

Media Perspective on UK General Elections

Gideon Ozik and Ronnie Sadka

December 9, 2019

Abstract

Amid disagreement over Brexit, the UK Parliament voted on October 29, 2019, to hold general elections on December 12, 2019. This note analyzes the media’s perspective on the upcoming elections, using MKT MediaStats’ local news reservoir. The media coverage of different parties/candidates along various topics are presented, as well as forward correlations with polling results.

Keywords: UK Elections, media coverage, thematic analysis

Data

MKT maintains multiple information reservoirs including bellwether reservoir (which contains all articles from the top media outlets daily), foreign exchange, country equity, corporate, interest rates, and commodities. The media information spans roughly 100,000 distinct sources, amounting to about one million articles per week across these reservoirs. For this study we utilize a bellwether reservoir subset focusing on UK-based sources. The subset includes about 1.4 million articles including 180,000 published in 2019. Figure 1 displays the number of articles collected per UK bellwether source from September 1, 2019 to December 7, 2019

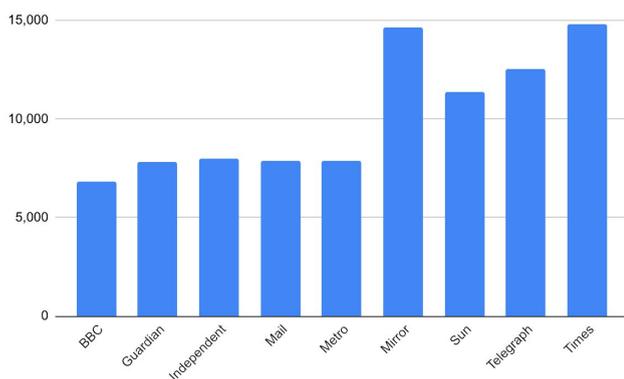


Figure 1, UK reservoir articles by source (9/2019 - 12/2019)

Media Coverage

Several topics seem to shape the upcoming elections: Brexit, Healthcare, Immigration, Education, Climate change, Terrorism, and Antisemitism. Figure 2 below presents the relative amount of media coverage of each topic, as they pertain to the discussion of election candidates.

As expected, the topic with the most amount of discussion is Brexit. However, since elections have been announced, additional topics have increased in relative importance, such as Antisemitism and, over the past couple of week, Terrorism. This naturally resulted in a lower percentage of relative discussion of Brexit.

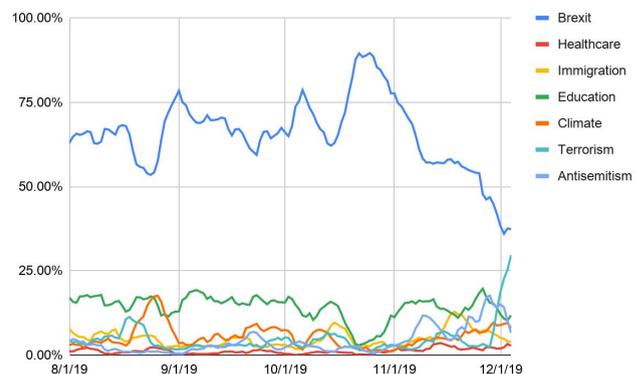


Figure 2, Media coverage by topic

Figure 3 presents the difference in the relative amount of media coverage between Conservatives and Labour per topic. The topic Brexit is mentioned roughly 5% more times in articles that mention Conservatives than those that mention Labour. In contrast, a similar percentage of 5% more articles discuss Labour in the context of Antisemitism.

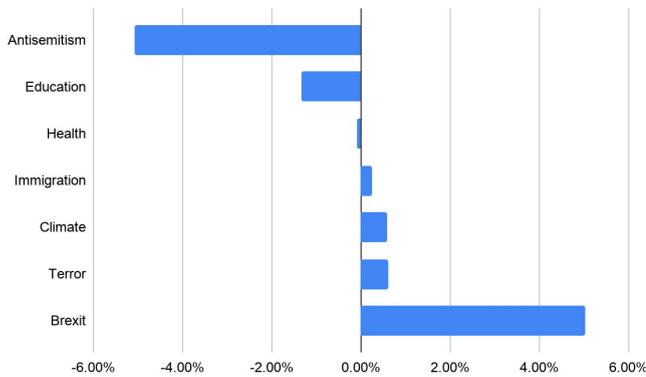


Figure 3, Excess coverage of Conservative Party relative to Labour Party, per topic

Can media coverage explain performance in polls?

Figure 4 below plots YouGov poll results over time. It is quite evident that both Conservatives and Labour have been gaining ground at the expense of the Liberal Democrats, which Conservatives leading by roughly a 10 point margin.

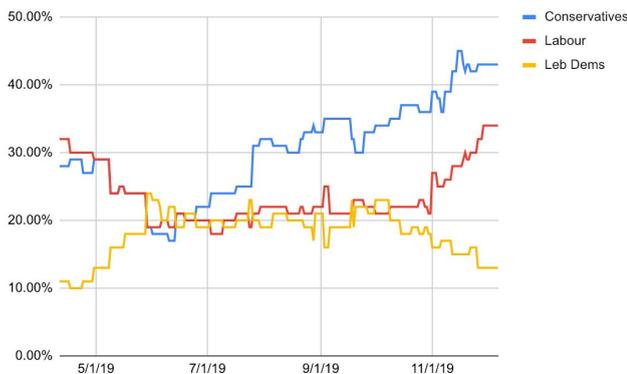


Figure 4, Voting poll results (YouGov)

To study the importance of each topic to election polls, we calculate the correlation between changes in the media

coverage intensity of a given topic over a day and changes in the spread between Conservatives and Labour in the polls the next day. The correlation results plotted in Figure 5 and indicate that increased discussion of Terrorism, Immigration and Antisemitism benefit Conservatives while increased discussion of Climate Change and Education benefit Labour. Interestingly, while Brexit and Healthcare are important topics that are significantly covered by the media, changes in their relative media intensity are not significantly associated with differential performance in the polls.

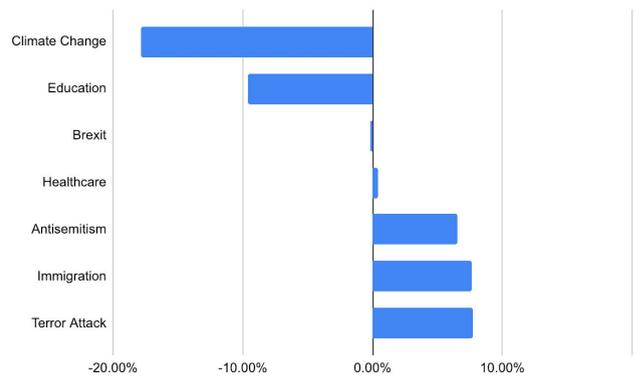


Figure 5, Correlation of daily changes in the Conservative - Labour poll spread and previous day's change in the media coverage intensity of a given topic

Conclusion

A systematic analysis of the media coverage of the upcoming UK elections provides interesting insights as to the most influential topics that are likely to determine the election results.