

Media coverage focusing on slim majority of the Conservative Party influences voter perceptions

18 January 2016



The research team surveyed 1,830 people from 600 Parliamentary constituencies to gauge their opinion about the performance of the new Conservative Government. Credit: Shutterstock

Voters who read media reports highlighting the slim Parliamentary majority of the Conservative Party are less likely to believe Prime Minister David Cameron can have an impact on their lives, University of Exeter researchers have found.

A survey by academics has found those who saw articles which highlight the Government's working majority of 16 then believe Ministers are not able to deliver on their campaign promises.

The research team lead by Professor Dan Stevens, based at the Exeter Q-Step Centre and the University's Centre for Elections, Media and Participation surveyed 1,830 people from 600 Parliamentary constituencies to gauge their opinion about the performance of the new Conservative Government.

They found participants who read articles focusing on the small Conservative majority were also significantly more likely to believe that it is

important to have a powerful Government in office in order to hold it accountable in elections.

Using methods typically used by computer scientists, academics from the University of Exeter's politics department have also examined how both traditional and [social media](#) coverage shaped the unexpected outcome of the 2015 election.

They found coverage of the then Labour Party leader Ed Miliband was more negative than coverage of the Conservative Party leader David Cameron.

This week academics have published data on 400,000 new stories and 371,000 tweets, and will share their insights with pollsters and political strategists planning future election campaigns at a workshop in London.

As part of the study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, academics examined the key topics covered in the [media](#) during the General Election and the sentiments promoted by different publications. They also compared output between social media and traditional news sources, the impact of Twitter activity by prospective parliamentary candidates and the role of pollsters and bloggers on media coverage.

Dr Ekaterina Kolpinskaya, Associate Lecturer in Quantitative Methods at the Q-Step Centre, said: "Our research highlights the differences in tone and content of General Election [coverage](#) between traditional and social media, and also shows that there are differences in the way parliamentary candidates are presented in the media based on personal characteristics – such as gender.

"Many voters might have the perception that most

[media coverage](#) focused on which party was ahead or behind in the polls, but we found there was a great deal of focus on [party](#) policy and issues facing the country."

Provided by University of Exeter

APA citation: Media coverage focusing on slim majority of the Conservative Party influences voter perceptions (2016, January 18) retrieved 22 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-media-coverage-focusing-slim-majority.html>

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