

Should the news media link the murder of Jo Cox with the Brexit campaign?

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This article is by Dr Bart Cammaerts, LSE.

The media have diligently and extensively reported on the just concluded trial of Thomas Mair, who murdered the pro-migrant Labour MP Jo Cox just before the Brexit vote. Across all media platforms her murder tends to be reported as the act of an isolated, disaffected and unemployed Nazi-loving nut-case, an attack by a domestic terrorist cell comprised of one person. Mair is, in other words, depicted as a rotten apple in an otherwise healthy barrel.

What disturbs me about this dominant narrative, however, is that the context within which this political murder occurred is not scrutinised, nor part of the public debate. This calculated and sick murder took place at the end of one of the most divisive and dirty political campaigns ever waged in this democracy.

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Autumn Statement 2016

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The Daily Telegraph

Brexit row overshadows Hammond

Ministers attack OBR for 'loom and gloom' prediction of £60bn lost growth after leaving EU

By Peter Dominiczak, Christopher Hope and Steven Swindford

EUROSCPTIC ministers last night attacked the Government's budget watchdog after it estimated that Brexit would cost the country almost £60 billion in lost economic growth.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) formally warned that the Treasury would not net balance the books during this parliament, although the economy will continue to grow and hundreds of thousands of jobs will be created.

The latest announcement yesterday's Autumn Statement – the first major economic policy package to be

announced by Philip Hammond and Theresa May.

The Chancellor's statement, one of the most conservative in recent history, contained relatively minimal changes to tax and spending policies. The flagship part of the hour-long speech was a pledge to spend £23 billion on infrastructure in the coming years.

Mr Hammond stressed that the OBR report confirmed the "underlying strength and resilience" of the economy, but he acknowledged there was an "urgent need" to address long-term weaknesses.

"This Autumn Statement responds to the challenge of building on that strength, while also heeding the warnings in the OBR's figures, as we begin writing this new chapter in our country's history," said Mr Hammond.

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Britain is open for business and it provides help to those who need it now.

Ministers in Mr Hammond's Autumn Statement included:
◆ A £1 billion "smidgen tax" paid by rising insurance premiums for motorists and homeowners and scrapping tax breaks on job perks enjoyed by millions of workers.
◆ Billions of pounds are to be spent on roads, rail and housing, to help Britain shake off its "slouching" reputation as the sick man of Europe.
◆ Fuel duty was frozen for the seventh

year in a row, saving drivers £30 a year.

◆ The pensions "triple lock" could be scrapped after the next general election due to rising life expectancy rates.

◆ More than two million people will need year after year to invest in a government-backed savings bond with interest rates of 2.2 per cent.

◆ However, the OBR forecast last night threatened to cause a government split. The official forecaster was forced to admit that it was given no access to privileged information about the Prime Minister's Brexit strategy and that the prediction was likely to prove wrong.

The head of the OBR said there was a 50 per cent chance that its predictions would be wrong – just as its forecast for how the economy would fare in the immediate aftermath of a Brexit vote proved incorrect.

Cabinet ministers reacted furiously, saying the forecast was "not worth the paper it is written on". One minister said: "We were told we would be in a



doom and gloom scenario" by an organisation "that simply hasn't got anything right".

"The key thing is that the OBR has been wrong in every single forecast they've made so far. On the deficit, on growth, on jobs, they've pretty much been wrong on everything," he added.

Cabinet sources said that Mr Hammond had taken the OBR forecasts with a "pinch of salt".

According to the OBR, Britain will need to borrow an extra £18.7 billion directly as a result of Brexit. It warned that growth will be 2.4 per cent lower over the next five years, adding an extra £12.2 billion to borrowing.

However, in one positive assessment, it did say that employment will rise by 200,000 by 2021. This is despite David Cameron's government predicting that Brexit would lead to a rise in unemployment by 500,000.

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Police hunt for accomplice who provided gun to Jo Cox's killer

By Martin Evans and Leif Flanagan

JO COX'S killer may have been aided by an accomplice who gave him the murder weapon, police disclosed last night as they began a manhunt.

The MP and mother of two was killed a week before the EU referendum, in what prosecutors yesterday described as an 'act of terror'. Thomas Mair - obsessed with the Nazis and white supremacy - was told he will die in jail after a jury at the Old Bailey took just an hour and a half to find him guilty of the brutal and senseless murder.

During the trial, it was revealed that the 33-year-old used a German-made .22 calibre bolt-action rifle which had been chopped down to fit in length so it could be used with one hand.

It has now emerged the legally field gun was stolen along with ammunition from a car in Highley, West Yorks, in August last year.

Police do not believe that Mair, who rarely left his home town of Bradford, was behind the theft and a forensic search of his home and garden found no evidence he had modified the gun.

Detectives are now urgently exploring the possibility that a far-right

sympathiser provided Mair with the weapon in the knowledge of what he was planning. Police believe Mair took possession of the gun just two weeks before the murder, when his online searches began to show an interest in how .22 calibre weapons worked.

Detective Superintendent Nick Walton said there was no record of Mair ever having been in trouble with the police. He said: "No parking ticket, no encounter with a police officer, no reporting of him being a victim of crime. There was nothing."

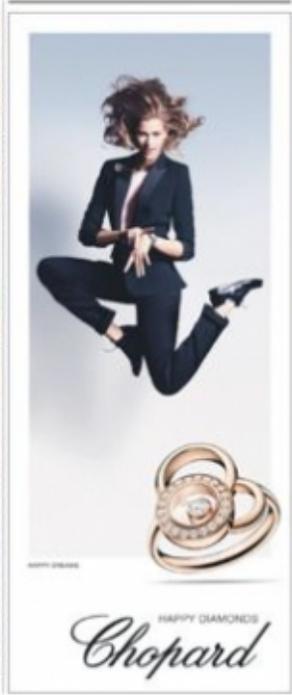
Det Sgt Walton said Mair was "an anti-social loner in the broad sense of the word" and had obsessive-compulsive tendencies, anxiety and agoraphobia. But he said there were no signs of mental health issues such as schizophrenia, or of drug or alcohol abuse.

Police believe he may have only made his plan to attack Mrs Cox - with whom he had never had any contact in the weeks before, after he took possession of the rifle he used to shoot her. Mr Walton said: "It is my view from the evidence that he has come into possession of the weapon and then he has started researching it. He had the motive and then the opportunity arose with her being his local MP at that surgery at that library that day."

Mair also researched materials and another pro-Europe Yorkshire politician, William Hague. When arrested he was carrying 23 bullets, suggesting he intended to attack someone else.



Jo Cox MP was murdered by Thomas Mair using a .22 rifle he is suspected of obtaining from an accomplice



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Whereas both sides of the argument were twisting facts to strengthen their case, it was above all the Leave campaign that went overboard in terms of transgressing political decency. The political forces that were bent on cutting all ties with the EU waged a vicious and ruthless campaign. The end justified all the possible means, even if this meant tapping into what Jeremy Corbyn called the 'well of hatred'.

The Brexit campaign consciously tapped into and pandered to very dark racist sentiments that have always been deemed to be excluded from a legitimate democratic debate in this country, and rightly so. They not only mainstreamed, but above all legitimated, a populist and fascist discourse that used to be confined to the EDL or the BNP.

To give but a few examples of this: the Brexit campaign promoted the myth that if the UK stayed inside the EU, the UK would surely be 'swamped' by [Ukrainian](#) and [Turkish](#) immigrants. They insinuated that all immigrants are rapists by releasing [a list of serious crimes](#) committed by EU citizens in the UK.

A few days before the murder of Jo Cox, Nigel Farage stood before an anti-immigration poster with the slogan 'breaking point'; the poster bore an eerie resemblance to [a Nazi propaganda movie](#). Even the Conservative peer Sayeeda Warsi denounced the Brexit-campaign for its xenophobia and for claiming that '[\[t\]he refugees are coming, the rapists are coming, the Turks are coming.](#)'

What the Brexit campaign furthermore argued is that only those that wanted the UK to leave Europe are 'for' Britain and indeed put 'Britain first'; they are the 'true patriots', whereas those that advocated for the UK staying inside the EU are 'against' Britain, and were basically positioned as traitors and this patterns continues until today.

In doing so, I would argue, the Brexit-campaign and those that led it, created a toxic climate of hatred and resentment towards foreigners in this country but also towards those in Britain that politically and in practice defend an open society, multi-culturalism, migration, humanitarianism, refugee rights, etc. This juxtaposition between the patriot and the traitor and the legitimisation by the Brexit-campaign of a xenophobe agenda undeniably provided the moral context in which the political murder of Jo Cox took place, but apparently this cannot be said as such.

It is, as far as I'm concerned, way too easy and above all misleading to depict the murder of Jo Cox as the despicable act of a mentally deranged loner which has nothing to do with the Brexit-campaign or with the way in which this campaign stirred and instrumentalised xenophobic hatred in this country. The Brexit-campaign has

unleashed and normalised something dark and sinister in British society and the murder of Jo Cox is just one manifestation of this. In these post-Brexit and post-Trump times, we need journalists to fight for democratic values and expose this toxic context which led to the murder of Jo Cox, not obscure or individualise it.

This article by Dr Bart Cammaerts, LSE written in a personal capacity.

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