rude?

CF: Well, we had a, we had a very good relationship with . . . with Boris Johnson when he was Mayor of London. You know, I think this is a time, actually, where you have to put divisions and things said in the past behind you. We're only going to tackle the challenges that really matter if we work together. I think this partnership between business and government has never been more important. And yes, very much looking forward to welcoming Boris Johnson to the stage.

DO: Thank you so much, Carolyn Fairbairn from the CBI.

Aside from the political leaders, one of the main draw cards here today is Christiana Figueres. She's a former executive secretary of the UN Convention on Conference on Climate Change. She mentions briefly the 'divisiveness of Brexit':

DO: It must be gratifying to you, I suspect, that all of the speakers today, all from the three main political parties in the UK will be talking about climate change, and climate change is a big issue in this election?

CHRISTINA FIGUERES: Well it is. It is a very big issue at the moment in the UK, it's a very big issue, obviously the world over. And what is very striking is that in the UK, in a moment in which there has been so much divisiveness about Brexit, the one thing that everyone is agreeing about is about addressing climate change.

Moves on to discuss her podcast featuring politicians from very different political and economic viewpoints.

Interview with Gervais Williams from Premier Miton on the markets. He makes a passing mention of 'the big issues coming on, with Brexit and some of the other things.'

7.18am Business Update

JUSTIN WEBB: The election battle moves to the world of business today. Big business. All three party leaders are at the CBI's annual general meeting in London. And so's Dominic.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Yes, I am. Justin, it's at a hotel beside the O2, the dome, on the banks of the Thames east of London. We get Boris Johnson, Jeremy Corbyn and Jo Swinson, get policy announcements on business from all of them. From the Conservatives, a review of business rates, a review of the apprenticeship levy from Labour and from the Lib Dems, well, maybe the promise of staying in Europe, which is what the CBI always wanted. John Allan is the President of the CBI. He's also chairman of Tesco, chairman of the housebuilder Barratt Developments as well. Good morning, Mr Allan. Just on the policy announcement from the Conservatives, the review of business rates, which is something the CBI has been pressing on. Are you confident that will lead to big change?

JOHN ALLAN: Well, I think it's a start. Until we see the details of the proposals they've got, we don't know whether it will go far enough. But up until now, government has been resistant to changing business rates. So I think it's a welcome first step.

DO: And we have had a review, a root and branch review of business rates from the Conservatives before, under a previous administration, which didn't lead to much?

JA: Well, let's wait and see. I think we will be optimistic until we see the details and then we can form a judgment.

DO: What about the deeper relationship with the Conservatives? Boris Johnson, who's speaking here later today, did of course, famously say, 'f*** business' when it came to a debate about Brexit. Has he made it up to you, has he apologised for that?

JA: Well, I think we have. We've certainly now got a good relationship, I think, with the government and the Prime Minister. We get access. We get listened to. I mean, the CBI was listened to very closely in the final stages of the negotiation of the Prime Minister's withdrawal deal, on the subject of how to handle the Northern Ireland border. Proposals we put to government were adopted very, very substantially by them. So we're very satisfied with the . . . the access that we've got at the moment. And of course, we want to have that access with every political party.

DO: So, will the CBI's position be to back Boris Johnson and the deal that he has negotiated.

JA: No, I think the first thing is the British public have got to decide who they want in government. We will then work closely with whoever that is to try to ensure that they . . . the policies they adopt are good for the, for the British economy. I mean, it's clear what will happen if the Conservatives are elected. Boris clearly wants to continue and take through his deal. But remember, that's only the first stage. The serious work begins after the withdrawal deal. It's vitally important for the future of the British economy that we've got a very, very friction free, frictionless trade deal with the EU and all the people with whom the EU has trade deals, who together account for almost two thirds of our trade. And that's not going to be an easy negotiation. So we will be pushing government, helping government, if this is the government, to try to get the best possible outcome from that.

DO: And what about Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party? Mr Corbyn apparently is going to speak a lot about infrastructure spending today, something that does resonate with big business, but against that, of course, we have his renationalisation plans, which will not go down too well with people in the hall, and also the idea of a possible second referendum. It's a mix there, isn't it?

JA: Yeah. Well, let me disentangle those three things, Dominic. I mean, first of all, generally speaking, we welcome infrastructure spending, particularly if it's going to reduce the disparity between

London and the regions. The regions have been left behind in recent years. They need every help they can get. And so we would support sensible infrastructure, infrastructure spending. Nationalisation, we think, is a complete own goal. Why huge sums of public money should be used to acquire businesses like, for instance, the National Grid, which is already very tightly regulated, we don't see. And, of course, the risk is that money spent there is money that could be better spent on things like public . . . improving public services. And then on the second referendum. Well, we'll have to wait and see.

DO: Thank you very much, John Allan, President of the CBI.

Wednesday 20th November

6.15am Business News (Extract)

How can trust in business be restored? Interview with Edwin Morgan, Institute of Directors.

DHARSHINI DAVID: We've had Labour, for example, talking about having a two-tier board system, we've had the Conservatives talking about halting reductions in Corporation Tax, but on the other hand giving various incentives when it comes to investment, and the Lib Dems saying they are the party of business, because they want to revoke Brexit. What do you make of all of this.

Edwin Morgan takes each in turn, nothing on Brexit in the responses to the Labour policy.

EDWIN MORGAN: Corporation Tax actually doesn't seem to come up so much anymore among our members as sort of the priority one to cut, because it obviously has come down. But I think probably our members do still have concerns about Conservative plans on immigration. The Australian points-based system may sound like a nice thing, but no one knows really what it would mean in practice.

Discusses Lib Dem policies on governance and climate change.

DD: Are they really paying attention to business anymore, just briefly if you will, because, of course your membership has been on decline, below 30,000 now you've made a loss, and your members, like many others are split when it comes to key issues like Brexit. So are organisations like yours relevant?

EM: I like to think we still are, you know, we regularly see the business and we spoke to Labour extensively before their manifesto. There are lots of, obviously, there are lots of different (*word unclear, 'businesses'?*) there are lots of different views within business. Our members aren't united, for example, on the best way forward on Brexit. Although they certainly would like to see some resolution. I think policy can only be improved if you talk to as many different groups as possible.

DD: Okay. Edwin, it was good to talk to you, thank you for coming in.

Interview with Maïke Currie from Fidelity International on the markets.

DD: Let's start off with that debate, according to our political editor, Laura Kuenssberg, it's not a game changer and sterling seems to agree with her?

MAIKE CURRIE: Absolutely, so I think the currency's reflected the fact that there was no real knockout blow from either candidate. Sterling has been the barometer for Brexit uncertainty. And what the currency probably will focus on now is whether we get a deal or not, if we do get a deal going into 2020. There's estimates that the pound could hit \$1.45. If there's no deal, further delay and dithering, it could fall to \$1.10, some of the estimates.

DD: So we're talking about extreme volatility . . .

MC: (*speaking over*) Absolutely.

DD: . . . on the cards here.

Moves on to discuss US and China.

Friday 22nd November

6.15am Business News (Extract)

Interview with Monique Wong from Coutts on the markets, discussion of public finances and the widening deficit.

MONIQUE WONG: So yeah, more spending is the direction of travel, but I think that investors are thinking that the likely outcome is a Conservative majority. I mean, you can look at the bookmakers. They're putting a 67 per cent probability on that event occurring. And I think the markets largely think Boris Johnson will be Prime Minister, that his Brexit bill will become law. These spending plans will be seen as a boost to economic growth, and therefore, that would be positive sterling.

Moves on to discuss shares of BP and Shell hardly moving yesterday, despite Jeremy Corbyn's windfall tax plan.

Tuesday 26th November

6.14am Business News (Extract)

Problems with TSB last year are being investigated by financial regulators, and the bank is going to close 82 branches in the UK.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Philip Auger is a former board member at TSB. He's a banking expert, journalist and author. And he joins us from Cambridge. Good morning, Philip.

PHILIP AUGER: Good morning.

DO: We should just go back. How was the current TSB – it's a venerable name in British banking – but how was the current TSB brought into being?

PA: Ironically, given Brexit, it was directed by the EU. Lloyds was the original owner of the TSB bank. The EU decided that Lloyds had too big a market share once it received government help from the UK government, and it insisted in 2013 that a kind of rag tag of branches, plus the original TSB brand, be carved out of Lloyds and floated separately. That happened in 2014. The following year 2015, the Spanish bank, Sabadell, took it over, and from then on, really, the troubles have been mounting.

Moves on to discuss TSB's operating costs.

6.30am Bulletins

KATHY CLUGSTON: The former Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Heseltine, has urged his fellow Conservatives to vote Liberal Democrat, unless there's an independent Tory MP in their constituency who's had the whip removed. The pro-Remain peer, who has himself been stripped of the party whip, says voters who oppose Brexit should put the country first.

Wednesday 27th November

6.19am Business News (Extract)

Interview with Will Walker Arnott from Charles Stanley on the markets

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Let's talk about the wider UK share market. Another thing that's in the papers today is Goldman Sachs's view that UK shares could take off after the election, presumably they think that will be predicated on some kind of Brexit bounce. This, though, it's not really a minority view, is it? This is kind of a wide, widely held view in the City, isn't it?

WILL WALKER ARNOTT: Yeah, I think any clarity will give a boost to UK stocks and also sterling. I mean, you'll remember back in October when the possibility of a withdrawal deal was mooted between Boris Johnson and his Irish counterpart, the FTSE 250 was up 4 per cent in one day, which is quite a move. So there has been a lot of it priced in. But if you compare valuations of UK companies with international counterparts, they are still looking cheap.

DO: The FTSE 250 is interesting, because it's the 250 shares after the FTSE 100, so it's the next 250 largest, and it's regarded as being a kind of a proxy for the UK economy, more UK-focused stocks. Just after the referendum it went down to 15,000 points. It's now over 20,000 right near its all-time high. Does it really have much more room to go up?

WWA: Well, it was seeing all-time highs around the globe at the moment . . .

Moves on to discuss trade negotiations between the US and China.

7.22am Business Update

NICK ROBINSON: In the excitement of the election, we tend to forget that we'll still need to negotiate a trading deal with the European Union when we leave, if we leave, of course. The car industry says this morning that a hard Brexit deal could cut production here by a third. Here's Dominic with more.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Yes, Nick, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, which is the trade body for the car industry, has its eyes firmly fixed on what happens at the end of that transition period at the end of next year. It's worried that tariffs will end up being applied to exports from the UK to the European Union. It says that could cut production from the current one and a half million cars a year to just one million cars a year. Well, I asked Mike Hawes, the SMMT's chief executive why carmakers were so worried about the trade talks.

MIKE HAWES: We are just one sector. To do a deal with the EU, a free trade agreement, by definition, it needs to be multi-sector. That's why trade deals take so long. If it was just automotive, then there is perhaps a good chance of reaching an agreement, unless the EU just decides we have an unfair competitive advantage through deregulation or something, which is not something this industry wants. But you know, with a free trade agreement they'll be looking at automotive, they'll be looking at agriculture, they'll be looking at a whole range of different sectors and services. Whether you can absorb all that and come to an agreement, especially if the clock is ticking to get it done by the end of December next year, I would suggest, you know, there is, there is a prospect, a real prospect of tariffs being applied in . . . in the event of that happening.

DO: You talk about production falling by a third. Isn't it the truth that car production is much more lump . . . lumpy? It tends not to happen in gradual wind downs or fractions like that, but it's either on or off. And if the UK loses, starts to lose production, it might lose all its production?

MH: Well, you've always got to remember that the nature of the UK automotive is quite diverse, Yes, we've got some major transplant manufacturers, global brands that have invested in the UK. Also, we have a raft of quintessentially British companies, think Bentley, Rolls Royce, McLaren, Aston, Jaguar

Land Rover and so forth. So it is very diverse. However, you know, if the competitiveness is undermined such that you start losing in spades the supply chain, then it does put into question the ability to produce vehicles viably given, as I said, the very . . . the wafer thin margins under which automotive operates.

DO: And all this is coming to a head, of course, when the when the global auto industry is going through one of its periods of self-reinvention and looking for conventional car plants to close?

MH: Yeah, it's I mean, to be honest, Brexit we're now at a situation where it couldn't possibly come at a worse time. The global industry is facing increasing trade tensions. It's facing challenges about how you move from internal combustion engines to electrification, how you move towards connected vehicles, autonomous vehicles, how you change the very mobility under which society operates. The automotive industry will be fundamental to that change, and it's a significant investment that's required, against, against all those issues. So at a time when all manufacturing facilities and all companies are looking at exactly where these big bets need to be made, Brexit, unfortunately, just gives investors a reason to look somewhere else.

DO: There was Mike Hawes, the chief executive of the SMMT.

Thursday 28th November

6.15am Business News

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Now, you might remember that after the Brexit referendum there were dire warnings that thousands of jobs would leave the City of London as financial services firms decamped to the European Union, rival financial centres perhaps like Frankfurt, Paris and Dublin. One of those leading the drive to recruit those potential exiles was Hubertus Văth, who's a managing director of Frankfurt Main Finance, and he joins us this morning. Good morning, Mr Văth. How has the recruitment gone? How many firms have moved across?

HUBERTUS VĂTH: Good morning. We've got about 60 applications of . . . to build up or increase presence in Frankfurt, 30 of which decided to build their new European headquarters in Frankfurt. But that is mainly concerning banks. So we've seen banks moving into Frankfurt, whereas, for example, asset managers rather tend towards Luxembourg or Dublin.

DO: And how many people can you put a number on the jobs?

HV: It's significantly less people than we expected. Why? Because it's a pretty unclear situation still. So we've seen about 1,500 jobs that moved already. And we know of about roughly 2,000 people that do have in their contracts a clause that as soon as Brexit is happening, they ought to work in Frankfurt. So whether they will relocate or whether they will move in and out (*word unclear*) the City is to be seen.

DO: Because one of the ironies of this, of course, is that we . . . there were all these predictions just after the referendum. But even now, three-and-a-bit years on, we don't actually know what the trading relationship between the City of London and the rest of Europe is?

HV: It's kind of ironic, because if you, if you look at the treaty, there's not a single sentence that says anything about what the future is going to look like. But one thing I would say is pretty certain that passporting rights that allow financial services firms to serve the European continent out of, out of the City will definitely no longer be in existence.

DO: And just very briefly, Olaf Scholz, who's the German Finance Minister, recently made a . . . well, he talked about increasing steps towards a banking union in the European Union, a shared deposit

protection scheme. This is clearly Germany getting ready for the days when the City of London isn't Europe's financial centre.

HV: Absolutely. What he, what he has realised is that the financial services sector in Europe is not quite . . . not up to the task. We don't really have a banking union. We don't really have a capital markets union. So lots of further steps needs to be taken. And the European Deposit Insurance Scheme is, the issue he addressed, is, is, is a key issue. I think it's important, to, to know that Germany will take the lead of the European Council in the second half of 2020. And that's exactly the time where, more or less pieces fall into place.

DO: Thank you very much, Hubertus Văth, from Frankfurt Main Finance.

Friday 29th November

6.15am Business News

DHARSHINI DAVID: On the markets, sterling briefly touched near seven month highs against the euro and it rose against the US dollar after a poll suggested the Conservative Party would win a solid majority in the election, of course, on 12 December. Thomas Pugh is UK Economist at Capital Economics. Morning, Thomas.

THOMAS PUGH: Morning.

DD: Now, this is an interesting one, isn't it, because currency traders are clearly betting that a Conservative victory means it's more likely to see progress in the Brexit process. But on the other hand, a Labour victory might indicate a softer or even no Brexit. So what do we read into all of this?

TP: That's true. A Conservative victory would obviously give us a pretty clear path towards a Brexit deal in January, which would be good for the economy. It would also give us a sizeable fiscal stimulus, both of which would be good for the pound. But you've got to remember that pretty quickly attention will probably turn to the possibility of something like a 'no deal' at the end of next year. So, in December 2020, Boris Johnson has already said that he's not going to extend that transition period. So unless the government sign a trade deal pretty quickly, or Boris Johnson decides that he will extend it, then firms could be looking at a 'no deal' at the end of next year, which would introduce some of that uncertainty.

DD: So are markets being a little bit short sighted here? Are they failing to see beyond, frankly, the next couple of months?

TP: Possibly. But I think that's one reason why Sterling kind of hasn't gone higher. You know, we think if all the uncertainty was removed, we could be looking at sterling 135 and it's only 129. That's probably one reason. And just going back to the Labour manifesto. You're right that they would pretty much take a 'no deal' Brexit off the table, which would obviously be good for sterling and their fiscal stimulus would be even larger. However, that good news for the pound could be more than offset by some of Labour's economic policies, plans to raise higher taxes on earners and corporations, as well as nationalising parts of the economy and especially indications that they may confiscate shares and give them to workers has really kind of raised concerns in the market that a) the UK economy could (*word or words unclear, 'underperform'?*) and b) the investors rights would be eroded. Those would both be negative points for sterling. On balance, we think that if, kind of, if there was a large Labour majority or even a Labour-led minority government, sterling would probably fall and it could fall quite sharply.

DD: Well, with so much uncertainty on the cards, I think one thing's certain Thomas, and that's it's going to be a busy time for currency analysts and economists. Thomas Pugh, good to talk to you, thank you.

Tuesday 3rd December

6.15am Business News, Scottish Economy (Extract)

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Well, there might be a lot of investment going into that one big retail project in Edinburgh, but elsewhere in Scotland, the economy is actually stuttering. It's grown by about half the speed of the rest of the UK this year and it actually shrank, only a bit 0.2 per cent in the second quarter of this year. Liz McAreavey is the Chief Executive of the Edinburgh Chambers of Commerce, and she's . . . she joins us. Good morning, Liz. That idea of a shrinking economy in the second quarter, does that kind of tally with what your members tell you, their experience?

LIZ MCAREAVEY: Certainly seeing a bit of a slowdown and a hiatus of investment. A lot of businesses are telling us that they're putting their recruitment plans on hold. So I think the uncertainty of Brexit is certainly having an impact on business ambition and growth at the moment.

DO: Because we hear that a lot south of the border, uncertainty, a lack of business investment. That's the same story here, and people thinking about Brexit.

LM: Definitely. I mean, Brexit is front of mind at the moment. The priority for businesses is to have an orderly, well-managed Brexit. And that uncertainty about our future relationship with the EU is certainly holding back investment.

DO: Businesses here also have to think about the other thing that might flow on from this election, possibly a second independence referendum or another independence referendum. Business got itself into a bit of a tangle about the referendum last time, it didn't know whether to come out and say what it thought or stay back. Are you doing any thinking, any planning about that?

LM: Well, we're not hearing an awful lot at the moment about the independence. I mean, the conversation's certainly hotting up at the moment. We're not hearing an awful lot about it. As I say, front of mind really is the general election and getting Brexit done. We wouldn't take a position, as a Chamber, we wouldn't take a political position. Our role is to make sure that businesses are informed, that they're following the debate, they're understanding the issues. And I think when we start seeing some of the clarity, the clarity around the discussions, we will pass that on to our businesses.

Moves on to discuss on whether businesses are frightened to take a position on independence.

6.24am Business News, Markets Guest (Extract)

Interview with David Cumming from Aviva Investors on the markets. Discussion of taxation on Silicon Valley firms.

DAVID CUMMING: I think I think the biggest trade issue, unfortunately, still for the UK is actually Brexit, because 'no deal' Brexit's still out there on the table. That's a major trade event. So that's point one. Obviously, the market is concerned how Labour's going to pay for a number of its promises in the election and taxes are obviously one of them. So the market, the market in terms of Labour it's worried less about digital taxes, probably more about nationalisation and lack of engagement with business, to be honest.

Moves on to recommending shares that will do well to play the election result.

8.37am Business Update

JUSTIN WEBB: Donald Trump has threatened to put very big tariffs, 100 per cent on imports from France, including imports of champagne. What many people don't realise though is he's already put tariffs on

imports of Scotch whisky. And Dominic is alongside me here at the University of Edinburgh. With more on that.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Yes, 25 per cent tariffs, actually, Justin, on imports of single malts into America. That came in on October 18. Those tariffs were in retaliation for a dispute. America said that Europe, including the UK, was paying unfair subsidies to Airbus, the plane-maker. Karen Betts is the chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association and she's with us here this morning. So Karen, in response to those tariffs, what's actually happened, have sales gone down? Talk us through it.

KAREN BETTS: Well, I mean, it's, it's really too early for us to tell. I think many of our . . . many of our member companies, many Scotch Whisky producers pre-shipped Scotch whisky to America before 18 October . . .

JW: (*speaking over*) To meet, to meet the deadline.

KB: Absolutely. Absolutely. There was a lot of pre-shipping, I think, that went on. And most companies will be trying to . . . to mitigate the impact of tariffs to get them through the Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year period. So I think it's really in the new year that we're going to see these tariffs start to bite.

JW: Have any . . . have any producers said they won't sell in America anymore? Because I've seen a few reports of some saying, 'Well, listen, this is just so punitive that it's not worth the candle.'

KB: No, I don't think so. I mean, you know, all Scotch whisky producers sell in America, really. And what's difficult about this tariff in many ways is that it disproportionately impacts smaller producers, because smaller producers only produce single malts. They tend not to produce blends. Blends are not caught in the tariff. And everybody either exports to the US or has an aspiration to export to the US. I think what it might have done with some . . . with some newer distilleries, it might have slowed down their plans to . . . to build a US market. But most companies will continue to support the US and try to manage the tariff one way or the other.

JW: And also overnight, there was a ruling from the US Trade Representative about this particular dispute, the Airbus dispute. They said there might be a new register of tariffs later in the week, so there might be more bad news to come?

KB: Well, I think all the products that were on the lists published by the US government that they . . . are things that they could raise tariffs against. I think everybody faces a renewed risk, because of the WTO ruling that was handed down yesterday, yes.

JW: And just briefly, what happens when we leave the European Union? If we leave the European Union? Do the tariffs then disappear?

KB: It will depend on how we leave the European Union. So, you know, those are the questions that we have absolutely been asking ourselves. You know, will the UK government have more flexibility when the UK leaves the EU? At the moment, Scotch whisky, we think, has been targeted because the EU placed a 25 per cent tariff on American whiskies about 18 months ago under a separate dispute, the steel and aluminium dispute. So if the . . . you know, if and when the UK leaves the European Union, it may be that the UK could lift that 25 per cent tariff on bourbon. And we think that that could shift views in the United States towards the, the tariff on Scotch, whisky.

JW: Cheaper whisky. Thank you very much, Karen Betts from the Scotch Whisky Association.

Thursday 5th December

6.15am Business News, M&G Investment Fund (Extracts)

MARTHA KEARNEY: Torrid times on the high street and Brexit uncertainty have been blamed for the suspension of the UK's biggest commercial property fund. Dharshin's here with the Business News, good morning.

DHARSHINI DAVID: Good morning, Martha. Thank you. Yes. We'll also be looking at how one of those who've been struggling on the high street has been granted a lifeline and why the pound is enjoying some respite. But first of all, yes, the investment specialist M&G has been forced to suspend or gate its fund, which owns over 90 properties around the country, including shopping centres. That's as it can't sell properties fast enough to meet a surge in demand for withdrawals. This, after that fund lost over a billion pounds of its value this year. Comparisons have been made with Neil Woodford's Equity Income Fund, which you might remember is being wound down after being suspended. But in this case, investors are to see their management fees cut by 30 per cent while the suspension goes on. Let's get more on this with Ryan Hughes, head of active portfolios at the stockbrokers, AJ Bell. Good morning, Ryan.

RYAN HUGHES: Good morning.

DD: We've been here before, haven't we? We saw a string of property funds suspended after the referendum back in 2016. I meant, the fact is that property is hard to sell. You've taken funds like this off your favourite funds list. Could you see this coming?

RH: Yes, I mean, as you say, we've been, we've been here before and there is essentially a fundamental problem with the . . . how long it takes to sell property, as anyone that's bought or sold, a house will know, with a fund that then offers the ability for investors to get their money back on any given day. And this was, I think it was anticipated that problems were coming in the sector. And as a result, what we've seen is a lot of other property funds have been raising cash to mitigate this risk as it came along.

DD: And we know as well that this has been high on the watch list of the financial regulator, the FCA, which has been looking at ways that perhaps it can reduce the risks. But frankly, they've stopped short of saying that such illiquid assets as property is shouldn't be in funds which allows daily withdrawals, this a mistake?

RH: I think it's certainly a missed opportunity. When they set out the new rules, having reviewed the situation after the problems in 2016, they suggested that it was likely that funds would suspend more frequently. And this was a suitable way of dealing with the problem here. But I think when you've got this mismatch between it, take could take months to buy or sell a property and offering investors their money back on any given day, then I think moving these funds away from a daily dealing structure and into one which is perhaps on a monthly dealing structure, as actually happens in the institutional market rather than the retail market, would probably be a better solution.

Moves on to discuss the fund being open to all investors and asking why fees have been cut by 30 per cent.

DD: And on the same note, of course, we know that last time this happened, it took a few months, but the fund was reopened, the M&G fund, as were the others as well, and they started trading again. Are you confident this will happen this time, too?

RH: Yeah. This is essentially buying the fund manager time to sell the underlying properties in an orderly manner, so they don't have to really essentially do a fire sale. Last time around, this fund was closed for about four months before it reopened. And we've obviously got the Brexit situation, which may be resolved in the next couple of months. So I would anticipate that we could be expecting a similar length of time. They do need to review this every single month and every month they'll update investors as to what the situation is. But I think in reality, we should be at least thinking a three or four month period and potentially longer, depending on whether the Brexit situation does get resolved.

DD: In the meantime, investors can just watch and wait. Ryan Hughes, good to talk to you. Thank you.

6.20am Business News, Markets Guest (Extract)

DHARSHINI DAVID: Well, let's talk to our markets guest this morning is Supriya Menon, who is Senior Multi-Asset Strategist at Pictet Asset Management. Good morning.

SUPRIYA MENON: Good morning Dharshini.

DD: Let's talk about sterling, because once again, and we're not used to saying this are we, another good day for the currency. What exactly is going on here?

SM: And especially against a euro, I would say.

DD: (*speaking over*) Yes, yeah.

SM: And you know, when the sterling had its initial move, you know, that was understandable because most investors were extremely underweight this currency, against pretty much any other. And you had the removal of the worst case scenario, the tail risk of basically a 'no deal'. And then it's been in a range for . . . for a few weeks now. And it, importantly, moved past the 1.30 mark against the dollar and moved to the highest level against the euro since his mid-2017. Now the latest move has been a little bit harder to decipher. I mean, most . . . most polls actually show a narrowing of the Tory lead. So is this, is this basically the market saying, 'Well, maybe we'll have a hung parliament and therefore, you know, a referendum and so on'? It's, it's hard to . . . it's it's hard to make sense of it, actually. But the fact is that now that positions are more neutral, so there's not this overwhelming weight of underweight positions, you know, it's more finely balanced. And the interesting thing is the pound has basically been a barometer of Brexit-weighted sentiment, rather than the underlying economy and the strength of the underlying economy and the fact is, on that front. It should actually be a little bit weaker, because you've had a string of weak data.

DD: It's very confusing to read, isn't it, at the moment?

SM: (*speaking over*) Absolutely.

DD: And some out there are telling us that actually, when you look at it, trading is pretty thin, liquidity is pretty thin . . .

SM: Yes . . .

DD: . . . and, actually, there's some short . . . shorting of sterling going on. Just explain exactly what that means?

SM: So, what that means is that most investors in the market, people like us, you know, but, but more broadly speaking, looking at the broader investor community, there were actually short the sterling against the dollar most prominently. And so because you had, because you have this deeply underweight position and deeply negative sentiment, there's room for that to recover. So people essentially cover their shorts, they buy a back those short positions and most investors are more neutral now. So neutrally positioned. So it's more finally poised.

DD: It's finely balanced, finely balanced, it's . . .

SM: Yeah.

DD: . . . an exciting one to watch.

Moves on to discuss OPEC meeting.

Friday 6th December

6.15am Business News (Extracts)

The West Midlands used to be the world's workshop, but there has been a dramatic change in the last few decades, and it is now 80% services rather than 80% manufacturing. Interview with Melvyn Wingfield and Mark Wingfield, who run a specialist manufacturing company.

MELVYN WINGFIELD: We need to do something for the regions. All the talk of the northern powerhouse and the Midlands engine, it's just talk, it's just bluster. Manufacturing is still massively, massively important, not just to this area, but to this country. Whatever happens, come the 31 January, manufacturing is the future of this country. One of the things I'd like to think would happen as a result of the 31, or whenever it is, is that companies will look to reshore (?).

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: So you think Brexit is a big opportunity for UK manufacturing?

MW: No, it's a double edged sword, isn't it? If you ask my brother, he'll tell you differently. But from my perspective, there are huge risks.

DO: Brexit?

MARK WINGFIELD: Yeah, I think we should leave and make our own way. I think we'll be much stronger for it.

Dominic O'Connell says that Jeremy Corbyn harks back to a lost world of manufacturing.

Interview with Claire Birch, West Midlands Regional Manager, Reed Employment

DO: We went round amid a lot of companies yesterday and almost all of them spoke about a hiatus, a pause caused by Brexit. Not people taking sides on Brexit, but just thinking, actually, are we going to wait and see what happens? Is, is that what you found as well?

CLAIRE BIRCH: I would say in recent months there has been a cautious mood. However, in recent times and we've noticed they're not waiting anymore. There's, there's work to be done . . .

DO: (*speaking over*) They've . . . they've had enough of waiting.

CB: Yeah, there's work to be done, you know, which is really positive, you know, they're still running a business successfully, and now taking the matter into their own hands.

DO: Thank you very much, Claire Birch.

7.19am Business Update (Extract)

Marston's Brewery is a strong presence in the West Midlands, Interview with Ralph Findlay, chief executive.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: We've been doing a lot of touring around this region in the last couple of days, talking to local businesses. They have different views on Brexit, but they all pretty much say the same thing: there has been a hiatus caused by Brexit, a pause. People aren't taking big investment decisions. Is that your experience as well is that what you see?

RALPH FINDLAY: Yeah, I think it is. It feels like things are just gummed up. You know, things have slowed down. People aren't sure quite what is happening. We can see it in the consumer confidence figures. All the indicators suggest that consumer confidence should be higher than it is. When you look at employment data, when you look at wage rate growth and all of those kinds of things, it suggests

that people should be feeling better than they are and they're not. All the indicators are that consumer confidence is pretty weak.

DO: And you see that, because you see people spending in your pubs and hotels and demand for beer, basically?

RF: Yeah, we do. I mean, pubs tend to be more resilient, more robust than many retail businesses, I have to say. But even for us, it has felt slower in recent months.

Moves on to discuss the party manifestos and tax.

8.45am Business Update (Extract)

The West Midlands used to be the world's workshop, but there has been a dramatic change in the last few decades, and it is now 80% services rather than 80% manufacturing.

DO: Mass manufacturing, the kind that employed tens of thousands in a single factory, may have gone, but specialist manufacturing is alive and well. Lock-making was a black country speciality and it's still going. Fortress Interlocks makes high tech devices to protect people from potential dangers in factories. The managing director is Joanna Smith.

JOANNA SMITH: We started off UK-centric, where now only 17 per cent of our sales are in the UK, the remainder go to the rest of the world.

DO: So if you're exporting a lot, are you a bit worried about what might be at the other end of Brexit? (*word or words unclear*) you know, tariffs, terms of trade, all that sort of stuff. It's a bit unknown, isn't it?

JS: Yeah, I think the uncertainty is the biggest risk that we're facing as a business. The tariffs don't look too significant in terms of that potential threat. It's more the fact that people are holding off making decisions on large projects. We rely on companies in the UK and other areas investing. They're holding up on my investment decision at the moment because of the uncertainty.

DO: Some of the famous names, Hobson's, Lucas, Goodrich, well, it's a long list, they survive, but in reduced form and often under foreign ownership. Collins Aerospace and Wolverhampton is owned by an American company, UTC.

ED DRYDEN: I'm Ed Dryden. I'm the vice president for actuation within Collins Aerospace. At the minute we're looking at what is are our prismatics area, which is where we machine high precision components. This factory supplies various parts of the aerospace industry from . . . we're stood looking at an (*word unclear*) thrust reverser actuator. We also provide secondary flight controls so that slats and flaps, which are parts of the wings. We also support military. So on the F-35 aircraft, we make the weapon bay door system.

DO: At some stage we assume we'll leave the European Union. Do you know yet whether there'll be any tariffs applied to the component you make here, whether it might cost the people who use them more to import them?

ED: That, honesty, is probably one of the most important points to me. We've done a lot of work around the risk of a hard Brexit, so buffering and protecting our customers because customers, that's the primary thing, we have to protect the customer. Once you look past that, I spend a reasonable amount of time lobbying ministers in bays (?) et cetera, to make sure they understand. I have to be competitive. I have got competitors who are, who are sat in Europe, and if I end up with some tax that they don't, then that immediately puts me in a worse position. To your point, I don't know and I'm, I'm pressing the government quite hard that that is not a position they can allow me to get to because I won't be competitive. And then that has consequences.

MARTHA KEARNEY: Ed Dryden from Collins Aerospace, ending that report by Dominic O'Connell.

Monday 9th December

6.15am Business News, Business Confidence

JUSTIN WEBB: Has the election done much to make business people more upbeat about the future? Well . . . it's a shocker, isn't it? But it hasn't. Dominic's here with the latest snapshot of mood among business people, and indeed the rest of the business news.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Yes, thank you. Justin, this gloomy mood is revealed in the latest survey from the British Chambers of Commerce. It forecasts that the UK will grow by only 1 per cent next year, 2020. That would be the slowest rate since 2009. Well, that must be said, that's a small improvement on the previous forecast of just 0.8 per cent from the British Chambers. Later on in the programme, we'll be looking at the latest crisis in fund management. The problems at property investment funds and talking about Tesco's plans to sell its operations in Thailand and Malaysia. But first of all, that Chambers of Commerce forecast. Adam Marshall is the Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, and he . . . and he joins us here in the studio. Adam, good morning. Just run me through the numbers. What are you forecasting for growth this year? We haven't got long to run, but what about this year and then next year?

ADAM MARSHALL: Well, we're forecasting that growth will come in at about 1.3 per cent this year and next year, in 2020 at 1 percent., And that's going to cap off what is the second lowest decade of growth that we've got on record in the UK.

DO: Forecasts of economic growth after the Brexit referendum have been wrong (*laughs*) and that the UK economy has actually continued to do quite well. Do you think you might be being overly pessimistic?

AM: Look, I don't think that's the case. I think we see a lot of businesses and consumers who are holding back right now. We see trade around the world as pretty anaemic. And to be honest, the figures are flattered a little bit by expected increases in government spending, which, of course, provides a bit of a sugar hit for the economy, but it's not the sort of protein boost that we need for the longer term.

DO: Because if you . . . so, a sugar hit provided by government spending. Also, we've been talking to business people around the . . . around the country last week, when we were doing our regional broadcasts and they were talking about that, they, they thought there might be quite a boost to investment if you get a decisive outcome from the election and a clear path on Brexit, one way or the other, then actually things will improve markedly.

AM: Well, I think there will be some improvement if we do see a messy and disorderly Brexit avoided and a clear path ahead. But in business, details matter. And what no one has, from any of the policies that might be victors in this election, yet is real detail on some of the economic policies, what they'll mean for individual businesses. So a lot of companies that I'm talking to will say, 'We're going to hang back until we understand exactly what this means for us.' So there may be a bounce, but it won't be as fast as some of our politicians expect.

DO: Let's talk about the Conservatives' immigration policy. A points-based system is being talked about. What will businesses think of that? Will they be happy to embrace this, this . . . this sort of a three tier system with points accorded?

AM: I think the first thing to say is that it's inexcusable that businesses don't know who they can hire this time next year. People will be thinking about their long term plans. And I've got companies from Sussex farms leaving fruits in the fields through to Highland tourism companies in Scotland who can't fill a staff roster right now.

DO: So, at the moment, right now, they're finding it hard to find staff?

AM: Even now, it's hard. And, of course, the lack of clarity . . .

DO: (*speaking over*) Why, why, why is that, why are they finding it hard?

AM: Well, there's huge numbers of vacancies. And even when businesses are training locally, a lot of our labour markets are effectively at full employment around the UK. So companies do have to turn to immigration. And when they don't know what the system is going to be in future, they find that a lot of people aren't too sure about uprooting their lives and coming here to the UK.

DO: Haven't companies, though, had their cake and ate it too, because they've been, they've been able to rely on cheap labour coming in from the European Union and not really done much about retention and recruitment, because they've been very, very easily able to pick up workers as and when they needed them.

AM: That's certainly not been the case in many of the companies I work with, who have set records in terms of the amount of training spend that they've put in in recent years. But what we really do need to see is an immigration system that offers businesses clarity and simplicity for the future. Again, those details matter. Simply saying you're going to have an Australian-style points-based system without giving businesses a route map for what that means for them is not good enough, frankly.

DO: Thank you very much, Adam Marshall from the British Chambers of Commerce.

6.19am Business News, Fund Managers (Marginal or Passing Mention)

Report on how it has been a chastening year for fund managers, Passing mention that property funds were frozen in 2008, and also after the Brexit vote.

6.23am Business News, Markets Guest (Extract)

Interview with Laura Lambie from Investec on the markets

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Laura, let's just talk about what the markets think about the election. In the weekend papers, lots of talk about how the market seemed to be pricing in a Conservative victory, talking about, you know, the sterling rallying and also the FTSE 250 looking quite perky. Do you . . . I mean markets have got this thing drastically wrong in the past, haven't they?

LAURA LAMBIE: Yes. All . . . all that markets can do is look at opinion polls. Certainly in terms of the UK market, it looks as if, with the lead that the Conservatives had they will have a majority and they'll get the Brexit deal done. That certainly stops the uncertainty in the short term. And it could well be that foreign buyers, who I suspect have been sort of standing back and just waiting to see what happens, they may well come in and start buying the UK market again, which looks undervalued, when you compare that to somewhere like the US.

DO: Hmm. Thank you very much, Laura Lambie from Investec Wealth and Investment.

7.21am Business Update

JUSTIN WEBB: Will businesses in Northern Ireland face a lot of extra paperwork because of Boris Johnson's Brexit deal? He says, of course, that they won't. But documents leaked from the Treasury and the Department for Exiting the European Union suggests that they will. Here's Dominic.

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Yes. A leaked Treasury report said goods going from Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK *would* need customs checks. Mr Johnson said they wouldn't. The Financial Times this morning has had sight of a Brexit department document that says that the Northern Ireland arrangements that he wants to put in place may not be ready as planned by the end of next year. Stephen Kelly is the Chief Executive of Manufacturing NI, which looks after manufacturing businesses in Northern Ireland. And Mr Kelly, who's right here, Mr Johnson or, or the person who prepared that Treasury paper?

STEPHEN KELLY: Well, the document is there in black and white. The Treasury's assessment is there and the assessment accompanying the legislation has also been published by government. And all those make it clear that if the UK decides to leave on the deal that's been negotiated, then there will be checks and controls.

DO: Both ways, because Mr Johnson was saying that there might be checks and controls if goods were going from the rest of the UK through Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland. You're suggesting actually both ways and quite comprehensive checks?

SK: Well, certainly goods leaving Northern Ireland into the rest of the UK, that's really a responsibility of the UK government, so we expect those to be pretty light touch. But anything leaving GB, moving across into Northern Ireland, well if that's for final consumption in Northern Ireland, or whether that's to travel on into the Republic of Ireland, those will require checks.

DO: And those checks will be put in place largely, I guess, by . . . they're in the purview of the European Union.

SK: Well, the UK has said that it will maintain the UK's union customs law. The UK essentially will be acting as the UK border at the ports in GB, or even in the ports in Northern Ireland. I mean, we've looked at this deal and in many respects it's . . . it's been like an onion for us, every time you peel away a layer, our eyes water just that little bit more. And the challenge that we have now is that should the Conservative Party become the party of government, then we have a responsibility to ensure that the Prime Minister's words are held up in actions.

DO: Because he said you should throw those documents in the bin if you're asked to fill them out, you know, going from Northern Ireland to GB . . . the rest of the UK, excuse me, will you be prepared to throw them in the bin?

SK: Well, the reality of the stuff leaving from Northern Ireland than to GB is it will be the HMRC that will be collecting those documents. And at that point, there's no need for that documentation. They've no requirement for them. However, what isn't clear and what's been pushed out to be designed by a new joint committee is what happens to the stuff that lands in Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK. And that's where the big challenge is for us.

DO: Thank you very much, Stephen Kelly from Manufacturing NI.

Tuesday 10th December

6.15am Business News (Extract)

What might the two main parties' manifestos mean for the economy? Interview with Jagjit Chadha National Institute for Economic and Social Research

DOMINIC O'CONNELL: Does the government have the capability to do the level of spending that Labour, for example, has outlined. And of course, at the same time, we have the challenge of Brexit?

JAGJIT CHADHA: Yes, I mean, from the Institute's offices in Westminster, we've observed month after month for the last three and half years almost exhaustion of the state in trying to deal with a Brexit that

wasn't particularly well planned for. And that's meant there have been a number of avenues that have been pursued by people over a long time without a conclusion. And what you have to add to that, under each set of parties, are further risks. One, under the Conservatives of a significant possibility of an exit without a deal under WTO rules. And as you've said, under Labour, the possibility that the size of the state may increase very rapidly and to very large levels, and without a detailed plan, we're concerned that that will lead to further exhaustion of the administrative capacity of the state.

DO: Is either manifesto, the Labour or the Conservative one, do you think particularly honest about the state of the public finances?

JC: I think the more . . . the better word to use is 'realism' about the public finances. The public finances have deteriorated since the financial crisis. The level of public debt is around . . . is somewhere between 80 and 90 per cent, depending how you classify things, so that's a concern given that you want to retain some ammunition to deal with public infrastructure, the possibility of future downturns and the genuine need to invest in human and physical capital in this country. And at the same time, underpinning that, as I've said right at the beginning, there must be a realistic discussion about taxes. And we haven't had that from either party. And that's a great concern, it seems to me.

DO: Now, I know you and your colleagues have spent most of the last few weeks looking at these manifestos, but is it in the end something of a futile exercise, because no plan survives contact with the enemy, does it?

JC: No, it's a phrase we've used ourselves very often. And I think the underlying point about the British economy is that we're . . . since the referendum under a slow puncture. We haven't had very much growth at all. Business investment has stalled. And these are the problems that any incoming government are going to have to deal with. And we've seen across government, in a number of areas, what can only be described as stalled planning. The Industrial Strategy Commission, the National Infrastructure Commission and other institutions that were really set up with good intentions to bring about higher prosperity for people by investing in the country, have been unable to formulate plans that have been able to be actioned. And that's the biggest concern. It seems to me, that that is just not happening. And what we're seeing are a lot of words being spilled and a lot of words being spoken that, in fact, will not be able to be acted out because of the underlying problems in the country. And secondly, our inability to deliver Brexit in a way that would allow the country to move on.

DO: Thank you very much, Jagjit Chadha

JC: Thank you, Dominic.

Wednesday 11th December

6.15am Business News (Marginal or Passing Mention)

Do the bookies always get it right in elections. Passing mention that they got Brexit incorrect

7.17am Business Update (Extracts)

MARTHA KEARNEY: Now, what does business want from the election? A survey from the Institute of Directors has thrown up a few surprising results. Here's Dominic with more.

DO: Yes, it has. The Institute of Directors asked its members about the priorities for the next government, rather than which party they supported. Edwin Morgan is director of policy for the IOD. Edwin, just talk us through it, what does it show?

EDWIN MORGAN: So when we asked in terms of the action the next government should take to help businesses out, top of the list came support for getting through Brexit. So I mean, that will be . . . obviously we don't know what's going to happen on Brexit, but whatever happens, the process of transition is going to be difficult for lots of businesses.

DO: So not 'Get Brexit done.' but assistance with whatever Brexit it turns out to be.

EM: Exactly. Our members are, you know, they're practical people, they want to know what the situations can be, the future trading relationship with the EU and they want, you know, a staged smooth process for getting there. And they do see some justification for, for government helping businesses out. After that, there are the kind of the things that you will often hear from members: investment in skills, incentives to invest, because in business investment has been right down for the last three years at least. And then, not too much extra regulation, which is always kind of a . . .

DO: Always, always high on the agenda.

Moves on to discuss the members being quite relaxed about an increase in public spending, and discussion of Labour's plans to offer free broadband and other nationalisation pledges.

DO: And the Conservative plans on Brexit?

EM: So I think the thing that we often hear from members is obviously the slogan is, 'Get Brexit Done', but getting the Withdrawal Agreement through won't be getting Brexit done in the eyes of our members. When . . . Brexit will only be done, when they know the complete final shape of the future deal with the EU, they know the terms of trading. They know how they're going to move people back and forth, all those things. That's the end state of Brexit, not just this kind of intermediate withdrawal deal.

DO: Thank you very much, Edwin Morgan from the IOD.

APPENDIX III: RUNNING LOG

November 6

Bulletins suggested that because of Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Conservative campaign had got off to a rocky start. Yesterday in Parliament focused on claims that the government was covering up an intelligence committee report about alleged Russian interference. Mention that Nicola Sturgeon was writing to Remain voters claiming that a vote for Scottish independence would stop Brexit. The Conservative Party claimed the push for independence would help their campaign. A report from Northern Ireland said the DUP were under pressure for supporting Brexit. Diane Abbott was asked why she was ignoring voters by pressing for a second referendum. Nicola Sturgeon outlined why she was pushing for an independence vote. James Cleverley was pushed about 'no deal', Brexit delay, Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Welsh secretary's involvement in a rape trial and pushing fake news. Laura Kuenssberg summarised that party chairmen were sent out to deal with disasters. David Dimbleby plugged his Panorama programme about divisions in Wales caused by Brexit.

November 7

Bulletins highlighted the Remain 'pact' with agreements not to stand in 60 seats. There was a clip from Heidi Allen talking about the dangers of a 'hard' Brexit. Sir Mark Rowley had warned that extremists of the far right were leveraging the Brexit arena (bulletin item, correspondent report and interview). In business news, it was said that Brexit was causing investors to hold back. Ian Austen, interviewed about Tom Watson's resignation, said that Jeremy Corbyn was not fit to run the country. Heidi Allen explained the Remain pact. Nigel Farage was interviewed and asked if he was Remain's secret weapon, whether Norway was outside the EU, why he opposed Boris Johnson's deal as it would lead to the UK leaving the EU, why he would not stand candidates down, and if he was afraid of personally standing as a candidate.

November 8

Bulletins mentioned Conservative plans for fast-tracking medical visa applications and the SNP's demands that the NHS should not be used as a bargaining chip in trade deals. Norman Smith said at 8am that the NHS issue 'would not go away', and in a report at 6.34am. Madeline Sumption, Director of Migration Observatory, said the immigration system already prioritised NHS workers. Baroness Findlay an 'independent' peer said Brexit had led to turmoil which deterred NHS workers coming to the UK. Nick Robinson suggested the new policy was an admission that the NHS would be in danger if wrong signals were sent to immigrants. Victoria

Atkins, a Home Office minister, said the purpose of the policy was to say the UK welcomed immigrants working for the NHS. She was also asked about a more general points system. Ian Blackford of the SNP said the NHS was in danger because of a trade deal with the US and suggested the party would support any prime minister who could prevent Scotland leaving the EU.

November 9

Layla Moran, of the Liberal Democrats, outlined what her party would do with a 'Remain bonus' and maintained her party could win the General Election. Gloria de Piero said there were no signs on doorsteps that the Brexit Party was gaining support and Vince Cable said the alliance between Remain parties was a big breakthrough.

November 11

Bulletins said the Conservative Party was trying to paint Labour as soft on immigration, but knew that they had their own problems on that front. Sam Gyimah said that the best possible Brexit deal was the current relationship. A Reality Check said that the 'Tories' had not costed their last election manifesto, but Labour had put out some numbers which were questionable, notably that the NHS would have to find an extra £500m a week because of a trade deal with the US.

November 12

Bulletins said Labour was promising six years of free study as part of plans to tackle skills shortages, with the Conservatives claiming that the pledge would not be possible to fulfil because of the commitment to a second EU referendum. Paul Barltrop of the Brexit Party said that the decision to stand down in Conservative-dominated constituencies would assist the party. Professor Hugh Brady, vice-chancellor of Bristol University, said he wanted continued access for his researchers to the 'European research ecosystem', and more certainty about immigration policy. Business school director Jonathan Owens argued that British Steel would find it easier to compete when it was not governed by EU regulations, making it more attractive to outside investors such as China. Hillary Clinton, in the 8.10am interview, argued that Brexit had unleashed a torrent of hate crimes, and that authoritarians were on the rise everywhere.

November 13

Bulletins said that former Conservative minister David Gauke had said that a government led by his former party would not be good for the country as it would lead to a 'very hard' Brexit. It was noted that former Leave EU campaigner Aaron Banks had urged the Brexit Party to withdraw from more seats. The 8am bulletin mentioned that Tom Harris, a former Labour minister had said he would vote Conservative because he believed Jeremy Corbyn was a danger to the

security of the UK. Norman Smith said that David Gauke had urged Conservatives to vote Liberal Democrat because Boris Johnson had sold his soul to Brexiteers. In an interview, Mr Gauke stressed the need to avoid a disastrous 'no deal' or hard deal. He warned whole sectors of the economy would be hit. Mishal Husain suggested he feared 'no deal' because the EU would not extend the implementation period. Mr Gauke said he hoped Liberal Democrats would not stand against him and said he wanted a 'confirmatory' referendum. Shadow Health Secretary John Ashworth warned that Brexit was 'a huge, huge risk' to the NHS. He claimed a Labour deal would mitigate against the worst excesses of Brexit and said freedom of movement for workers and their families would continue to help NHS staffing. Michael Gove said that David Gauke was wrong in his assertions because the choice was between Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson. Nick Robinson suggested 'no deal' was back on the table because of an artificial deadline with the EU at the end of 2020, which experts believed could not be met; said Boris Johnson had failed to come out of the EU in October, despite promises to do so or die; pushed again whether 'now deal' would be on the table if the 2020 deadline was not met and noted that Mr Gove had warned of huge tariffs if there was 'no deal'; that Mr Gove was happy with the support of Aaron Banks rather than moderates who were former senior Cabinet members; that the Conservative track record was chaotic; that in line with a speech by Ed Miliband, the Conservatives had indulged in self-gratification rather than meeting the needs of the electorate; and that the Conservatives had won a majority in 2015 but had failed. Nick Robinson, in an interview with Tom Harris, suggested that Labour people said the thought of a Boris Johnson government was 'loathsome', would lead to unfairness and injustice, would likely lead through complacency to an independent Scotland, and that Brexit would be very damaging. Mr Harris replied that he was following the logic of his own arguments. In Reality Check, in reaction to Jonathan Ashworth's claim that free movement of people would continue to apply to the NHS, Chris Morris said it was not possible to 'slice and dice' freedom of movement. He noted that Michael Gove had written that he regarded extending free movement as extreme, dangerous and of touch with people. He also opined that the link between the NHS and Brexit would continue to be a defining issue of the election.

November 14

Bulletins said that Home Secretary Priti Patel had said that numbers of immigrants would fall through the ending of free movement. Chris Mason noted that past promises in this area had not been kept. In the 8am bulletin, Chris Mason said that on Today, Home Office minister Victoria Atkins had repeatedly 'been unable to answer' whether Conservatives wanted immigration to be higher or lower if they won the election. Now Ms Patel had said the numbers would be lower 'overall' but had not said by how much or when. He stressed that previous promises to reduce numbers had not been met, but now Ms Patel was confident that her more vague promise could be kept by delivering Brexit. The 8am bulletin also contained a clip from Donald Tusk saying

that the UK's departure from the EU was not irreversible. It was also noted that the British ambassador to the EU had written to the new president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to say the UK would not be nominating yet a new commissioner. Adam Fleming said in a correspondent report that Donald Tusk had always clear in his views about Brexit. Mr Fleming said that Mr Tusk was annoying pro-Brexit supporters. Norman Smith doubted that Priti Patel would provide numbers in her policy statement about immigration, and in addition Boris Johnson had a much more 'liberal' approach to the topic. He added that 'Tories' believed Labour was vulnerable on immigration because of their apparent support for free movement. A constituency report (prior to the Conservative candidate being selected) from Anglesey said the PC and Plaid Cymru candidates were both Remain and included a clip from the Brexit candidate saying that she did not know about 'no deal' planning, but would check. Ex-Labour MP Luciana Berger, standing for the Liberal Democrats in the same seat as David Gauke, said she was doing so to give electors choice, and because her new party wanted to stop Brexit and put Jo Swinson into Downing Street. Nick Robinson said that this was confusing because in Labour-held Canterbury, the Liberal Democrat candidate was stepping down. Ms Berger said it now had emerged that Labour was not a party of Remain. In the second interview with Nigel Farage. It was first pointed out that the Brexit Party had decided not to stand in 317 Conservative-held seats. Nigel Farage said the party would not stand down in more seats because the government was intent on a Conservative victory, not a Brexit one, and did not want a Leave alliance. Mr Farage contended that he did not trust the Conservatives – a referendum had been secured because Jimmy Goldsmith, UKIP had pushed for one. He denied his party was simply a pressure group because it had won the 2019 European elections and had reset the agenda on Brexit. Nick Robinson suggested that Mr Farage was not putting his own neck on the line, to which he replied that neither were Nicola Sturgeon or Arlene Foster. It was suggested to Laura Pidcock that Len McCluskey disagreed with the Labour Party's position on free movement. Ms Pidcock maintained that immigration was beneficial and discounted any regulation of numbers. Martha Kearney suggested that this would drive some Leave supporters away. Ms Pidcock again said it was not a factor in unemployment. Simon Fraser, former Permanent Secretary to the Foreign Office, said that Donald Tusk had broken a diplomatic convention by commenting on the election. Professor Robert Tombs said Donald Tusk's claims about the British Empire were 'silly stuff'. Mr Fraser contending that leaving the EU would damage British standing in the world and that those supporting Brexit had a fanciful view of British influence. Professor Tombs suggested that the EU was a weak player on the world stage and that Britain had been obsessed with decline when it was Europe's leading military power. Nick Robinson, interviewing Home Office minister Brandon Lewis, said again that the 'Tory' party was not saying whether immigration numbers would be higher or lower while claiming numbers would surge under Jeremy Corbyn. Mr Lewis was the aim was to cut numbers but first to end free movement and then introduce a points system 'fair to the whole world'. He said previous efforts had failed because coalition partners the Liberal Democrats did not want to cut numbers. In Reality Check, Chris Morris said in latest immigration

figures, 59,000 had come from the EU and 219,000 from the rest of the world, so ending free movement was not the issue. Yet the Tory party had jumped on the Labour conference motion to allow free movement and said it would generate 819,000 immigrants, but that was not definitely in their manifesto. Mr Morris also noted that Liberal Democrat claims about their position in the European election were misleading because they did not show that Labour and the Brexit parties had secured more votes. Deborah Mattinson, founder of Britain Thinks and the World Thinks consultancy, said focus groups among women were not picking up concern about Boris Johnson's 'personal behaviour' towards women. Leave voters saw him as a glamorous and favourable figure, while Remainers thought he was Homer Simpson. Former Downing Street communications director Katie Perrior - in response to a point that nothing in the election was yet hitting home with voters - claimed this was brilliant for the Conservatives. It meant that the party could keep on talking about getting Brexit done because Labour was not winning any headroom. It also suggested the campaign would be 'run out' in the last fortnight.

November 15

Bulletins said the Conservative Party had dismissed claims by the Brexit Party of bullying and intimidation. In the 8am version, it was reported that the Liberal Democrats were planning to spend an extra £100 billion on tackling climate change, which deputy leader Ed Davey had said was more important than stopping Brexit. A report on the election in Wales suggested that Labour had most to lose, especially in Leave-voting constituencies. It noted that Labour was offering a second referendum and to end austerity, and Plaid Cymru claims that being honest with voters about not wanting Brexit but being in favour of Welsh independence would attract voters. In a separate report about Welsh agriculture, a local farmer - though not mentioning Brexit directly - claimed that politicians were making a hash of things and causing uncertainty. Another farmer said that abandoning EU regulations would damage the environment. The Welsh first minister Mark Drakeford (Labour) said he was happy with Labour's position on Brexit including campaigning to Remain, while at the same time respecting Leave voters by getting a better Leave deal. Ed Davey fleshed out his party's plans for spending £100 billion on climate change and claimed that most of the money would result from economic growth generated by staying in the EU. The goal was to make the UK the world's most climate friendly economy. Martha Kearney suggested growth could not be guaranteed, but Mr Davey disagreed, claiming that such forecasts were from reliable experts. He was also asked about the introduction of university tuition fees, but blamed Labour. Adam Price, of Plaid Cymru, said he wanted Wales to be outward looking and prosperous as a member of the EU. He denied that becoming independent would lead to hard borders.

November 16

Bulletins said that Lord Falconer, said to be the former Labour Lord Chancellor, had written to Scotland Yard urging the police to investigate claims by Nigel Farage that Brexit Party members had been offered inducements such as peerages to stand down as candidates. Helen Catt reported that Boris Johnson had dismissed the claims as nonsense. Nick Robinson said the SNP message to voters was to leave the UK but stay in the EU. He asked Kirsty Blackman of the SNP if her party was ignoring the 1 million (42 per cent) in Scotland who had voted Leave and the 55 per cent who did not want independence. Ms Blackman said latest polls did not show that but the fundamental point was that Scottish people, rather than Westminster, should be determining the future. Mr Robinson pointed out that remaining in the EU would not allow Scots to regain control of fishing. Ms Blackman said the fishing deal would have been better if it had been negotiated by Scots and said a strong relationship with the UK would continue. John Owen commented that a key point in the Labour manifesto would be whether free movement would continue and the precise extent of the Remain position. Michael Gove, discussing his party's environmental plans, said there were plans to plant 30 million trees and to improve on CAP with the government in control. Mr Gove dismissed claims of intimidation against the Brexit Party but said it was right that claims were properly investigated. In a report from Northern Ireland, Chris Paige said that because of Brexit, a big battle related to Irish nationalism was being fought. An SDLP candidate said a united Ireland was in sight, and it was argued that DUP seats were under threat. Lord Falconer, who said he was pursuing with the police claims of intimidation against the Brexit Party, suggested that there was evidence that peerages had been offered.

November 18

In bulletins, it was said that the Liberal Democrats would claim to be the true party of business in a speech to the CBI. Norman Smith said Boris Johnson would acknowledge that the CBI did not want Brexit, but that his path ended delay and prevented Jeremy Corbyn from implementing his agenda. Kate Nichols, of UK Hospitality, warned that placing restrictions on immigration would devastate her sector and put a 'severe block' on investment and growth. Andrea Leadsom maintained that business was doing very well despite uncertainty and picked up Carolyn Fairbairn's point that the CBI had not tried to stop Brexit but to make sure the deal worked for business. She claimed that her party's immigration policy would allow workers in to help British business where required, while being much fairer. Nick Robinson pointed that all previous targets had not been met. He also suggested that women told pollsters 'don't know' more frequently. Professor John Curtice said this was unlikely to make a difference to the election results as only 14 per cent of Labour Leave voters now supported them, unchanged from the previous week, despite Labour focusing on their domestic agenda. Equally the Liberal Democrats did not seem to be attracting Conservative Remain voters. Professor Curtice suggested that as things stood,

the chances of a Labour majority were 'virtually zero' in an election where the choice was binary between a Conservative majority and Brexit, or a hung parliament and a second referendum. In Reality Check, Chris Morris said that Boris Johnson was promising Brexit but this was unlikely to happen because the UK had to negotiate its future relationship with the EU. The CBI wanted to know what terms they would be trading with the EU in a year's time and about immigration policy. He noted that Carolyn Fairbairn had said that Jeremy Corbyn's policies threatened to crack the foundations of the economy.

November 19

James Landale said it was unclear what the UK's relationship with the world would be outside the EU. Philip Lee, a Liberal Democrat candidate (former Conservative MP), said that NHS finances would be improved by stopping Brexit and the policy of putting a penny on income tax. Mr Lee said that his party would not put Jeremy Corbyn into Number Ten, or Boris Johnson. After Justin Webb observed that the election would decide the fate of MPs who had defected to other parties, Ross Hawkins visited the constituency being contested by former Conservative Anna Soubry. She accepted that some of her former constituents were unhappy with her but suggested others were not. Jonathan Bartley, joint leader of the Green Party, said party proposals were very much about remaining in the EU. In Reality Check, Chris Morris noted that the level of deficit required for Green party spending broke EU rules. He said the biggest issue was whether spending £100 billion a year would achieve the party target of zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2030. Frances O'Grady, of the TUC contended that the UK would not be worse off without billionaires Philip Green or Mike Ashley.

November 20

Bulletins said that in a leadership debate, Boris Johnson had hammered his message on Brexit and Mr Corbyn would not be drawn on which side he would back in a second referendum. It was also reported that the Liberal Democrats were making pledges for extra funding for schools to be found from 'the £50 billion generated by cancelling Brexit'. In the 8am version, Branwen Jeffreys said the capitation spending on schools had been cut by 8 per cent since 2010, and the Liberal Democrat spending of £7.6 billion extra by 2023 and more beyond that, plus higher pay for teachers, went further than Conservative promises. At 7am, in further reporting on the leadership debate, there was a quote from Nicola Sturgeon saying that Boris Johnson wanted a hard Brexit while Jeremy Corbyn was ambiguous in what he wanted. Laura Kuenssberg said Boris Johnson had not thrown away his lead. James Vincent, reporting from Yorkshire, said it was a strong Labour area but Liberal Democrats were hoping to win back Hallam in Sheffield and the Brexit Party were contending most seats. Labour were stressing public services rather than Brexit. Norman Smith, commenting on the leader debate, said Jeremy Corbyn had projected

that the election was about saving the NHS and ending austerity, and for Boris Johnson, it was about whether people trusted him and whether he played fast and loose with the truth. Mr Smith noted the audience had burst out laughing when he said he could be trusted, and also that the Conservatives had been criticised for re-branding the party's website 'Fact Check UK' during the debate. A report from Crewe by Ross Hawkins included a quote from a Brexit-supporting local, who said he did not trust Jeremy Corbyn and did not want a second referendum. He also attacked Boris Johnson as 'a clown'. Layla Moran, the Liberal Democrat education spokesperson, claimed that a £50 billion economy uptick would be created by stopping Brexit and said that the money would be ploughed into education. She claimed it was a 'conservative' estimate of savings based on forecasts agreed by everybody. Dominic Raab – against suggestions from Justin Webb that the audience in the leaders' debate had laughed at both leaders – said the laughter happened at a 'bleak' point in the debate and contended that more important was a poll which showed people preferred Mr Johnson as prime minister by 2:1. Mr Webb pushed that the same poll also found that he was believed to be untrustworthy. Mr Raab claimed that what counted was that his party had a credible plan for leaving the EU, whereas Labour did not. In a separate interview, Dawn Butler, shadow spokeswoman on Equalities, defended Jeremy Corbyn's performance in the debate and claimed Labour was offering a binding deal and a result that would be implemented. She claimed his personal neutrality was irrelevant because he had pledged to implement the results of the second referendum. In a Reality Check, Chris Morris said that much of the fall in capitation for schools targeted by Liberal Democrats had occurred when they were part of the coalition. He said the money that the party was planning to spend on education was not yet in the government's possession, and their claims that it would be £50 billion could not be verified.

November 21

In a report from 'marginal' Darlington, Mishal Husain noted that Labour was hoping to win the seat by promises in areas such as housebuilding. The incumbent Labour MP said she was being frank in supporting Remain. The Liberal Democrat candidate said she wanted to stop Brexit, while the Conservative – said to have supported Remain – would not commit to supporting the current deal. Matthew Lawrence, of the think-tank Common Wealth, claimed that climate change policy was more important than Brexit and required radical interventions. Angela Rayner claimed that the Conservatives had not delivered Brexit, had not delivered infrastructure, had wrecked the economy and the NHS, whereas Labour would deliver for the country 'like every Labour government does'. In reality check, Chris Morris suggested that Labour's pledge to build more housing rely on importing 'a huge amount of construction workers' from abroad whether from the EU or elsewhere. Mr Morris also suggested that the slogan "Get Brexit Done" would divert attention away from other policies.

November 22

Bulletins reported the launch of the Brexit Party 'contract' with voters which included a pledge of capping immigration, making a clean break with the EU and to hold Boris Johnson to negotiating a free trade deal with the EU. There was also mention of Plaid Cymru's commitment towards a green revolution and the holding of a second EU referendum. This was fleshed out further at 7am, when it was said that the party's green policies had been costed at £20 million and that it was working in coalition with other parties to achieve a second referendum. John Pienaar opined that the Brexit Party pledge was to the 'hardest possible Brexit that could be conceived'. He reported that Plaid Cymru was part of the anti-Brexit 'alliance', and had other 'big' things to say such as the development of clean energy. Nick Robinson, suggesting that Labour was being 'big and bold' asked if this was a tactic to change the subject from Brexit. Mr Pienaar agreed that the party leaders wanted to do that on what they believed was the strong ground of social justice, a fairer Britain and a redistribution of wealth through taking on 'bankers and billionaires'. He added that the plans were a dream come true for Jeremy Corbyn, but also suggested that Brexit was a thorn in Labour's side because party policy did not define whether it was for or against Leave. Andrew Harding claimed that after the Brexit vote, Britain's allies in the international community had started to desert Britain, and the UN was now asserting that the UK was behaving outrageously over the Chagos Islands and should give them back to Mauritius. Nick Robinson suggested that the 'Tories' were trying to claim that Labour's immigration policies added up to 'uncontrolled immigration'. He added that polls showed Britain was divided on the issue, with 'most (later amended to 'nearly half') thinking that immigration had a positive effect on Britain', but two thirds thinking it put pressure on public services and housing. Reporting from Corby, he said Eastern European immigrants had come for affordable homes and available jobs. Mr Robinson found a range of opinions including that immigrants worked really hard, better than UK workers, that Corby was no longer what it had been, and that there was unpleasant discrimination against incomers. He suggested that the town had always relied on immigrant labour, including Scots who came to the steelworks. Chief Secretary to the Treasury Rishi Sunak said Conservatives had built more council homes 2010-16 than in the entire Labour government period. Brexit needed to be achieved so that other policies supporting housing could be introduced. Nick Robinson suggested to John McDonnell that Brexit was the most important election issue but that Labour did not have a clear policy and possibly wanted to hand control of it to a 'cabal' of Momentum supporters and trade unionists. Mr McDonnell claimed Labour members reflected the country as a whole and stressed party policy was a second referendum. Nigel Farage was interviewed about his 'contract'. He denied he had broken faith with his party by standing down candidates and claimed the position had changed because Boris Johnson had pledged to go for a Canadian-style deal. He was also asked about his immigration policies, with Mishal Husain suggesting that the numbers he wanted to allow would not fill NHS vacancies. In Reality Check, Chris Morris claimed that net immigration figures were

lower in the past because a lot Britons were leaving the UK and stressed the current high numbers were not from the EU, so Brexit would not make a huge difference. He added that economy needed immigrants, pointing out that a third of jobs in construction were held by EU nationals. In future, the 'trouble was' that these immigrants might be attracted elsewhere. Mr Morris also claimed that Brexit Party ads suggesting that 5 million Labour voters wanted Brexit were untrue because the actual figure was between 3 million and four.

November 23

Bulletins said that on Question Time, Jeremy Corbyn had 'tried to neutralise a line of attack' by saying that he would be neutral in the second referendum. Iain Watson added that Jo Swinson had also faced a hostile question about her Remain position, while Nicola Sturgeon had said she wanted Scotland to be able to choose its own future. He then focused on that Boris Johnson had been challenged on 'issues of trust' and his stewardship of public services, as well as Russian interference. Justin Webb said the edition of Question Time had shown there was hostility to all politicians. Ian Blackford of SNP said his party wanted to block Mr Johnson from Downing Street and had a responsibility to stop a damaging Brexit. He said that if Jeremy Corbyn became minority prime minister, he would have to respect Scotland's self-determination, and would not discuss other matters unless he did. Justin Webb asked health secretary Matt Hancock if the plans were being resumed for a 'no deal' Brexit. Mr Hancock replied they were, but asserted they would not be needed because a trade deal could be reached, despite what Mr Webb said about the lack of time available. Laura Pidcock, asked about apparent confusion about the Labour policy on Brexit – and claims that it favoured Remain – said Jeremy Corbyn was remaining neutral and claimed there was a credible Leave option for those who wanted it through the second referendum. She added that Mr Corbyn was being 'brave' because he was allowing the people to have the final say. She discounted that being neutral was about being ineffective as a leader. Justin Webb asked if there would be Leavers on the Labour EU negotiating team. Ms Pidcock claimed that there would be a variety of opinions among team members and they would be 'professional'. Mr Webb suggested that Labour Leave voters might not accept that. Ms Pidcock said again the team would not be biased. Simon Jack suggested to Liberal Democrat Chukka Umunna that party leader Jo Swinson had come under pressure from remain voters in the Question Time audience for wanting to revoke Article 50. Mr Umunna argued that she had handled issues well, and turned his attack on Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn for handling matters badly. He added that his party would not change its policy on Brexit of fighting to stay in the EU, and if they did not get a majority in the Commons would continue with the second referendum campaign. Justin Webb suggested the party's target of 320 seats was unrealistic from a base of 12. Mr Umunna replied the party needed as many seats as possible to stop Brexit, and asserted that it was vital to stay in the EU to save the NHS. The main aim was to stop the immeasurable harm being perpetrated by Boris Johnson and was still planning 'no

deal'. In a constituency report from Felixstowe, a vox pop said politicians did not do what they promised, such as getting more money for the NHS through Brexit. Another said he supported 'no deal' and believed Boris Johnson would deliver Brexit in an election which was all about Brexit.

November 25

Norman Smith claimed the Conservative manifesto was 'cautious' because they did not want to pull the focus away from the single narrative of Brexit, as Theresa May's 'disastrous manifesto' had done. He noted the difference between Conservative and Labour spending plans and said Labour had the previous day added to its promises. Ross Hawkins, in a package about social care, included an observation that Gillian and Les were persuaded by 'Tory' promises on public spending and Brexit, but Andy, said to be a Brexiteer, said he was less convinced about Boris Johnson's 'deal'. Mishal Husain said the Conservative manifesto was designed not to frighten the horses, and claimed that four months previously, Boris Johnson had sounded more ambitious about social care. Culture secretary Nicky Morgan denied that Boris Johnson did not have a clear plan. Ms Husain said it was untrue to suggest Brexit would be done in January and doubted that a trade deal could be done in 2020. Ms Morgan maintained a deal could be done. Ms Husain suggested the trade deal would be 'incredibly complicated' and that leaving was a 'far off' reality. Laura Kuenssberg commented that the Conservative manifesto did not aim to shake up the campaign. This was because they lived in fear of what had happened last time. The core message was to get Brexit done. She claimed that Ms Husain had been right to press on the timescale. Nicky Morgan had 'sort' of admitted that the second stage would be an enormous challenge. There was a great deal of scepticism over whether it could be done to the prime minister's deadline as expressed in the manifesto. Ian Blackford of SNP claimed that 10 years of austerity had been wasteful, and wanted to see an end to it; wanted continued free movement of people; and that the issue of nuclear weapons on Scottish soil was of 'paramount importance'. In reality check, Chris Morris said (at length) 'getting Brexit done' could not be drilled into, and was likely to lead to disappointment. He maintained that confidence in business would not be restored until more details emerged and that the next year would be dominated 'by the rush to a trade agreement' and so other policies on the NHS and the economy would not be tackled. He said the time allotted to the deal was not enough and the year would be 'fraught and frenetic' and could lead to 'no deal'. Brexit was not going to be done. Lord O'Neill, of Chatham House, said Brexit would not be done in 2020 and would require an extension.

November 26

Bulletins said Lord Heseltine, the former Deputy Prime Minister, had urged members of his party to vote for former party members who had had the whip removed and were standing as

independents or Liberal Democrats. Norman Smith said Tony Blair's and Lord Heseltine's interventions showed how far Brexit had pretty much eviscerated the old traditional centre ground in politics, had polarised debate and totally shattered normal party loyalties. Felicity Evans examined voting intentions in Wales and said Brexit and spending on public services were key issues. Chris Paige noted that in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionist had swung back towards supporting Remain but still were working with the DUP to maximise the unionist vote. The SDLP for its part was standing down in some areas to help the Remain vote. He suggested that some unionist seats were vulnerable to Remain parties. Michael Heseltine was asked whether Brexit was more important than Jeremy Corbyn becoming prime minister. Lord Heseltine replied that he was not fit and would not be elected, and he could not support those who wanted to make the country poorer by leaving the EU. Nick Robinson said that Jo Swinson wanted to revoke Article 50. Lord Heseltine said this would not happen. He added that it was complete nonsense to say that Brexit could be completed by Christmas, and Britain was faced by the possibility again of 'no deal'. Mr Robinson asked if he was being 'startlingly complacent' in risking Mr Corbyn. Lord Heseltine repeated that this would not happen. Sir Geoffrey Donaldson, chief whip of the DUP, said that no party in Northern Ireland supported the Boris Johnson Brexit deal and he believed it would create further instability as well as fundamentally changing the relationship between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He added that it could breach the Good Friday Agreement and the issue of a border in the Irish Sea needed to be re-examined. He said the preference was for a deal in which the UK as a whole left the EU, in line with the referendum result. Justin Webb asked if the current deal did that. Mr Donaldson said it did not and created a trade border, significantly increasing the costs of Northern Ireland businesses in their biggest market. He added that Mr Johnson would be foolish to impose such a deal because it would be a threat to peace. Michael Gove asserted that Lord Heseltine was a long term supporter of European integration and of the single currency and said the Brexit deal had the support of all Conservative candidates. Mr Webb said that nobody believed that a trade deal could be done in 2020, with Ivan Rogers – a former ambassador to the EU – stating that the clock would be run down to a cliff edge and 'no deal'. Mr Gove said Mr Rogers had always been sceptical, but Boris Johnson had proved it was possible to make deals. Mr Webb said trade deals generally took years. Mr Gove said the structure of the deal had already been set out and it worked well in the UK and EU's interests, and provided for no tariffs for goods or services. He added that Lord Heseltine wanted to stay in the single market, but everyone in financial services said that was not possible because it would preclude the UK having a say in the rules. Being outside would allow the UK to innovate outside the bureaucratic rules of the EU. Nick Robinson noted that the Chief Rabbi and Michael Heseltine had both intervened in the election and Laura Kuenssberg suggested that developments were 'very strange' and it seemed that 'old loyalties' were melting away, adding that she was not as confident about polls as Lord Heseltine. In reality check, Chris Morris confirmed that Michael Gove's estimate of the combined cost of an EU and Scottish independence referendum, at £138m, was broadly correct, but suggested the government had

spent £100m on a 'get ready for Brexit' in October, as well as £2 billion in preparing for 'no deal'. He also said there was already a single market for services (with holes in it). He claimed it was more integrated than anything similar anywhere in the world and it provided guaranteed access to the EU market. Conor Murphy of Sinn Féin asserted that Northern Ireland was being taken out of the EU against its wishes and that he saw the election to reaffirm it wanted to Remain and avert damage to the economy. Justin Webb asked if his party would work to overturn a Conservative majority by taking up seats they won in the Commons and suggested they might help trigger another referendum. Mr Murphy replied that a hung parliament was unlikely and that his party had no interest in defining the political future of Great Britain. He asserted that separately, the party had used its influence in Dublin and Brussels and put the issues of Ireland front and centre of the agenda there. Mr Webb suggested that some in the audience at Queen's University believed that they should take up their seats or do deals with other parties so the seats in the Commons were occupied. Mr Murphy replied that those who voted for his party were fully aware of their policies. Student Emma Shaw said there was anger that the border which the Johnson deal created in the Irish Sea would create an 'economic All Ireland'. Another student, Lisa Whitten, claimed the election was about the provision of adequate services, and that Ireland was no longer divided between Unionist and Nationalist.

November 27

Bulletins said the SNP manifesto attacked 'get Brexit done' as an illusion because there would not be time. James Shaw reported the SNP goals included stopping Brexit and the holding of a second independence referendum, and stated that the party would only support Labour at a price, which would include considerably more spending on the NHS. Kevin Connolly reported that the new European Union Commission was getting off to a difficult start with some candidates for office failing to get parliamentary approval. He also reported that for the first time, the UK would not have an EU commissioner because Boris Johnson thought the appointment could delay Brexit further. Nick Robinson said there was scepticism in the Commission that the UK could do a deal by the end of 2020. Mr Connolly stressed that the talks would be of 'enormous complexity' and said that the doubts emanated from Michel Barnier. He added that proceedings had been launched against the UK by the EU for not appointing a commissioner. Norman Smith noted that the SNP manifesto claimed Brexit would be profoundly damaging to the Scottish economy and that Boris Johnson would not get Brexit done. James Naughtie said the Scottish Conservative manifesto launch had not mentioned Brexit, the emphasis instead in the entire campaign being how to avoid an independence referendum. He said the approach was thus 'entirely negative', based on what they were against. He suggested it might be 'good sense' in that anti-independence feeling needed a home, and noted that earlier talk of a 'Tory' wipe out was not being played down. Mr Naughtie concluded that the Scottish party did have a cause and it had little to do with Brexit. And they were now undoubtedly happier than when the election campaign

had started. Mishal Husain wondered whether Boris Johnson could lose his Uxbridge seat. There were vox pops for and against, and pollster opinion that the constituency was now more 'diverse' and shifting away from Conservative. Stephen Gethins of the SNP said that austerity needed to end and argued that Brexit would hit the public coffers hard as well as causing problems for EU nationals and medical supplies. Ms Husain suggested that a vote for the SNP would not stop Brexit because his party could not win a parliamentary majority. Mr Gethins argued that the SNP through the Benn Act and other measures had helped avoid Brexit. He said his party would continue in that work. Nick Robinson suggested that a new Liberal Democrat policy on the minimum wage had been adopted because of problems with the policy of reversing Article 50. Sam Gyimah said his party did want to stop Brexit and was the unequivocal party for Remain. He added that he had not left the Conservative Party to put Jeremy Corbyn in office and his party would remain the party of a people's vote.

November 28

Bulletins claimed that the Labour Party had adopted a new election strategy after senior figures had admitted that the party was struggling in some Leave areas. Iain Watson commented that the party had over-estimated the Liberal Democrat threat and so the remainder of the campaign would feature party figures who backed a Leave deal rather than Remain, and the message that a new referendum would not be simply a back door Remain device. Another item about polling said that latest figures suggested the Conservatives were on course for a health majority of 68. It was also said that Dominic Cummings had warned that the position on the ground was much tighter than polls said. Norman Smith said the Labour Party had not quite pushed the panic button but there was concern about what was happening in the North and Midlands, and a feeling that the Brexit policy was 'too clever by half'. He added that it was too ambiguous for Leave supporters as 'as we know, Brexit is a very binary issue, you are either for it or against it'. Mr Smith said there was nervousness that senior figures represented too much the 'metropolitan view' and that there had been too much emphasis on seeing off the perceived Liberal Democrat threat. He added that policy would not change but figures supporting a Leave deal would be more prominent, and a clearer focus on 'bread and butter' issues. Naomi Smith of the 'pro-Remain' group Best for Britain, said polling indicated that Labour must take care too far towards Leavers and opined that a 'hard' Brexit could be stopped by tactical voting. She claimed that the difference between Boris Johnson winning or losing was around 117,000 votes. Justin Webb explored with her the potential impact of tactical voting, but pushed that people would stick to their party loyalties. Ms Smith argued it was up to voters to decide what impact they wanted to have. Ross Hawkins, reporting from Oxford West, noted that all the candidates had voted Remain and that the Conservative candidate even allowed for a period of extended negotiations if it was necessary to help the economy. Simon Jack said an issue was how much the UK would stick to EU regulations or 'bend' towards US ones. Emily Jones, Associate Professor of

Public Policy at Oxford, said discussions between the UK and the US over a trade deal suggested a normal scoping exercise, although the US had taken issues off the table but the UK had not done so with the NHS. Minette Batters, President of the NFU, said she had concerns about US standards relating to beef and chicken. She said she did not want regulatory divergence from the EU, and contended that at the moment, there was no guarantee that food safety would not be compromised. Mr Jack suggested to shadow Labour minister Barry Gardiner that his party's claims about risks to the NHS in a US trade deal were being pressed to divert attention away from claims of antisemitism and doubts about their Brexit strategy. Mr Gardiner said not and claimed moves were afoot which would force privatisation. He denied that claims of costs of £500 million were widely exaggerated. He asserted that party policies including public pay increases were already attractive to voters and were trying to appeal to all sectors of the population on Brexit. Health secretary Matt Hancock stressed that the NHS was not up for sale and would not be part of a trade deal. The point of talks was to bring prices down, not up. Justin Webb suggested it was a mistake not to take the NHS off the table. Mr Hancock claimed that this had been raised because Labour wanted to divert attention away from their problems, and he also denied that food standards would be compromised – if anything, the reverse would happen. Mr Webb said the US wanted the UK to conform to their standards. Mr Webb suggested it was not possible to reach US and EU trade deals and asked what the priority was and asked why Boris Johnson would not be interviewed by Andrew Neil. In reality check, Chris Morris said that Labour claims of £500 million a week of savings to the NHS through not agreeing to a US trade deal were 'a little suspect' and would only come about if a 'disastrous' trade deal was struck. He added that the US talks had included drugs pricing.

November 29

Bulletins said that Labour was setting out details of how Labour would create one million new green jobs. Andrew Walker said John McDonnell had promised an investment blitz which would bring prosperity to every region which tackling the climate emergency. Proposals included carbon capture and tidal barrages. He noted that Conservatives had said the policy was designed to distract attention from their Brexit failure. The 8am edition included claims by retiring European Council president Donald Tusk that there would be a special place in hell for Brexiteers and that he hoped the UK's departure would be reversed. There was also mention of a more conciliatory approach by the Belgian Prime Minister, although he had said he would defend vigorously EU interests in future negotiations. A constituency report from Ipswich (Labour) – which had voted Leave but had a Remain MP - featured a voter who said he would no longer vote Labour because of their Brexit policy. Other vox pops included a supporter of Jeremy Corbyn, a Green supporter and a Conservative who wanted Brexit. John McDonnell asserted people would vote Labour because of problems with public services. He denied there had been

a change in election strategy, only efforts to make sure people understood their very credible Brexit strategy of a Leave deal and the choice to remain. Sir Alan Thompson, the former UK NATO representative, claimed that there needed to be a roadmap for building European military strength, but denied this would include a European army, but rather improved military collaboration in the shadow of possible US withdrawal. A constituency report from Newport contained a vox pop fearing that the election would not sort out Brexit. Another said there should be a second referendum because people did not have enough information at the first. A third said the wishes of those who wanted to Leave should be respected. Another said she would vote Conservative despite previously opting for Labour.

November 30

Bulletins noted that many election events had been cancelled because of the London Bridge 'attack'. The leadership debate had been overshadowed, but Rishi Sunak had stressed getting Brexit done, while Richard Tice had clashed with Nicola Sturgeon over Brexit policy. Chris Cook, of Tortoise news, suggested 'getting Brexit done' was misleading and should be 'prolong Brexit negotiations' because it would take at least a year to achieve an EU trade deal and could result in a 'no deal' cliff edge. Any deal would require accepting EU conditions. He queried why Britain wanted more fishing fleet because the job was dangerous. He warned that the arguments about Remain could continue for years. Professor John Curtice analysed the latest leader debate, and asserted that Labour had created ambiguity about its Brexit stance, Jo Swinson had said Brexit was a bad idea, and the Conservatives had said they were not going to increase taxes. He added that polls showed a Conservative lead of 11 per cent, but with signs of narrowing. That, he said, was a reason for the Conservatives to worry – the election was not in the bag. Tom Newton Dunn of the Sun that Boris Johnson could not win in the handling of the Donald Trump visit because Labour wanted a row over the NHS and the Brexit Party wanted a US trade deal. So there was no plan for a bilateral meeting, something that was unprecedented. Laurence Lukens, a former US Embassy official warned that an approval from Donald Trump could backfire on Boris Johnson. Sam Lowe, of the Centre for European Reform, said the US trade talks could include an enforceable provision on environmental obligations, despite what the US wanted. Molly Scott Cato, of the Green party, claimed negotiations with the US had been going on in secret and it was very disturbing that the US had tried to exclude climate change issues. Her party wanted to introduce a carbon tax at the EU level and wanted to tax more those who did not live up to expectations. Simon Jack asked Ms Scott Cato if she believed the US would much prefer a 'no deal' Brexit. She replied that Boris Johnson was engineering with his colleague a hard Brexit away from EU standards and there was a 'Trump-Johnson' nexus. An election panel feature included a view that the Labour policy on Brexit was good. Sir Vince Cable said he party had switched more towards a 'People's Vote'.

December 2

Bulletins said the Conservative Party was making proposals which they claimed would strengthen border security post-Brexit, while Labour was saying that leaving the EU would undermine the work of border agencies because the UK would lose access to databases. It was also reported that Facebook had deleted a Conservative election broadcast because it contained unauthorised BBC footage. Mishal Husain noted that a Labour 'red wall' seat was Clwyd, which Labour had won in 2017 with a majority of 2,000. Hywel Griffith said the Conservative candidate was confident and was claiming that 80-year-old Labour supporters were changing sides. Peter Dane, the Conservative candidate, said he was getting support from Labour as well as his own side. He denied he was splitting the Leave vote. Mr Griffith noted that Jeremy Corbyn did not have high approval ratings in Wales, but said the Labour candidate – who was Remain – was proud of his party's investment record. The Liberal Democrat said that Rhyl was one of the most deprived areas in Europe and needed EU help. The Plaid Cymru candidate said he struggled to get voters to engage.

December 3

Iain Watson said that Jeremy Corbyn had written to Donald Trump demanding assurances about drug prices and the NHS. He noted that Nicola Sturgeon was proposing an NHS protection bill and had accused Mr Trump of being 'desperate' to charge the NHS more for drugs, while Jo Swinson was pressing for guarantees about food standards. He noted that the Prime Minister had said the NHS would not be part of any international trade negotiation and nor would food standards be compromised. The 7am bulletin had a clip from Jeremy Corbyn saying he would not allow public services to be part of a trade deal with the US. Kevin Connolly reported that in Brussels, the 'avuncular eccentricity' of Jean-Claude Juncker was giving way to the more conventional approach of Ursula von der Leyen, and noted again that the UK would not have a European Commissioner. He said her initial agenda would be dominated by Brexit. Sarah Smith opined that the SNP, in a country which had voted 62 per cent Remain, thought they were on strong ground, in part because stopping Brexit could be achieved by being an independent country. Norman Smith said Downing Street was viewing the Trump visit with 'real apprehension' because he represented 'unpredictable' and because he might draw attention away from Brexit. Conversely, Jeremy Corbyn wanted to create a hullabaloo over the possibility of the NHS being included in trade talks. A report from Scotland noted that the Conservatives were focusing on the independence referendum and preserving the union, and said the need was to make steps to deal with other issues such as farm labour. The SNP, for their part, were arguing about the need for referendums on both Brexit and independence to save Scotland. Justin Webb suggested to the Liberal Democrat candidate that his party could put Labour into power. He

replied that party policy was unique in supporting the union and opposing Brexit and returns showed it would win throughout the country. Mr Webb suggested that there was a contradiction in their Brexit stance, that in the UK they wanted to revoke Article 50, but wanted to stop SNP doing that in Scotland. Will Rennie, the candidate, denied this. Dominic Raab, the Foreign Secretary, denied there was any embarrassment about President Trump's visit and that he was delighted allies were coming together to discuss a range of issues, such as tackling terrorism. Nick Robinson asked again why bilateral meetings were not happening. Mr Raab said the Prime Minister's job was bringing everyone together, not bilaterals. Mr Robinson said political opponents wanted to make sure the NHS was off the table in trade talks and asked why it was not off the agenda. Voters could not trust the Conservatives on this issue. Mr Raab replied that NHS privatisation was not being considered and the UK wanted the cheapest price for drugs. Mr Robinson suggested that in the past, Dominic Raab had proposed privatisation of the NHS. Mr Raab replied that he had argued for limited privatisation of franchises within hospitals, such as Costa coffee shops. Mr Robinson asked if a 'no deal' Brexit was in the frame. Mr Raab said it was, in order to improve the UK's negotiating position, but a deal would be preferred, and that could be achieved in the timeframe of 2020. Ian Blackford insisted to Nick Robinson that higher prices for NHS drugs were a possibility in the proposed trade deal with the US, as a consequence of taking the UK out of the EU. Ross Hawkins, reporting from the Gordon constituency, said the Conservative candidate was talking more about independence than Brexit. The SNP candidate said Brexit was the main issue, and independence. There were vox pops for and against independence, and against Boris Johnson. The Liberal Democrat candidate said constituents thought Brexit was a disaster and did not want independence.

Independence-supporting academic Tom Devine said that if there was a hung parliament, there would be compromise between SNP and Labour and an independence referendum would be held 'in a year or two'. Kezia Dugdale, the former leader of Labour in Scotland said the main issue for Scots was economic security, though the position on Brexit was a key determinant of voting behaviour. She predicted the Conservatives were on course to win 10 seats. Justin Webb said there were those in Scotland who dislike Boris Johnson intensely. Professor Devine suggested the Conservative vote was holding because of their opposition to independence, whereas Labour was offering 'diet' versions of policy on both independence and Brexit. In reality check, Chris Morris, querying Dominic Raab's claim on the programme that it would be possible to strike a trade deal with the EU by the end of 2020, said it was going to be 'extremely tight' and be – in the time available – 'pretty unambitious' with the possibility that it could be knocked off course by issues such as fishing or 'the status of Gibraltar'. He noted that a Changing Europe report talked of the feasible outcome being that the deal would only cover goods with no or only limited provisions for services 'and services are extremely important to the UK economy'. Mr Morris added:

But a lot of what might happen next year also depends on the UK accepting what are known as level playing field provisions, which means sticking close to EU rules on things like workers' rights and environmental protection. And that's where the other trade deal comes in, because Donald Trump, of course, has made it pretty clear that he wouldn't look kindly on any future UK trading relationship with the EU, which would bind the UK close to EU rules on all sorts of things, because he wants to drag the UK much closer to the American orbit.

December 4

Norman Smith said the 'Tories' were delighted with President Trump's slap down of the idea that the NHS would be on the table as part of a US trade deal, though the president was, for many voters, 'toxic full stop', so his endorsement might rebound. There was a discussion between climate alarmists and they said it was vital that the EU had to ensure that fossil fuels were phased out by strong pricing. Jeremy Hunt, former health secretary, claimed that the idea that drug costs could rise for the NHS as a result of a US trade deal was a scare story. Martha Kearney asked whether, when he was health secretary, he had taken drug pricing off the menu in trade talks. Mr Hunt said it had been completely clear that drug pricing was not on the agenda. Mr Hunt said 'no deal' remained a possibility because if it was taken off the negotiating table, good deal might not happen. He insisted that the EU had said a deal was possible. Labour shadow minister Barry Gardiner insisted that there was a danger to NHS drug supplies as part of the US trade talks and claimed Donald Trump had been 'schooled' to backtrack on the threat. Chukka Umunna claimed that third parties were always squeezed, and that additional pressure had been created by the Conservative-Brexit Party alliance. Martha Kearney asked whether the pledge to revoke Article 50 had been a mistake. Mr Umunna claimed that the party was on course to deprive the Conservatives of a majority, and the goal remained to stop Brexit. In Reality Check, Chris Morris said that the Labour focus on Trump and the NHS was like Groundhog day and he noted that the claim of extra spending of £500 million a week on drugs was not as prominent. Mr Morris suggested that US drug companies did want access to the UK market and were lobbying for changes in procurement practice. He commented if a blanket ban was imposed on a deal covering drugs and agricultural products, then it could be asked how useful a trade deal would be.

December 5

Bulletins reported that the Conservatives had set out their plans for the first 100 days in office, but opposition parties had said they would be mired in Brexit for years to come. SNP had said they would block an 'economically damaging' Brexit. Norman Smith noted that the Conservative release emphasised getting Brexit done, but claimed that a chink in this was that next phase of trade of trade talks was more complex and difficult. He added that to talk about the first 100

days was a cliché and that previous efforts to do so had led to less dramatic results than promised. Martha Kearney said that Unionists in Ireland feared that the Brexit deal would create an economic wedge down the Irish Sea. From North Down, Chris Paige said the incumbent independent unionist, a Remainer, was stepping down. The DUP candidate said Brexit was not talked about much on the doorstep – more important were health and education. Mr Paige noted that Ulster Unionists had not supported Brexit and the party's candidate said the DUP – despite their alleged influence – had created the biggest-ever threat to the union. There were vox pops for and against Brexit. In a regional round-up Peter Henley in the south of England said nothing specific about Brexit, other than it had stumped the whole political world. Tom Ireland said the north contained many Leave supporting constituencies. He said Labour's red wall now seemed vulnerable because voters saw the Conservatives better placed to deliver Brexit, and it wasn't necessary to look far to find Labour voters who were switching sides. He said the fog of Brexit hung over the campaign like 'fog on the Humber'. Justin Webb suggested that according to focus groups, the only slogan cutting through was "get Brexit done" and suggested to shadow minister John Healey that people weren't heeding other policies. Mr Healey replied that the 'Get Brexit done' phrase was misleading because it would go on for years. The party's improved policy for the homeless was essential. Professor John Curtice noted that the Conservative lead over Labour had narrowed to 10 points and other parties had been squeezed out by a rise in support for both main parties. There was still an element of volatility centred on the Brexit vote. Just over three quarters of people who voted Leave were going to vote for the Conservatives or the Brexit Party and 80 per cent of those voting Remain would favour a party wanting another referendum. Martha Kearney said the Conservative slogan 'Get Brexit Done' might look good on the side of a bus, but there was an awful lot to do after January. Chancellor Sajid Javid said his party wanted to end the current paralysis. Ms Kearney said the slogan might not be possible to deliver but what would happen in the first 100 days was only the divorce. Mr Javid insisted a trade deal would be delivered by the end of 2020. Ms Kearney said it was a very tight timetable and would have to be agreed by June to be approved by the EU in time, and that the devil was in the detail such as tariffs. Mr Javid said it would be a deep and detailed agreement which enabled the UK to take back control of borders and would include zero tariffs. Ms Kearney asked which country had done such a deal. Mr Javid replied that the UK's departure was in unique circumstances. Ms Kearney said there would be issues of regulatory divergence which also would take time, as David Gauke had said. Mr Javid again disagreed. Ms Kearney said another problem was the Northern Ireland border, and a further one was the possibility of 'no deal', something which the CBI said was its worst fear. Mr Javid maintained there would be a deal. Laura Kuenssberg commented that in an unconventional campaign, in which Brexit had 'fuzzed the lines'. In the final days, the 'Tories' would try to secure and nail down the block of Leave voters and Labour would try to capitalise on concerns about austerity. She speculated that the Conservative had sought to split the Remain vote, but that had not happened because there had seemingly been no surge by the Liberal Democrats. That made it harder for the Conservatives

to win Labour seats. Justin Webb said there was genuine nervousness in the Conservative-supporting newspapers. He also said Today's constituency reports were showing that there was a 'dour, depressed atmosphere' among those being asked to vote. Ms Kuenssberg said this was also because the political machine had creaked and heaved and had not been able to find a solution to Brexit. Boris Johnson had been projecting himself as the one who could fix that, but that was hotly contested. Ms Kuenssberg wondered what 'Get Brexit Done' actually meant 'because it doesn't mean that suddenly turn on the taps and milk and honey will flow out'. In Reality Check, Chris Morris said that Sajid Javid had appeared to suggest that both Brexit and a trade agreement were 'oven ready'. He pointed out the trade commissioner believed it could be done in theory but it would be difficult. And the UK did not even have a trade agreement because that was not allowed until after the UK had left. He added that most trade agreements tried to bring people together, but the UK wanted to move apart; that another issue was that full market access would be difficult when the trade rules were moving apart; and that the possibility of 'no deal' really mattered to businesses. He added that Brexit Party Facebook adds, as well as targeting Labour Leave voters, was also trying to appeal to wavering 'Tories' in seats they had not won in decades.

December 6

Bulletins said Labour was setting out plans to help small business. The Conservatives were saying that sorting out Brexit would help businesses. The Liberal Democrats claimed that Labour did not have a plan for ensuring the UK stayed in the EU, thus they were not helping business. Iain Watson noted that Boris Johnson had accused Jeremy Corbyn of trying to rig the promised EU referendum by offering two million EU nationals the vote. Mr Watson claimed that there was a flaw in that in that he did not believe Jeremy Corbyn would try and load the dice against his own Leave deal and was saying he would remain neutral. He added that EU nationals already had the vote in local and European elections, so there was an argument for that. He asserted that Mr Johnson was thus reminding former Labour voters that Labour was offering a second referendum and 'talking about the chaos that might ensue'. Mr Watson also claimed that Boris Johnson's refusal to take part in an interview with Andrew Neil might allow Mr Corbyn to pull that evening's leader debate on to issues of trust, and he might be able to get through there. James Naughtie, in Walsall, said the Conservatives believed they could win ironclad Labour seats and noted Boris Johnson's 'Brexit-fuelled advance through the region. Labour believed the threat could be countered by focusing on the NHS. Jeremy Corbyn had made only one mention of Brexit in a recent speech. In a regional report, Tony Roe in the East Midlands suggested Brexit had dominated and the Conservative 'catchphrase' had got through, even to a miner who had always voted Labour, though there was a lack of trust towards all parties that promises would be kept. Kathryn Stanczyszyn, in the West Midlands, said that people were not embracing the

Conservatives wholesale, but were saying they were the lesser of two evils. There were signs that the red wall was breaking down in key Labour heartlands, but they could be overstated because lots of people were still voting Labour, Mr Roe added that in some seats people were undecided and he had found a Conservative Remainer who was not a big fan of Boris Johnson who had said he would stick with his party because there had been a democratic vote. In another report from the West Midlands, a range of opinions from different members of the community was expressed, including that Asian voters might be swayed by Brexit considerations, but crime and school 'cuts' were also important. Another contributor claimed that three years on, there was more detachment about Brexit. Ross Hawkins noted that the Conservative candidate had refused to speak to him, and there was input from a Labour candidate who said Conservative claims about Brexit were 'nonsense'. Omar Khan, of the Runnymede Trust, said that one in three ethnic voters had opted for Brexit, but were less likely to opt for the Conservative Party. Michael Gove said that EU nationals – though contributing to national life – had never voted in referendums or general elections and to allow them to do so now would not be fair. He claimed that Labour's wish for them to vote was an assault on democracy. Martha Kearney asked why he thought Jeremy Corbyn would try rig a vote against his own EU deal. Mr Gove argued that Labour wanted Remain and Remain-light. Mishal Husain challenged shadow business minister Rebecca Long-Bailey about why she thought EU nationals should have a vote in a second referendum. She replied they had been in the UK for a long time and those who contributed to the economy should have such a vote. In Reality Check, Chris Morris said Michael Gove's argument about EU nationals having a vote in a future referendum did not stack up because he did not know how they would vote. He claimed he had met EU nationals who were in favour of leaving the EU. He did not produce any figures to back his claim.

December 7

Bulletins said that in the latest leader debate, Boris Johnson had gone on the attack and accused Jeremy Corbyn of indecision and questioned how a deal would be negotiated when the shadow cabinet wanted Remain. For his part Mr Corbyn had said he doubted that the Conservative Brexit plan would work and would introduce border checks between the UK and Northern Ireland. Nick Eardley said that Jeremy Corbyn had also asserted that the NHS would be under attack and that plans for new nurses did not stack up. John Pienaar said there had been no knockout blow. Chris Morris, in Reality Check, suggested that Boris Johnson had landed a blow by linking Mr Corbyn to terrorism, but added that the Prime Minister had doubled down on dubious claims about Northern Ireland and his Brexit deal. He had found a way back to 'get Brexit done' several times but claimed his supporters would be disappointed when they found out what he actually meant. The truth was that neither had a simple solution to Brexit, but the Conservatives had a better slogan. Mr Morris – discussing points about the NHS – said Mr Corbyn had done a good job targeting his core audience by using phrases such as ending

austerity but the documents about the NHS did not say, as he claimed, that the NHS was going to be privatised. The question was whether he would thus have changed many minds. Mishal Husain, noting that the Liberal Democrats were claiming that nearly a million businesses had closed because of 'Brexit uncertainty', suggested that the real reasons were other factors such as business rates and internet shopping. Sam Gyimah said these problems were involved, but the two main parties were throwing cards in the air (through their Brexit policies). He claimed his party had been squeezed because it was the 'third party' and stressed again that Liberal Democrat policies were the only ones in the national interest. Mishal Husain said that Alexandra Hall, the diplomat the UK Brexit team in Washington because 'she could not peddle half-truths on behalf of government she could not trust'. John Casson, a former British ambassador said she had made the right decision if she could not perform her duties. Ms Husain said there was a difference between not wanting to put something against your personal beliefs and the government pursuing things that 'are not wholly true, misleading or disingenuous arguments', and she also cited behaviour towards UK institutions by politicians. Mr Casson said that because the EU referendum overturned 40 years of diplomacy, it had required a lot of humility. Ms Husain asked whether Ms Hall's view were widely shared. He replied that the truth about Brexit did not sit neatly on the side of a bus. The UK could not benefit from the EU economy and be much more closely integrated with the world economy. Nicky Morgan, reacting to that Irish EU official Phil Hogan had said there was no accurate way of predicting how long a trade deal would take, claimed that Boris Johnson had already reached one deal quicker than expected and would do so again. Ms Husain said the trade deal was more complex. Ms Morgan repeated her views. Ms Husain said Labour had promised to get a different deal in three months. Ms Morgan said the position was not that clear. Ms Husain suggested Boris Johnson had been frivolous in his response to a question about politicians who lied. Ms Morgan said people could choose who they trusted and that Mr Johnson's scourging remarks had been intended to be light-hearted, but were part of a serious, intense debate. Ms Husain said that Mr Johnson had chosen not apologise for his mistakes, then that the Treasury believed there would be a Northern Ireland border and the 'deal' could cut it off from huge swathes of the UK market. Ms Morgan said this was not the case. Northern Ireland was going to be leaving the EU customs union, and other issues would be resolved once the election was over. That was the whole reason for holding the election – parliament had been paralysed. She repeated that the 2016 referendum result had to be delivered. Andy McDonald, Shadow Transport Secretary, said the documents about the NHS had veracity, but agreed there should be an inquiry into how they had been leaked. He argued that the government needed to be open about future trading arrangements and transparent. Justin Webb also asked whether Leavers would trust Labour's EU negotiating team. Mr McDonald said a credible deal which protected jobs and the economy would be achieved, and it would be the best possible deal because the Labour team would believe in what they were doing because it would be in their interest that it was the best deal. Mr Webb if he would campaign to Remain whatever the deal. Mr McDonald wondered why presenters were making

such a mountain of this when the Labour policy was clear. Matt Hancock asked Barry Gardiner if he was in favour of Brexit because on doorsteps it was a key issue. Ross Hawkins suggested people mentioned Brexit because Boris Johnson kept on talking about it. Mr Hancock said he was over analysing – it was a key issue. In an election panel, Sir Vince Cable claimed that in the leader debate, nobody had put the Remain argument or challenged Boris Johnson's 'get Brexit done' proposition. He maintained the exclusion of Jo Swinson had negatively impacted the whole election debate, causing simmering resentment among Remain voters. Robert Blackman-Woods (Labour) maintained that the Labour Brexit policy was clear and strong, against suggestions from Mishal Husain that the policy was a vulnerability of Jeremy Corbyn. David Lidington (Conservative) said Boris John had pushed the Brexit policy and one nation Conservatism. It was put to Mr Lidington that in the past he had written that Mr Johnson was not properly Conservative. Sir Vince Cable repeated that his party was projecting Remain and that Brexit could not be done at all, and that Jeremy Corbyn had in the past supported Leave. He claimed his party could win 30 to 40 seats, which could determine what happened next. Ms Blackman-Woods repeated Labour would sort Brexit. Mr Lidington said his party needed a majority.

December 9

Bulletins said that Labour would use their first 100 days to nationalise utilities, while the Conservative message was that Labour heartlands had been betrayed on Brexit. Jonathan Blake said Labour's plans were 'ambitious' while Boris Johnson was visiting Sunderland urging voters to break the Brexit deadlock and unlock investment. The Liberal Democrats were pledging another referendum. Ben Wright elaborated on the news headlines and suggested that Boris Johnson was 'barrelling' through the Labour red wall and suggesting to Leave voters that they had been betrayed. Labour, he claimed, was aiming to say that Labour would create prosperity and better public services, though it did not have an effective crystallised message such as that of the Conservatives. Nick Robinson said not many voters had been seen around the Conservative bus. Mr Wright said that was partly because of security issues. Things were a far cry from 1992 and 1997 when leading politicians plunged into crowds. Boris Johnson's visits were brief and aimed mainly at party activists. Martyn Oates said that in the South-West there was a continued churn of party allegiances because of Brexit, with the Liberal Democrats hoping to win back some of their former seats. Labour was getting a frosty reception on some doorsteps, with some candidates being called 'traitors'. Kevin Fitzpatrick, in the North-West, suggested that divisions over Brexit had led to people assessing their old party loyalties. Support had now seemed to have ebbed away for the Brexit Party, though it could affect the results in some seats. He suggested that many working class people could not connect with Jeremy Corbyn in the way they did with Boris Johnson and the message of getting Brexit done. Jo Swinson said her party was setting out legislation for a second referendum, to tackle the climate emergency and to improve mental health and the economy. Justin Webb asked if 'revoke' was now off the agenda.

Ms Swinson said the second referendum was the best way of tackling that and 'revoke' would only have happened if her party formed the government. She added that her party would not put Jeremy Corbyn into Number 10. Nick Robinson said a DexEU document circulating Whitehall raised serious doubts about whether the infrastructure, systems and staff would be ready to deliver the Boris Johnson Brexit promise. Chief Secretary to the Treasury Rishi Sunak said people had said Boris Johnson would not get a Brexit deal but he had so those who wanted Brexit should ensure there was a majority government. Mr Robinson again said it might not be possible to leave by the end of 2020. Mr Sunak repeated his previous answer, that it would be. Mr Robinson asked twice if 'no deal' planning would resume. Mr Sunak said it would not be needed because there would be a deal, though many things, such as the new immigration system needed planning. Mr Robinson said Boris Johnson was asking to be trusted when the Treasury and DexEU said there would be Northern Ireland Border checks but there would not be. Mr Sunak said the document showed Northern Ireland would have unfettered access to UK markets and would be part of UK customs territory. Mr Robinson replied that did not mean no checks. Mr Sunak said there would not be. Mr Robinson suggested that the new immigration policy – in telling businesses who they could hire – was not business friendly. Mr Sunak said the new system would be responsive to business needs. The need first was to leave the EU. Nick Robinson asked Arlene Foster of the DUP if she believed the Johnson deal was a 'betrayal act'. Ms Foster said her party was very frustrated at what was being proposed. Mr Sunak had said Northern Ireland would have unfettered access to the UK markets, but had not said it would operate the other way round and it was vital that it should be two-way. She added that HMRC officials had made it very clear to her that checks would operate from the UK to Ireland as the default position, and said this was very concerning because it went to the heart of the Union. She refused to be drawn on whether a description of Boris Johnson as a liar was accurate but insisted again there could be not be border checks between different parts of the UK. Nick Robinson asked again if she trusted Boris Johnson. Ms Foster said there must be clarity on what was being proposed. Mr Robinson suggested that she believed the Union was being betrayed and had played her cards and lost. Ms Foster said he had broken his word and that she would continue to push for the best deal for Northern Ireland. Mr Robin said that a recent poll, even the unionist community wanted Remain so she only spoke for a 'small portion' of the people in Northern Ireland. Ms Foster replied that the whole of the UK had voted Leave and it was vital to leave as one nation. Laura Kuenssberg speculated that if the 'Tories' did not win a majority the DUP could come into play in a big way. She claimed that the Prime Minister was not doing himself any favours by refusing to accept there would be more customs checks because there would be and they would be 'levied' by UK authorities. It was not possible to beat the DUP in the detail, as Theresa May had discovered. Sarah Smith said it had been assumed that Boris Johnson would not be considered an electoral asset to Scottish voters and 'get Brexit done' would not resonate north of the border, but 'the Tories' had made the election, as far as they were concerned, about Scottish independence. They had projected Nicola Sturgeon as a 'pantomime baddie' and polls

suggested they would hold on to more seats than had been projected. She added that the SNP had made their central message 'stop Brexit' and to say that their price for supporting Labour would be a second independence referendum. Ms Smith added that the Labour Party had not done themselves any favours by trying to 'split the difference' by supporting a delayed independence referendum. Thus Labour was no longer seen as a unionist party, with the result that some of their votes might go to the Conservatives. In Reality Check, Chris Morris claimed that on border issues – to the extent that this was a Brexit election – the Conservatives were saying 'trust us' but the biggest issue of the election would be left with 'an awful lot of questions left hanging'. The Conservative argument was that they had surprised by people by getting a deal and could do it again. Mr Morris commented that he had achieved a deal but 90 per cent was the same as before and what he had changed was not going down well at all with Arlene Foster in that there would be border checks, as was stated in the agreement. Nick Robinson interjected that the FT story based on a Treasury leak said it would be 'a major challenge' to deliver Brexit on the current timetable. Mr Morris said it would be because it was about employing more staff, putting new systems in place and potentially paying tariffs on goods moving between the UK and Ireland. It was a system never put in place before. It would be a big bureaucratic exercise and there was concern in Whitehall that there would not be enough time to do so. Sian Berry, of the Green Party, said that in some seats, where the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru had stood aside, her party was the strongest Remain candidate. In addition one in five people was saying that Green issues were the ones they wanted to vote upon. She maintained the Green party had been on the right side of the Brexit debate from the start. Isabel Hardman (Spectator) said the closing arguments were 'get Brexit done' and end austerity. Jeremy Corbyn had been easy to ridicule because of his neutral stance on Brexit. Sonja Soda (The Observer) maintained Labour had tried to avoid talking about Brexit. Justin Webb added that correspondents had noted that people in working class communities complained about Labour's Brexit position and Jeremy Corbyn personally. Ms Soda agreed that the Article 50 policy had 'done for' the Liberal Democrats.

December 10

Iain Watson said that with the Conservative Party focusing on its core Brexit message, party strategists now believed Boris Johnson was now 'more vulnerable' on issues of trust following his reaction to a photograph of a four-year-old boy on a hospital floor. Mr Johnson had also suggested that tactical voting was a danger and could lead to a hung parliament. Norman Smith noted that Boris Johnson would be in the West Midlands and would warn about tactical voting. He suggested the NHS issues of the previous day had been a 'bucket of cold water' on Conservative high command. Nick Robinson suggested there were two elections – one to capture Leave voters in the North, the other for Remain voters in the South. Richard Moss (North-east) said the Conservatives were targeting three Labour strongholds with Labour campaigners saying

they were getting tough reactions to their Brexit policies and Jeremy Corbyn as leader. There was a concern among Conservatives about placing too much store on their poll lead. In London, Tim Donovan said the Conservatives had not done much campaigning, and Jeremy Corbyn was seen as 'less virulent'. He speculated that Londoners liked the focus on public services and equality/diversity. Mr Donovan said businesses felt let down by Boris Johnson, and added that the Liberal Democrats might come in short of what they needed. Nigel Farage was asked why he had said he would spoil his ballot paper. He answered that Boris Johnson had reneged on wanting a Canada-style deal, and if he pursued the current one it would not get Brexit done. Nick Robinson suggested that he should thus have run against the Conservatives. Mr Farage countered that it would have gifted seats to the Liberal Democrats in London and in the North, the Brexit Party was the only one that 'millions' of Labour Leave supporters would accept. Mr Robinson next suggested he was thus supporting a deal which he thought was atrocious. Mr Farage said he was trying to prevent a second referendum at all costs. Mr Robinson posited he would not win a single seat. Mr Farage said he was hoping for a breakthrough. Separately, his party had got rid of the worst prime minister in living memory as well as re-setting the agenda including stopping a second referendum. He now wanted genuine reform of the political system. Mr Robinson noted that a leader debate contributor said he could not resist being on telly. Mr Farage said he had retired in 2016 and only came back because of the failure to deliver Brexit. Mr Robinson asked if he wanted to thank Channel 4 for finding that one of his councillors had attacked Muslims. Mr Farage confirmed the councillor had been kicked out. Ross Hawkins, in a report about the Liberal Democrat campaign, suggested some had branded the Article 50 policy a disaster. There were clips from Jo Swinson saying at the beginning she could be prime minister, and the day before that she would not. An analyst suggested she had been campaigning in difficult seats. There were vox pops for and against Jo Swinson. Mr Hawkins concluded some in the party were ready to apportion blame. John Ashworth, shadow health minister, said Labour would negotiate a deal and respected the Brexit vote by wanting to put it back to the people. Mr Robinson suggested that Conservatives were trying to persuade Labour supporters to vote for them, something they had never before achieved. A package by Mr Robinson, in which he contended Brexit had changed the profile of the Conservative voter so that it now included a majority from the 'working class' - included opinion from Labour supporters for and against Boris Johnson and Brexit. Boris Johnson said he hoped his policy on Brexit appealed across the board. Mr Robinson noted that neither Mr Johnson nor Jeremy Corbyn had agreed to give an extended interview on the Today programme. Nicola Sturgeon said she wanted a Brexit referendum before an independence one. The actor Hugh Grant said that he hoped tactical voting would stop Boris Johnson becoming prime minister and thus also halt Brexit. He denied that he was being anti-democratic because opinion polls showed that people no longer wanted Brexit and people had not understood what they were voting for in 2016. He noted that the Conservative ad about Love Actually omitted the card 'because at Christmas you tell the truth' and suggested that spin doctors believed this would not look good in 'Boris Johnson's hands'. Laura Kuenssberg

assessed that what was going on in terms of tactical voting meant the election was hard to read and unpredictable. She judged that the Liberal Democrats, though perhaps ‘a faint overall cry’ would have an impact on many individual fights, and that the votes won by smaller parties would affect the overall arithmetic. Nick Robinson suggested that the vote won by Sinn Fein could affect whether Brexit happened, and asked Mary Lou McDonald of the party whether she was more interested in the past (than affecting the present). Ms McDonald said the Sinn Fein vote would not affect Brexit because there was an overall vote in England for it, and that a second referendum would not change things – even if Ireland was against it – because England was in favour. She added that if Arlene Foster and the DUP was worried about customs checks – as Nick Robinson said she had conveyed on the programme – then they should not have championed Brexit. Ireland would need special provisions.

December 11

Bulletins reiterated that the Conservatives were emphasising Brexit, Labour that the rich should pay for spending promises, and Jo Swinson on stopping Brexit. Norman Smith said the Labour manifesto would introduce huge changes which it said would improve national self-confidence. The election had evolved into a two-party race with the Brexit Party reduced to almost insignificance and Nigel Farage ‘abandoned by fellow Brexiteers’. He wondered whether the real story of the election would be the extent to which Boris Johnson had united the Leave vote around him, while the Remain camp had remained divided ‘and at sixes and sevens’. In a regional report, Liz Roberts said the Conservatives were targeting seats and an issue was the extent of the impact of the Brexit Party. In the East of England, Andrew Sinclair said a question was whether Labour would hang on to their various seats. He suggested that Jeremy Corbyn was a big issue on doorsteps, with a Conservative minister saying he was having fun in a marginal seat because of the levels of support for his party. Martha Kearney suggested to Adam Price of Plaid Cymru that an issue which had eroded trust was that people had voted to Leave. Adam Price claimed Leavers had lied and made false claims on the side of a bus and said there could not be proper debate in that context. Professor Sir John Curtice said that support for the two main parties was up five per cent, with squeezes on other parties as a result. At the lower end of polling predictions, a win was not guaranteed for the Conservatives. It looked like they would win a majority, but it was not guaranteed. He added that tactical voting levels were not likely to deprive the Conservatives of a majority. Steve Rouse, a tactical voting campaigner, was asked if it was a way of stretching Labour’s budget within the rules. A Labour member said he was risking losing his card because he was advising people to vote Liberal Democrat. John McDonnell was interviewed but did not mention Brexit. A report by Nick Robinson examined the extent to which the ‘working class’ was coming over to the Conservatives, but provided nothing concrete to indicate that. A round-up of correspondent opinion, Laura Kuenssberg said the campaign had been ‘uneventful’, though key moments had been the flaws of the leaders, Jacob Rees-Mogg’s

unfortunate remarks about Grenfell Tower, Labour's attempts to manage comments by John Ashworth, and the Prime Minister's robotic response to pictures of a four year old boy on a hospital floor. Mishal Husain pointed to the limited number of faces who had appeared, including the absence of the Labour Brexit minister. Mark Easton underlined the cynicism among voters about what parties were saying. Faisal Islam said the Conservative offer was to change Britain's business model, in particular trade policy. For decades, it had been integrated with Europe, and Boris Johnson had specifically negotiated the Brexit deal in order to create 'more distance with Europe' in order to make a trade deal with the US. He noted that the car industry had said it was fighting for its preservation, not in relation to Labour's plans but the Conservative attitude towards trade. Mr Islam also pointed to contradictions in the Conservative attitudes towards alignment with the EU. Mark Easton said:

. . . there's a bigger issue here about the way in which, sort of, conventional politics and the conventional kind of left-right divide, if you like, plays with, with that sort of broader issue that underpins Brexit and other kind of issues around populism, which is about to what extent we want our nation states to be protective of their heritage and their tradition and sort of keep things familiar. To what extent we want to be, you know, interchange and new technology and out there and part of the sort of globalised world. And that fundamental divide in this sort of world view, if you like, of voters is not one that has yet properly being reflected in the political offers. And I think we're seeing that certainly in this country, and I think we're seeing it across Europe and of course, in America.

David Linden of the SNP said Brexit would be a disaster for Scotland and the country should be allowed to choose its own future. Michael Gove asserted that a hung parliament would lead to more paralysis and more referendums or getting a Conservative majority to make parliament work again and get Brexit done. In Reality Check, Chris Morris again said that Brexit would have to be done in record time and predicted that even if it was legally done in January, it would still be on the agenda for years to come. Tom Newton Dunn said it was a dire election which had been vandalistic and polarising. A key moment that would be remembered by Remainers was a 'buffoon, silly stunt' when Boris Johnson had broken through a Styrofoam wall saying 'get Brexit done'. He noted that Labour had tried to talk about Brexit through the lens of the NHS, and that was because their overall policy was sitting on the fence. He claimed that Labour's policy on the NHS had 'really resonated' because services were falling apart, whereas stuff on the US trade deal had not. Mr Newton Dunn noted that although the Tory campaign had been rigid and disciplined, its core message of getting Brexit done had resonated with his 10 year old (Remainer) son. The focus on that had underlined the limitations of the Tory campaign in relying on Brexit when it was only supported by 45-50 per cent at the moment. That was its 'entire strategic flaw'. Pippa Crerar agreed it had been an 'absolutely rigid' message, with the campaign run by the same people who managed Vote Leave. Labour had been desperate to offer an alternative which was improvement in public services. Tom Newton Dunn claimed 'the fascinating winner' of the election was two party politics and Labour in a late surge through the Remain vote in spite of everything Jeremy Corbyn had said about achieving Brexit.

