

# Journalistic Representations of Jeremy Corbyn in the British Press:

From Watchdog to Attackdog

Media@LSE Report



## **Foreword:**

As media and communication scholars we have been troubled by the problematic way in which the British media has systematically attacked Jeremy Corbyn ever since he came to national prominence in the summer of 2015. At the same time, we also acknowledge that the media needs to fulfill an important watchdog role in a democracy. Indeed, we expect and value our media to be critical and to ask difficult and probing questions of those in positions of power.

Jeremy Corbyn is an unconventional party leader in a British context, more leftwing than previous leaders of the Labour Party, contesting the neoliberal common sense and promoting an anti-austerity and anti-war agenda. The question we pose here is to what extent this warranted the acerbic and overtly aggressive media reaction he has consistently received over the last year? Is it acceptable for the media to delegitimise to such an extent a legitimate democratic actor who is the leader of the main opposition party in British politics?

This study, undertaken by the LSE's Media and Communications Department, set out to empirically analyse the nature of the media representation of Jeremy Corbyn in 8 British newspapers from 1 September – 1 November 2015. First, it distinguishes between critical reporting and what we call antagonistic reporting. Second, it aims to demonstrate and assess the ways in which the British press systematically delegitimised Jeremy Corbyn as a political leader.

The results of this study show that Jeremy Corbyn was represented unfairly by the British press through a process of vilification that went well beyond the normal limits of fair debate and disagreement in a democracy. Corbyn was often denied his own voice in the reporting on him and sources that were anti-Corbyn tended to outweigh those that support him and his positions. He was also systematically treated with scorn and ridicule in both the broadsheet and tabloid press in a way that no other political leader is or has been. Even more problematic, the British press has repeatedly associated Corbyn with terrorism and positioned him as a friend of the enemies of the UK. The result has been a failure to give the newspaper reading public a fair opportunity to form their own judgements about the leader of the country's main opposition.

The overall conclusion from this is that in this case UK journalism played an attackdog, rather than a watchdog, role. This is unhealthy from a democratic point of view and poses serious ethical questions as to the role of the media in a democracy, especially when it concerns the legitimate contestation of the Government of the day.

When a democracy cannot rely on its press to provide its citizens with information about political parties that meets the basic standards of fairness, then we can expect a political process that is equally unbalanced. Recent events may have provided broader evidence of this disturbing trend.

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# Journalistic Representations of Jeremy Corbyn in the British Press:

## From Watchdog to Attackdog

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### Introduction

In a democracy, we expect journalists to fulfill a set of roles. In the liberal tradition, the media are fulfill the normative role of watchdog, holding decision-makers to account and highlighting abuses. However, at the same time, the media is also known to fulfill a collaborative role whereby media owners, editors and journalists align themselves with the interests of the establishment and the powers that be. As a result of this, leftwing parties and ideas have historically received a rough treatment in the UK. It was Ralph Miliband, the father of David and Ed, who noted at the end of the 1960s that:

*the press may well claim to be independent and to fulfill an important watchdog function. What the claim overlooks, however, is the very large fact that it is the Left at which the watchdogs generally bark with most ferocity, and what they are above all protecting is the status quo* (1969: page 199).

In other words, the monitorial role in conjunction with a collaborative role towards the political establishment can also lead to journalistic transgressions whereby the watchdog becomes an attackdog blatantly delegitimising political actors that dare to challenge the status quo. On the basis of an extensive content analysis of a representative sample of the coverage of Jeremy Corbyn in eight British newspapers, we argue and demonstrate that the watchdog has become an attackdog. We will also conclude that this poses serious questions regarding the role of journalism in a democratic society such as the UK.

On 12 September 2015, Jeremy Corbyn was elected new leader of the largest and arguably only opposition party in the UK. Corbyn can in many ways be described as somewhat of a political maverick; a political transgressor and deviator who refuses to align himself with the mores and quirkiness of the British political establishment. Unlike other recent Labour leaders, Corbyn is an unabashed democratic socialist, an ardent anti-austerity champion, a rebellious Member of Parliament with a long history of bucking party discipline, a long-standing anti-war and anti-nuclear activist, and a staunch republican in a country with a widely supported monarchy.

The way the British mainstream media reacted to him could, in our view, likewise be denoted as transgressive. In order to make this claim we undertook a systematic analysis and assessment of the nature of the UK newspaper's representation of Corbyn. In what follows we will present our findings, a methodological note can be found in Appendix 1.

## The Media Representation of Jeremy Corbyn

First, we assessed the overall tone of the articles. On the one hand we looked for a positive tone towards Corbyn or a more neutral one. On the other hand, we distinguished between 1) a critical tone, which corresponds more to a legitimate watchdog role, and 2) an antagonistic tone, which could be seen as an indicator for attackdog journalism. Arguably, the tone of the article represented a rather crude way of presenting the results, so we wanted to have a better sense of the ways in which this attackdog mentality towards Corbyn manifested itself. Three specific forms of delegitimization were identified:

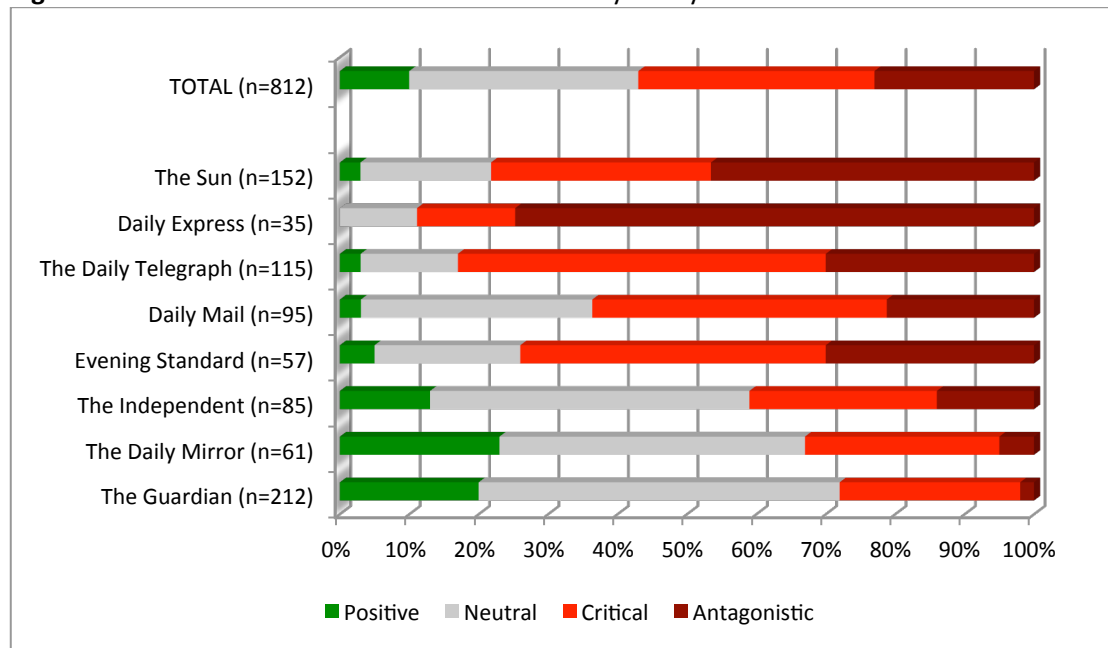
- through lack of voice or misrepresentation
- through scorn, ridicule and personal attacks
- through association

Each of these mechanisms in their own right are problematic democratically, but it is above all the combination of the three forms feeding each other that has in our view very detrimental consequences for democratic life in the UK.

### Overall Tone

Assessing the overall tone of the article is not always straightforward, especially the subtle difference between a legitimate critical stance and an antagonistic one is both important and at times difficult to discern. Despite this, the so-called Inter-Coder reliability of this variable, which measures the validity of the variable, was very high and consistent (96%).

**Figure 1:** Overall tone of the article towards Jeremy Corbyn



The antagonistic tone refers to the delegitimation of Jeremy Corbyn by being scathing, disingenuous, insulting or mocking. A critical tone refers to a monitorial attitude, something we would expect from the media, i.e. to be critical but in a measured and even-handed

manner. Of note here is that almost 3/5 of all articles we coded (57%) were critical or antagonistic and 2/3 of all opinion pieces (67%) coded in the period of analysis were critical or antagonistic<sup>1</sup>. The Independent Press Standards Organization's (IPSO) ethical guidelines stipulate that while newspapers are 'free to editorialise and campaign', they are at the same time obliged to 'make a clear distinction between comment, conjecture and fact'. When it comes to the reporting on Jeremy Corbyn this ethical guideline has not been adhered to.

Furthermore, our statistical analysis found an association between media organization and tone<sup>2</sup>. Especially, the rightwing newspapers have very little or almost nothing positive to say about Corbyn and the antagonistic tone is also much more pronounced in these newspapers (see Figure 1). The degree of positive exposure in the leftwing and centrist press is a bit higher, but it would be fair to say that also there the support for Jeremy Corbyn is at best lukewarm. Despite this, however, we noticed in *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mirror* and *The Independent* a remarkably less antagonistic tone and positioning compared to the rightwing newspapers.

### ***Delegitimisation through Lack of Voice or Distortion***

An important way in which Corbyn was delegitimised by the press relates to the presence of Corbyn's voice in his own media representation (or the lack thereof) and also to how his own voice is represented in the reporting on him. Our results offered evidence of the mainly antagonistic stance towards the Labour politician. To a large extent, Corbyn was delegitimised or misrepresented as a political actor. His voice was not only largely ignored in many instances, but his words were also often distorted and taken out of context. Let us first focus on the use of sources in the reporting about Corbyn.

As Table 1 shows, Corbyn himself is often absent as a source in the reporting on him (56% of articles on him does not give him any voice at all. What is surprising, though, is that articles in *The Guardian* and *The Independent* that use Corbyn as a source are relatively low (around 40%), this can be explained by the high level of opinion pieces on him in these papers. Conversely, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express* seem to use Corbyn as a source above average (respectively about 87%, 66% and 89% of the articles).

**Table 1:** Sources used in the reporting on Jeremy Corbyn

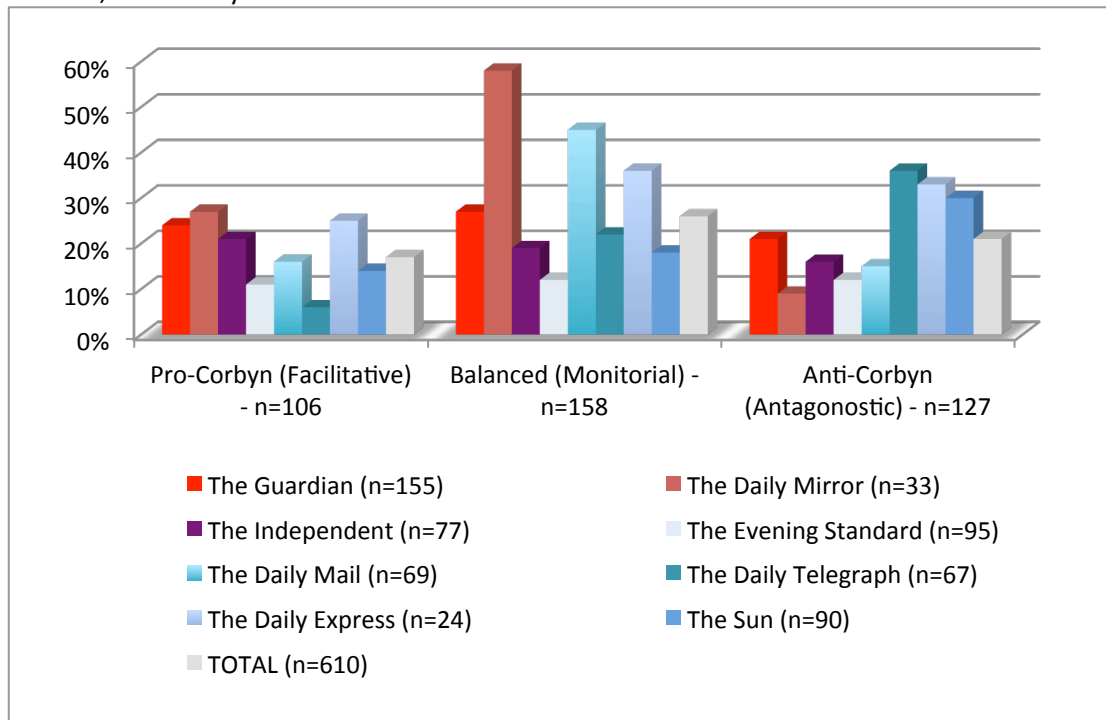
	Corbyn <sup>3</sup>	Labour Pro-Corbyn <sup>4</sup>	Labour Anti-Corbyn <sup>5</sup>	Conservatives <sup>6</sup>	Lib-Dems <sup>7</sup>	Union Leaders <sup>8</sup>
Guardian (n=212)	42%	29%	27%	18%	3%	9%
Daily Mirror (n=61)	87%	26%	38%	39%	8%	2%
Independent (n=85)	37%	13%	24%	12%	1%	2%
Evening Standard (n=57)	47%	11%	28%	12%	2%	4%
Daily Telegraph (n=115)	20%	7%	28%	15%	0%	3%
Daily Mail (n=95)	66%	44%	41%	33%	2%	1%
Daily Express (n=35)	89%	6%	34%	29%	0%	3%
Sun (n=152)	25%	26%	19%	15%	1%	5%
<b>TOTAL (n=812):</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>

Members of the Conservative Party are also often used as a source critiquing Corbyn, especially in the right-wing newspapers *The Daily Mail* (33%) and *The Daily Express* (29%), but also in the left-wing tabloid *The Daily Mirror* (39%); this is arguably part of the legitimate role of the media to provide balance in their reporting. Union leaders are relatively absent in the reporting about Corbyn and when they are used as a source, especially in the rightwing newspapers, it is often to discredit Corbyn. This is consistent with the historical negative media representation and the overall lack of union voices in the public debate in the UK (see Philo, et al., 1995).

A telling observation emerging from Table 1, relates to the differences between the Labour sources that are in favour versus those that are against Corbyn as their party leader. In many newspapers the voice of Labour sources that are against Corbyn outweigh those that are supporting him. This is especially the case in *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Daily Express*, but also in the leftwing tabloid *The Daily Mirror*. This is an expression of the civil war taking place within Labour. Exposing this could be seen as being part of the watchdog role of the media and is also very visible in the left-wing and liberal newspapers. At the same time, however, the great discrepancy between Labour voices in favour of Corbyn and against in *The Daily Telegraph* (7% pro versus 28% anti) or *The Daily Express* (6% pro versus 34% anti) are clear indications of a more antagonistic rather than a critical agenda.

Besides this, when we exclude opinion pieces and letters to the editor from the sample (n=391) we get an even more outspoken picture of this polarization. On the left of Figure 2, we can see the number of news articles that exclusively used pro-Corbyn voices (Corbyn himself, sources from his campaign, pro-Corbyn Labour sources or union sources), on the right, we find the amount of articles that exclusively gave a voice to anti-Corbyn sources (Anti-Corbyn Labour sources, sources from the Conservative Party or a combination of both), in the middle we can find articles that used both pro- and anti-Corbyn voices.

**Figure 2:** Per Cent of Articles in Respective Publications using exclusively Pro-Corbyn sources, Anti-Corbyn Sources or a mix of both<sup>9</sup>



The reporting of *The Daily Mirror* is most balanced with almost 60% of its news articles about Corbyn using sources from both the pro- and anti-Corbyn camps, similarly and more surprisingly *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express* also have a high degree of balanced reporting, mixing pro- and anti-Corbyn sources in its news-reporting about Corbyn (respectively 43% and 49% of news articles)<sup>10</sup>. As was to be expected, however, the rightwing newspapers tend to carry more articles that exclusively rely on sources that are anti-Corbyn; *The Daily Mail* and *The Evening Standard* are exceptions in this regard. In all other rightwing newspapers between 30 to 35% of articles exclusively use sources that are anti-Corbyn. About 1/5 of news articles in *The Guardian* also, arguably, lack balance. This again should be seen in the context of the turf-war within Labour and a relatively negative tone towards Corbyn that is also apparent in the more leftwing newspapers.

As Table 2 makes apparent, Corbyn’s voice, even when acknowledged, was also often distorted; in more than 1/5 of the total sample (22%) his views were taken out of context. In sum, slightly less than 3/4 of the news content (74%) offered either no or a highly distorted account of Corbyn’s views and ideas. Unsurprisingly, his views are mostly taken out of context in the rightwing newspapers, especially in *The Evening Standard*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Daily Express*. As was to be expected, *The Guardian* did give Corbyn somewhat of a platform as his voice without alteration was present in almost 27% of its coverage. Corbyn did not get any platform at all in the rightwing newspapers and this is very pronounced.

**Table 2:** Reproduction of Corbyn’s views<sup>11</sup>

	Corbyn’s Views Absent	Corbyn’s views present but taken out of context	Corbyn’s views present, but challenged	Corbyn’s views present without alteration
Guardian (n=212)	44%	18%	11%	27%
Daily Mirror (n=61)	48%	12%	25%	16%
Independent (n=85)	60%	15%	8%	17%
Evening Standard (n=57)	54%	39%	5%	2%
Daily Mail (n=95)	57%	20%	23%	0%
Daily Telegraph (n=115)	52%	29%	16%	4%
Daily Express (n=35)	51%	37%	11%	0%
Sun (n=152)	55%	24%	18%	3%
<b>TOTAL (n=812):</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>11%</b>

A telling example of his views being deliberately and maliciously distorted by the rightwing media was the resurfacing at the end of October 2015 of a statement he made in 2013 regarding the 100<sup>th</sup> year commemoration of the First World War. In its typical jingoistic style the rightwing newspapers laid into Corbyn for having declared at the time that commemorating the First World War was ‘pointless’ (*The Daily Express*), for ‘questioning’ the commemorations (*The Daily Telegraph*) and for ‘denouncing’ the high budgets spent on them (*The Daily Mail*). What Corbyn actually said at the time was:

[...] apparently next year the government is proposing to spend shedloads of money commemorating the First World War. I'm not sure what there is to commemorate about the First World War other than the mass slaughter of millions of young men and women, mainly men, on the Western Front and all the other places. [...] it was a war of the declining empires (Corbyn, quoted in The Independent, 2015)

These results relating to sources and ‘voice’ are evidently troublesome from a democratic perspective. Allowing an important and legitimate political actor, i.e. the leader of the main opposition party, to develop their own narrative and have a voice in the public space is paramount in a democracy. Denying such an important political actor a voice or distorting his views and ideas through the exercise of mediated power is highly problematic. There were, however, also other mechanisms at play which were equally, if not more, problematic in terms of delegitimising Corbyn as a political actor. One of these was the use of ridicule, scorn and personal attacks.

### ***Delegitimisation through Ridicule, Scorn and Personal Attacks***

Much of the newspaper coverage of Corbyn — simply put — ridicules the new Labour leader. Three in ten (30%) news stories, editorials, commentaries, features or letters to the editor mock the leader of the opposition or scoff at his ideas, policies, history, his personal life — and, alarmingly, even his looks. Much of the coverage is clearly patronizing and scornful. Unsurprisingly, we found a strong association between ridicule and scorn on the one hand and personal attacks on the other in the eight publications we examined<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, statistical analysis (two-sided Fisher's exact test) confirmed an association between publications and personal attacks (p=.001).

**Table 3:** Ridicule, Scorn and Personal Attack by Newspaper

	<b>Ridicule &amp; Scorn</b>	<b>Personal Attacks</b>
Guardian (n=212)	5%	5%
Daily Mirror (n=61)	15%	6%
Independent (n=85)	4%	6%
Evening Standard (n=57)	47%	26%
Daily Mail (n=95)	54%	11%
Daily Telegraph (n=115)	38%	16%
Daily Express (n=35)	80%	40%
Sun (n=152)	45%	17%
<b>TOTAL (n=812)</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>13%</b>

As Table 3 makes apparent, when comparing leftwing newspapers with rightwing ones, the latter are 90% more likely to heap ridicule or scorn on the Labour leader than their liberal counterparts. Much of the coverage is clearly patronizing. The long-serving Member of Parliament for Islington North frequently gets reduced to the journalistic shorthand of a caricature. He is often portrayed as a clown-like figure, mocked as the ‘Jezster’ or derisively dismissed as the comic political equivalent of the child-like TV sitcom character Mr. Bean with tabloid media repeatedly referring to him as ‘Mr. Corbean’. It is noteworthy here,



however, that *The Daily Mirror* to a certain degree also ridiculed Corbyn. For example, Paul Routledge called 'Jezza's' reluctance to use nuclear weapons 'naïve' (Routledge, 2015).

The so-called 'bearded socialist' (*The Daily Telegraph*) often gets sneered at for his looks and the way he dresses (a bit more than 7% of articles refer to his dress-style). Of the articles that contain a personal attack ( $n=102$ ), a staggering 69% refers to his look, his clothing and his lifestyle, a further 13% relates to Corbyn's love life. Several commentaries moralised about Corbyn's personal and romantic life. *The Daily Telegraph* sarcastically ridiculed the Labour leader's former relationship with shadow minister Diane Abbott. The commentary capriciously also folded in a political critique questioning what attracted the pair to one another:

"Lovers of what?" Bolshevism? Marx & Spencer? A warm vest to keep out the chill winds of the political wilderness? (Woods, 2015).

More than any other newspaper, *The Sun* sensationalized Corbyn's relationship with Abbot and the break-up of his first marriage. Calling the Labour leader 'The Sexpot Trot', the rightwing tabloid describes in detail how Corbyn's 'lover' had commanded his first wife to 'get out of town' (Cooke, 2015).

Plenty of the newspaper coverage also suggested that Corbyn's sartorial and lifestyle choices make him seem weird, unconventional — and decidedly unelectable. A week after his election as leader of the opposition, Allison Pearson in *The Daily Telegraph* artfully weaved all of the sneering criticisms into a one-sentence depiction:

a rather dreary bearded fellow who takes pictures of manhole covers as a hobby, doesn't drink alcohol or eat meat, and wears shorts teamed with long dark socks exposing an expanse of pale, hairy English shin. (Pearson, 2015)

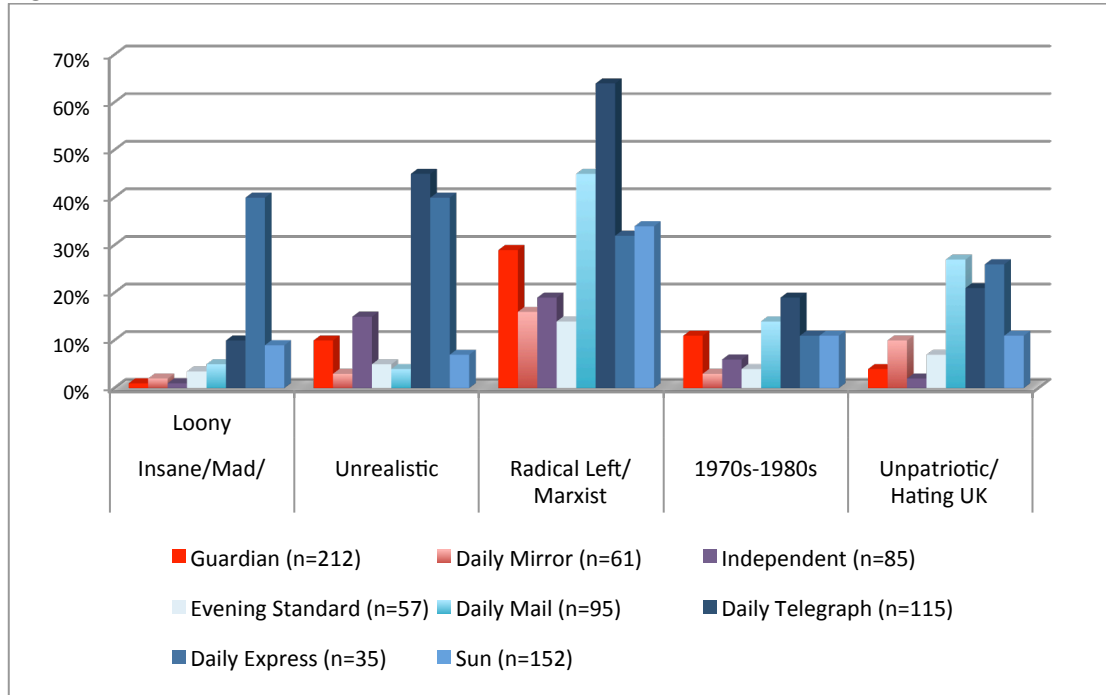
Our analysis found that the ridicule and scorn also tended to increase over time with 25% of the coverage exhibiting ridicule and scorn before his election as party leader (12 September) to 33% of the articles analysed in the last two weeks of October 2015. Also personal attacks increase (slightly) after Corbyn was elected as party leader. Whereas 10% of articles contain a personal attack before he was elected this rises to 14% of the articles in the period directly after he was elected. Personalisation of politics is not a new phenomenon (see Langer, 2007), but the vengefulness and sneering tone with which Corbyn's character was assassinated, was questionable and damaging.

### ***Delegitimisation through Association***

A final – and arguable most harmful – way in which Corbyn was delegitimised is through subtle and less subtle forms of association. Across our corpus we found evidence of the British press discrediting Corbyn by describing his ideas as mad or crazy, and himself as a terrorist friend and a dangerous, even sinister, individual.

As Figure 2 shows, many journalists and commentators describe the Labour leader and his political ideas as 'loony', 'unrealistic', or 'outdated'. Rightwing newspapers, such as *The Daily Telegraph*, and tabloids like *The Daily Express* and *The Sun*, emphasized the supposed 'radicalism' and 'insane' nature of his political proposals. Besides describing leftwing ideas as loony, they are also seen as unrealistic and highly unlikely to deliver an election victory to Labour, something the leftwing and liberal newspapers also picks up on.

**Figure 2:** Number of mentions in the article



Before his election as party leader an astonishing 42% of the coverage framed Corbyn essentially as a Communist, whether it was by calling him part of the ‘hard or radical-left’, a ‘Marxist’, a ‘Leninist’ or a ‘Trotsky’. On the eve of his election, for example, *The Sun* called him ‘a gormless Marxist’ (Liddle, 2015). In a piece published in *The Sun* end of November 2015, Corbyn was even pictured next to Lenin (cf. Figure 3). This is in line with a long legacy in the UK of discrediting the left by associating their ideas and their leaders with Marxism and Communism (see Curran, et al., 2005).

**Figure 3:** Lenin and Corbyn in *The Sun*, 30 November 2015



Comrade Jeremy . . . in cap like Russian revolutionary Lenin at rally

**Source:** Hawkes, 2015

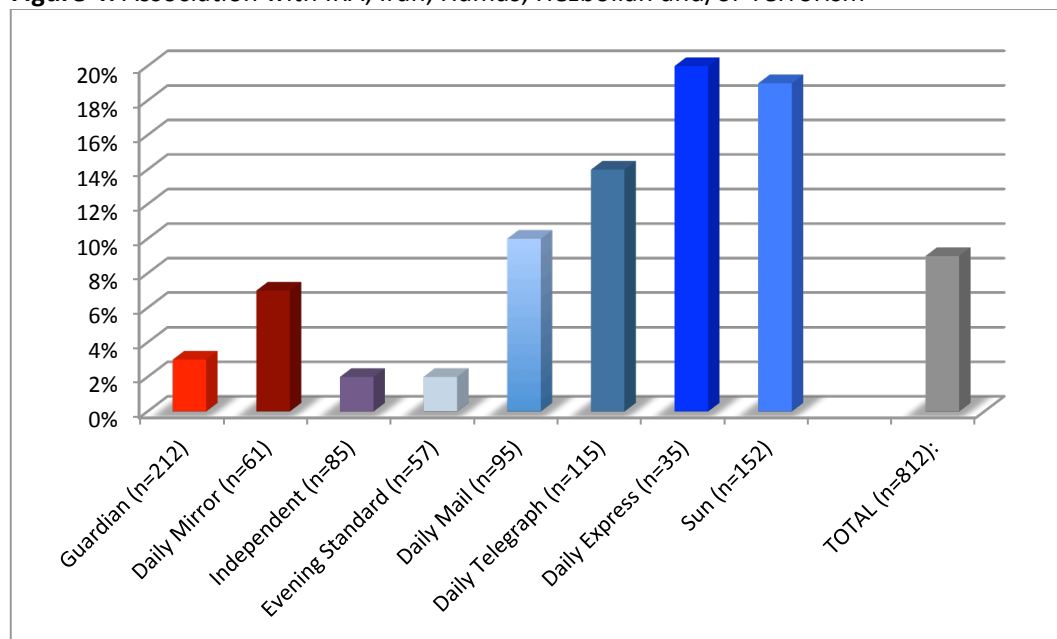
Another prevalent media frame in the reporting of Jeremy Corbyn was geared towards positioning him as unpatriotic and as hating Britain; this was (again) especially the case in

the rightwing newspapers<sup>13</sup>; for example 27% of the articles about Corbyn in *The Daily Mail* carried this frame. Intrinsicly linked to the hating Britain frame was a very strong and highly problematic association of Corbyn with terrorism and with being a friend of the enemies of the UK (see Figure 4). *The Sun*, for example, described Corbyn as someone ‘who delights in describing as *friends* every possible enemy of this country’ (Liddle, 2015 – emphasis in original).

In particular, Corbyn was portrayed as a supporter or as someone having ‘links with’ the IRA, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, or terrorism more in general. *The Daily Express* (2015) condemned Corbyn for having ‘suspicious ties to terror groups’, whereas *The Sun*, called him a supporter of the IRA and ‘any heavily bearded jihadi mental[sic] who long for the destruction of the West’ (Liddle, 2015). Along the same lines, in *The Daily Telegraph* Allison Pearson sarcastically wondered if instead of hummus, Corbyn might in fact have a weakness for the Palestinian Sunni-Islamic organization Hamas:

Hummus made by Hamas, would be Corbyn's idea of manna from heaven. Well, not heaven, obviously, but the atheist, socialist paradise to which the dork will lead us in the fullness of time, once he's confiscated our debit cards, our Army and our evil, biased newspapers (Pearson, 2015)

**Figure 4:** Association with IRA, Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah and/or Terrorism<sup>14</sup>



This damning and problematic association with terrorism or denoting him as a friend of those deemed to be enemies of the U.K. also fed into a broader frame that depicted Corbyn as a danger or as a dangerous individual. Even the British Prime Minister could not resist feeding this danger frame. Just after Corbyn was elected as party leader, David Cameron tweeted:

The Labour Party is now a threat to our national security, our economic security and your family's security. (@David\_Cameron, 13 Sept 2015).

As Table 4 clearly demonstrates, however, the danger frame was (and arguable still is) also being pushed by Labour politicians and by journalists. Denoting Corbyn as a danger or dangerous by politicians of the Labour Party is yet another indication of the civil war being

waged within the Labour Party, something which could be observed throughout the corpus. Linked to this is also the ongoing frame of persistent references to possible and potential coup attempts against Corbyn.

**Table 4:** Denoting Corbyn as a danger or as being dangerous and by whom<sup>15</sup>

	Corbyn denoted as dangerous or a danger		By journalist	By Non-Labour Politician	By Labour Politician
Guardian (n=212)	17%		2%	5%	6%
Daily Mirror (n=61)	20%		3%	8%	7%
Independent (n=85)	7%		1%	4%	1%
Evening Standard (n=57)	4%		2%	2%	0%
Daily Mail (n=95)	18%		8%	5%	4%
Daily Telegraph (n=115)	50%		22%	4%	18%
Daily Express (n=35)	63%		49%	6%	9%
Sun (n=152)	16%		9%	2%	1%
<b>TOTAL (n=812):</b>	<b>22%</b>		<b>9%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>

It has to be noted though that in contrast with scorn and personal attacks which increased in the later stages of the period of analysis, most of these very emotive negative frames, such as the communist one or the references to Corbyn being unpatriotic and a terrorist friend or a danger, diminished somewhat over time. The communist frame halved to 22% of the total coverage in the latter part of the period of analysis (from 06/10 to 01/11/2015). Likewise, while 18% of the coverage emphasized the anti-patriotic frame before he was elected party leader, 5% of the coverage contained this frame in the last part of the period of analysis. Also, the association with terrorist groups dropped to 5% of the coverage. The danger frame seems to lose strength over time, but clearly not as much as the other ones. While a staggering 35% of the coverage denoted Corbyn as dangerous before his election, this reduced somewhat to 22% in the first two weeks after his election and to 13% in the last two weeks of the analysis.

Mediated power, Roger Silverstone (1999: 143) so aptly noted, is ultimately about the power ‘to create and sustain meanings; to persuade, endorse and reinforce’, but also relates to ‘[t]he power to undermine’. As the results of our content analysis have shown, the predominant way in which the British newspapers used its mediated power vis-à-vis Corbyn was to undermine and to delegitimize the leader of the main opposition party in the UK.

## Conclusion

We originally set out to provide a nuanced perspective acknowledging and wanting to account for the watchdog role of the media by differentiating between on the one hand the legitimate role of the newspapers to critique and to question the Labour Party and its leadership and on the other hand a virulent and acerbic antagonistic tone delegitimising a legitimate political actor. To some extent this did come out of the analysis; some newspapers did fulfill an important watchdog role. However, what emerged much stronger is an overall picture of most newspapers systematically vilifying the leader of the biggest opposition party, assassinating his character, ridiculing his personality and delegitimising his ideas and politics. As the quote of Miliband Sr. at the outset of this report already pointed out, this is not an entirely new phenomenon in the UK and has happened before in relation to other leftwing leaders from Neil Kinnock to Ed Miliband (see Curran, et al., 2005; Gabor, 2014), but in the case of Corbyn the degree of antagonism and hatred from part of the media has arguably reached new heights.

This can, in part, be explained by the newspapers' over-reaction to Jeremy Corbyn, a politician who refuses to play the part that the British establishment carves out for political leaders in a position of authority. Some argue that as a result of this Corbyn deserves the kind of negative media representations he is getting (Grice, 2016). Someone who rocks the boat like he does is likely to get wet. However, while Corbyn might be a political transgressor in some ways, this does not in itself legitimate the high levels of antagonistic and delegitimising coverage he has been getting.

Corbyn is systematically ridiculed, scorned and the object of personal attacks by most newspapers. Even more problematic were a set of associations which deligitimised Corbyn as a politician, calling him loony, unpatriotic, a terrorist friend and a dangerous individual. It has to be noted though that whereas ridicule and scorn increased in time, the more hard-hitting and emotive frames such as calling him a communist or a terrorist friend diminished over time. In this regard, the question could be asked whether this amounts to an unstated *mea culpa*, an acknowledgement that the newspapers were over-egging their cake in their reporting of Corbyn?

With the vast majority of the British newspapers situated moderately to firmly on the right of the political spectrum, the analysis of our data also points to a strong ideological bias. The rightwing newspapers were particularly negative and acerbic towards Corbyn. At the same time, we could also clearly observe a degree of anti-Corbyn reporting in the left-leaning and liberal newspapers. This was especially visible through the amplification of internal struggles and tensions within the Labour Party regarding Corbyn. This manifested itself by the newspapers providing an extensive and enthusiastic platform to those forces in the Labour Party that aggressively contested Corbyn and what he stands for. Arguably, exposing the internal tensions within the Labour Party could be seen as part of the watchdog role of the media. However, as pointed out above, there was quite a considerable amount of coverage that was very one-sided, only giving voice to those that are against Corbyn and at the same time ignoring those that are in favour of him and his policies.

To conclude, the degree of viciousness and antagonism with which the majority of the British newspapers have treated Corbyn is deemed to be highly problematic from a democratic perspective. If, as the British philosopher Onora O'Neill (2002) also argued, the high degree of media power needs to be accompanied by a high degree of media and democratic responsibility, is it then acceptable that the majority of the British newspapers

uses its mediated power to attack and delegitimise the leader of the largest opposition party against a rightwing government to such an extent and with such vigour? By posing this question in the way we do, we also imply that this is not merely a political question, but also an ethical and a democratic one. Certainly democracies need their media to challenge power and offer robust debate, but when this transgresses into an antagonism that undermines legitimate political voices that dare to contest the current status quo, then it is not democracy that is served.

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## Appendix 1: Methodological Notes

A Content Analysis (CA) proved to be an effective tool for investigating the media representations of Labour’s Jeremy Corbyn. Considerable research highlights the efficacy of CA for synthesizing large amounts of media for critical research (Bauer, 2007; Krippendorff, 2013). For this study’s analysis, reporting about the Labour leader was turned, as the title of Franzosi’s (2004) book elegantly suggests, *From Words to Numbers*. This was done with an eye to capturing the tone and tenor of the news media coverage of Corbyn’s leadership. As the findings and analysis makes clear, CA offered a reliable and systematic means to capture the complex nature of the mediated representations of the new Labour leader.

**Table 1:** Sampling<sup>16</sup>

	Daily Circulation and Daily Unique Browsers (2015) <sup>17</sup>	Ownership	Type of Newspaper	Exhaustive Population	<i>n</i> Coded	% Coded
<b>Guardian</b>	160.000 8.9 Million	Guardian Media Group	Broadsheet-leftwing	983	212	22%
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	790.000 4.2 Million	Trinity Mirror	Tabloid-leftwing	301	61	20%
<b>Independent</b>	66.000 2.9 Million	Alexander Lebedev	Broadsheet-centrist	288	85	30%
<b>Evening Standard</b>	900.000 480.000	Alexander Lebedev	Mid Market-rightwing	297	57	19%
<b>Daily Mail</b>	1.6 Million 14.4 Million	4th Viscount Rothermere	Mid Market-rightwing	358	95	27%
<b>Daily Telegraph</b>	470.000 4.3 Million	Barclay Brothers	Broadsheet-rightwing	420	115	27%
<b>Daily Express</b>	400.000 NA	Richard Clive Desmond	Mid Market-rightwing	171	35	20%
<b>Sun</b>	1.4 Million 2 Million	Rupert Murdoch	Tabloid-rightwing	599	152	25%
<b>TOTALS:</b>				3417	812	24%

The media texts analysed in this research ( $n=812$ ) were harvested from eight national UK newspapers<sup>18</sup> (see Table 1 for a complete list). This random sample was drawn from an exhaustive population ( $N=3,417$ ) and represents 24% of the total coverage by the national newspapers of Jeremy Corbyn between 1 September – 1 November 2015. The newspaper archive Lexis was used to identify the corpus of media samples for analysis. Three further periods were delimited to enable a temporal analysis across all other variables:



- 1) 01/09/15 to 12/09/15: final weeks of the leadership campaign
- 2) 13/09/15 to 05/10/15: his election as party leader and its aftermath
- 3) 06/10/15 to 01/11/15: his shaky consolidation as party leader

As noted above, the search terms 'Jeremy' and 'Corbyn' yielded an exhaustive corpus of 3,417 possible samples. Pulling every 4th media sampled produced a reliable probability sample because our starting point was randomly selected (Krippendorff, 2013).

Similar to Rendon and Nicolas (2012), a two-step approach to developing coding categories was employed. An analysis of media texts revealed rhetorical patterns and consistent frames surrounding Corbyn. Furthermore, the training of coders during the piloting phase also led to improvements in the coding frame. This process produced a list of 16 variables with some variables split-up into sub-variables so as to enable multiple options to be selected.

In addition to the authors, twelve coders were trained to help with the coding of the collected samples (see acknowledgements). Coders were mindful of applying a systematic interpretation to all the samples (Bauer, 2007; Krippendorff, 2013). Coders — independent of each other and randomly selected — analyzed 12% of the same samples. This overlap in coding ( $n = 100$ ) was subsequently used to check the reliability of the coding to validate this study's findings. This process produced an intercoder reliability (ICR<sup>19</sup>:  $r = \text{agree} / [\text{agree} + \text{disagree}]$ ) above 80 per cent for all variables. The average of the ICR was 95 per cent. This high level of reliability points towards a well-defined coding scheme, a robust sampling validity and successful training sessions during which coders were made familiar with the conceptual framework, the coding frame and how to apply it to the media content (Bauer, 2007; Krippendorff, 2013).

## End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> All percentages reported in this report were rounded off

<sup>2</sup>  $c2(21, N = 812) = 272.701, p = .001$

<sup>3</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 145.096, p = .001$

<sup>4</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 61.961, p = .001$

<sup>5</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 18.505, p = .001$

<sup>6</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 36.631, p = .001$

<sup>7</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 15.671, p = .028$

<sup>8</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 17.801, p = .013$

<sup>9</sup> All the crosstabulations are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Articles which use no sources or articles which exclusively use sources that are neither pro- nor anti-Corbyn are absent from this graph.

<sup>10</sup>  $c2(21, N = 532) = 95.746, p = .001$

<sup>11</sup>  $c2(21, N = 812) = 126.157, p = .001$

<sup>12</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 193.094, p = .001$

<sup>13</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 59.570, p = .001$

<sup>14</sup>  $c2(7, N = 812) = 43.447, p = .001$

<sup>15</sup>  $c2(28, N = 812) = 191.260, p = .001$

<sup>16</sup> The sampling included the Sunday editions of all these newspapers

<sup>17</sup> Figures for 2015 published on 31/03/2016 by ABC:

[http://www.newsworks.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/1%20Facts%20Figures/Market%20overview/2016/Mar/Newsbrand\\_Circulation\\_17\\_03\\_16.pptx](http://www.newsworks.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/1%20Facts%20Figures/Market%20overview/2016/Mar/Newsbrand_Circulation_17_03_16.pptx) [Last consulted 18/04/2016]

<sup>18</sup> We initially also planned to code broadcast news, which tends to be more balanced, lack of resources and time constraints made us focus on newspaper coverage. Overall, it could also be argued that despite the decline of the newspaper industry, newspapers still play an important role in the public sphere, they often set a tone and shape the news agenda

<sup>19</sup> Scott's Pi, nominal Krippendorff's alpha, and Cohen's Kappa for all the variables.