

Never mind fake news, this was the fake politics election

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The 2015 election was a mirage. The country thought it was choosing between the Tories and a coalition of Labour and the SNP because of misleading polls. This election is even more of a sham.

Bizarrely, the two main parties have not been fighting to win a General Election. They have been competing for victory over their own MPs.

Theresa May's goal is to secure a majority that allows her to negotiate a Brexit deal on her own terms, not that of the arch Eurosceptics. All that talk of her reshaping the Conservative agenda to a more inclusive, centrist agenda collapsed as she bungled social care and school lunches and promised the return of fox hunting. According to focus groups conducted by Britain Thinks, the latter policy especially, barely discussed in the news media, has sent out a powerful message that the Conservatives are still the 'posh' party.



Clearly, Jeremy Corbyn has done a fantastic job at rallying his core support. He has ignored the centrist votes needed to win the election, instead pursuing a nostalgic, utterly unimaginative agenda that will secure him the leadership. Bizarrely, he wants to be judged as having done as well as Ed Miliband in the popular vote, sacrificing hard-working Labour MPs on the BBQ of his vanities.



(BEN STANSALL/AFP/Getty Images)

We have had no debate about what Brexit will mean. Just supine indifference from an incompetent Labour team and arrogant blackmail threats from the Prime Minister. At least Labour tried to have a conversation about other issues such as the NHS but only to provide material for all those rallies with the adoring faithful in safe Labour seats.

You can't blame the media for the fact that this has been an even more a stage-managed campaign than 2015 with leaders parading in front of invited party members and avoiding either lengthy interviews or proper debates on TV.

Social media has amplified the polarisation. The digital Corbynites have abused the very people that they should be persuading, while the Tories have wisely pumped their cash into targeted Facebook adverts that seek to scare voters in the privacy of their own cyberspaces.

Let's see what the actual vote brings. I suspect that there will not be a big surprise. Labour is piling up votes in its safe seats and will probably surrender a decent majority to Theresa May. The real political battle will begin on June 9th.

Paradoxically, Corbyn personally will win by losing well. May could find herself under more pressure by winning well, but dropping below those early high expectations.

It's the electorate who will lose.

Election campaigns are about more than just the result. They are supposed to be a national conversation about who we are and where we are going as a country. That hasn't happened. They are supposed to be a job interview for the post of running the country. That hasn't happened. They are supposed to be a rigorous audit of policy positions so we understand what the next government will do and how they will pay for it. That clearly hasn't happened.

We are none the wiser and more divided, depressed and politically denuded than before. I genuinely don't know what journalists could have done to address this. It might have helped if there was more exposure of the stage-management, less slavish propaganda for the party line, perhaps more attempts to raise policy not personality to the fore? Many of them have been witty, incisive and informed on Twitter but perhaps they need to get out more?

But in the end, you can only report on what the politicians do. In this election they turned democracy into a cynical, constrained exercise act of political robbery. The danger is that this vicious cycle of spin will leave the public more bored and alienated from the political process just as historic decisions are being made. Journalists are supposed to be the watch-dogs of democracy. They must ask themselves how they can help rebuild real politics in an age when

the politicians have opted out.

This article by Charlie Beckett, @CharlieBeckett director of Polis, the LSE's journalism think-tank and a professor in the Department of Media and Communications.

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