How did the media and politicians in the UK discuss poverty in 2015?

by Amy Sippitt and Alessia Tranchese

This report assesses how politicians and the media spoke about issues relating to
poverty and people living in poverty during the 2015 election campaign,
and how accurate these representations were.

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How ideas and issues are framed matters greatly in politics. On a small scale, the fight over whether the 'bedroom tax' label would stick to government housing reforms epitomises this.

This is a time of important decisions that affect how, and to what extent, poverty will persist in the UK. The longstanding pursuit of welfare reform goes on, and the economic and fiscal climate is the background for almost all government policy.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has a longstanding concern that the way politicians and the media talk about people in poverty makes it harder to build public and political consensus on the need to tackle and find solutions to poverty and its causes. JRF funded this report from Full Fact to assess how politicians and the media spoke about issues relating to poverty and people living in poverty during the 2015 election campaign, and how accurate these representations were.

This report seeks to help readers judge:

- whether the public debate during the election campaign accurately reflected the realities and causes of poverty;

- whether the presentation by politicians and the media of issues relating to poverty and welfare reform was accurate.

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Foreword

Five months after winning the general election, the Prime Minister stood up in front of party members at his annual party conference and declared an 'all-out assault on poverty'. David Cameron, now leader of a majority Conservative government, used his party conference speech to set out his vision for the next five years on social reform, social mobility and 'making work pay', all with recurring references to poverty. In parallel, the consciously leftwing politics of the new Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and his shadow chancellor have been widely remarked upon in the press; not least Corbyn's first major speech as Labour leader when he labelled the government 'poverty deniers'.

This is in striking contrast from the election period, when our report found 'poverty' as a term was infrequently used in debates and the focus was much more on jobs and welfare. For Labour it's a departure from the portrayal by then leader Ed Miliband during the election campaign, who referred more to global poverty than poverty in the UK when he did mention the word. This association of poverty as an international issue mirrored the media's use of the term during the campaign.

As a result of our findings we recommended that charities seeking a reduction in poverty, such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), may need to start using words other than poverty to evoke the experience of living on low income in a UK context. But what this more recent activity suggests is that rather than 'poverty' as a term potentially being viewed as no longer relevant for the UK, it's a term which politicians are seemingly picking up and putting down as they see fit. That raises more questions for JRF and other organisations working in the field.

Where welfare cuts will come from is now clearer. The reports during the election that child benefit was on the cards to be cut were unfounded, but plans to cut child tax credits have been announced. That's consistent with our finding that potential cuts to child benefit appeared to get the most prominence and to be portrayed particularly negatively, while cuts to child tax credit appeared to be less in the limelight. After low pay was a big theme during the election, we've also seen the replacement of the minimum wage with a new 'National Living Wage' (NLW) – albeit lower than that recommended by the Living Wage Foundation.

Child poverty has fallen, according to David Cameron, and has risen according to Jeremy Corbyn. The former refers to relative child poverty while the latter refers to absolute. Yet discussions about poverty are ever more clouded by the now regular insistence of each leader to use only one measure of poverty to evaluate trends over the last five years. The leaders should be explaining why they're opting to use one measure only, rather than constantly talking across each other. 'There is little value in this trading of examples', as the Institute for Fiscal Studies commented in reference to competing claims by opposing politicians of families who would win or lose from the tax credit changes.

One of the most striking findings from our report is that journalists did not appear to explicitly scrutinise or challenge claims made by politicians or pressure groups. Supporting and encouraging journalists to do this, and to encourage politicians to take on more responsibility for giving people a realistic view of the topic they're discussing, will be a key focus of our work in taking these findings forward.

We are grateful to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for funding this important piece of work.

Amy Sippitt

1 Introduction

The Coalition Government oversaw what it described as the 'greatest reform to our welfare state for a generation' through policies such as Universal Credit and changes to disability benefits. At the same time, the UK was dealing with the aftermath of the recession, with austerity measures introduced to begin to reduce the deficit. Beside a wider set of media narratives about poverty this happened as fly-on-the-wall documentaries about people on benefits and people living in poverty became more frequent. The Channel 4 series *Benefits Street* alone provided the channel with what it described as some of its best-ever viewing figures.

JRF funded Full Fact to analyse the way in which politicians and the media present poverty and how people living in poverty are typically depicted. The aim was to understand the accuracy and themes of the contemporary public debate around poverty, in terms of the narratives and statistics used to describe poverty in the UK and those experiencing poverty.

Politicians frequently see media coverage as being reflective of public opinion, and consequently such reporting can affect policy-making. This analysis draws together output from print, radio, TV – where most people get their news from – and politicians' speeches; previous narrative studies on poverty have tended to focus on print media.[1] In drawing these mediums together it is important to take into account the distinctions between and within each of these output types: for example, the different regulatory systems between broadcast and print media are likely to have contributed to the findings. This project focuses on the 2015 general election campaign and on the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats, alongside a brief analysis of the national parties in the rest of the UK.[2] The research sought to find out how poverty and related issues were talked about during the campaign, when parties' messaging was arguably most refined, to analyse the current state of public debate about poverty.

There is no uncontentious definition of poverty. Over time there has been a continuous redefinition of 'poverty' and governments and others have frequently attempted to shift the boundaries and perceptions of it. For example, in the 1970s sociologists argued poverty was more about the inability of people to participate actively in society than it was about a shortage of income.[3] While official statistics currently measure it in terms of income or material deprivation, the government has announced its intention to replace income-based measures of child poverty with measures of educational attainment gaps and worklessness.[4] This report does not seek to define poverty, and instead focuses on where 'poverty' itself was explicitly talked about. The second focus is on benefits and welfare, due to the prominence of this topic during the last five years, and the way in which the two topics have become interlinked in discussions on each by politicians and the media.

For the analysis of 'people living in poverty' we refer to the individuals and groups discussed by the media and politicians who were either talked about in the context of low income (insecure work or unemployment), poverty or benefits.

The research used corpus linguistics tools[5] to identify patterns in the language used to talk about poverty and welfare reform, and factchecking of specific claims relating to poverty and welfare reform to assess the extent to which they were accurate.

Using these methods, it sets out to inform the views of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and others on the following questions:

- Does public debate reflect the realities of poverty and the causes of poverty?

- Is the presentation by politicians and the media of issues relating to poverty and welfare reform, in terms of the narratives and statistics used, accurate?

- What is the interaction between political and media representation of poverty?

This is not the first time that these questions have been asked; concerns have previously been raised for example by the Department for Work and Pensions Select Committee which, at the height of the welfare reforms in 2011, lamented the presentation of the work capability assessment for those claiming Incapacity Benefit by politicians, and the media coverage as 'often irresponsible and inaccurate'. Lord

Justice Leveson in his [Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press](#) has also criticised inaccurate reporting on disability and social welfare benefits, where he said 'the inaccuracy appears to be the result of the title's agenda taking precedence or assuming too great a significance over and beyond the facts of the underlying story'.

2 Executive summary

This report analyses the way in which politicians and the media (print and broadcast) talked about poverty and people living in poverty during the 2015 general election campaign to gain an understanding of the state of the contemporary public debate around poverty.

Explicit discussion of poverty in the UK by politicians of the three main parties and the media was infrequent during the campaign period. This is perhaps not that surprising given that poverty did not come up as any of the most frequently mentioned issues named by voters as being very important to their vote, according to the [Ipsos Mori Issues Index](#). Issues such as the economy, which can be seen as related to poverty, were among the most frequently mentioned topics though, and these did come up.

How the media and politicians discussed poverty and benefits

Media

Poverty was most frequently used in the context of foreign need, as a reality distant from the UK, and far more rarely used in the domestic context. In general the representation of poverty was fragmented, stretching from its appearance in discussions of climate change through to education. Poverty was not talked about in terms of what it is, what it does, or how it affects people. Similarly, it was often portrayed without cause or solution.

In the broadcast media, fuel poverty and child poverty were most frequently referred to, with the former mostly due to media appearances by the Green Party. In the print media, 'people' in poverty were talked about most frequently, closely followed by child poverty, while fuel poverty appeared less frequently. In the print media, poverty was explicitly mentioned more frequently in the leftwing press.

Overall, explicit mentions of poverty were much less frequent than other related issues such as benefits and welfare. While some issues such as jobs, childcare and wages clearly related to poverty were discussed during the election, they were rarely identified as issues about or causes of 'poverty'. For example, childcare was discussed more frequently in articles relating to job insecurity rather than explicitly to poverty.

Benefits were talked about far more frequently than poverty in both print and broadcast media, and had a distinct singular narrative in terms of costs and public spending. This meant that benefits were portrayed in terms of their cost to everyone, adding to an intolerable debt, while poverty had no perceptible public costs, especially not in the UK.

The emphasis on the costs, as opposed to the supportive role, of welfare, was a clear reflection of the ground over which politicians were arguing during the election. However, there were some exceptions in a small number of articles where benefits were mentioned in the context of poverty, where the print media focused more on restrictive state actions and the state's responsibility in relation to welfare policy (such as mentions of *benefit sanctions*).

While the ground on which leading politicians debated was firmly established, and third parties contributed economic analysis to that debate, overall there was little evidence of any third party attempts to put forward the perspective of people experiencing poverty or to challenge the dominance of the welfare spending versus welfare cuts narrative.

However what we did see evidence of was a greater use of academic studies when articles in the print media mentioned poverty on its own, compared to when benefits were referred to.

Child benefit (and the potential cuts to it) was the most commonly talked about type of benefit and in terms of prominence appeared to be placed more in the limelight than child tax credit. In terms of

frequency, cuts to tax credit (in relation to child tax credit or child benefit) were mentioned more frequently than child benefit in the print media but less frequently in broadcast media.

The dominance of discussions about child benefit in both print and broadcast media may be due to the fact that cuts to child benefit were a dominant topic in the campaign of the (now) opposition parties and were therefore frequently mentioned in the news. Who was doing the cutting was not as frequently presented. *Housing benefit* was among other benefits mentioned far less. In broadcast in particular references to potential cuts as *threats* rather than for example *restrictions* suggested these cuts were portrayed negatively (and reflected politicians' statements). However, unemployment benefits and working-age benefits were not represented as equally necessary or in need of the same protection from cuts.

Politicians

References to poverty in the UK by the three main parties were rare and none appeared to talk about it more than any other. This contrasts with the SNP, Plaid Cymru and Green Party, who in the leaders' debates talked about poverty more – in particular, child poverty. This was also the case in Nicola Sturgeon's speeches, which mentioned poverty more than David Cameron's or Ed Miliband's.

This was a shift from 2014 for Labour, when they did talk about poverty more than the Conservatives. The lack of this distinction in 2015 appears to demonstrate a shift away from explicitly talking about poverty towards implicitly talking about inequality by juxtaposing the experience of *millions paying more* and *millionaires paying less* in reference to Conservative policies for the rich. The Conservatives did not demonstrate any shift from 2014 in terms of how they talked about poverty.

Overall, Conservative speeches focused more on topics such as the *economy* and *jobs*, Labour speeches focused on the criticism of Conservative policies while the Liberal Democrats also focused on the *economy* as well as *(youth) unemployment, welfare, fairer society a*nd *opportunity for everyon*e. The Liberal Democrats also talked more about *cuts* in reference to both alleged *Tory tax cuts* and *planned* or *secret cuts* by the Conservative Party.

As in the media, benefits were a far more frequent topic than poverty. Cameron discussed them from the point of view of reducing welfare through work, while Miliband spoke about alleged Conservative plans to cut benefits. In this way, both focused on Conservative plans to reduce the expenditure on benefits rather than talking about benefits in terms of the support they provide.

How the media and politicians discussed people in poverty

Media

Individual benefit stories were a strong feature in the print media when benefits were talked about outside the context of poverty. Frequently occurring in our counts was the name Mike Holpin, a benefit claimant with a large family who featured prominently in the print media coverage of benefits for the amount of money the family was costing in benefits, including child benefit for multiple children. These stories were prominent and out of kilter with the fact that such large families make up a small proportion of all families claiming child benefit – a point not made clear in these articles. Plane crashes are newsworthy, for example, but they're rare and articles about them often make this clear.

In contrast, when articles spoke about poverty, these accounts of individual experiences were not as apparent, and instead were focused more on the experience of people in poverty as a collective. The repetition of stories about named benefit claimants meant that a vivid picture was offered of the lives of specific individuals claiming benefits – something which was not apparent in articles about poverty. Benefits were talked about as something individuals could actively 'get off', while poverty was mentioned in a more generalised sense as a thing to be tackled, but not by the individuals in poverty. Poverty was also presented as something that people *need to be taken out of, lifted out of* or *helped get out o*f and something that must be *prevented* or *stopped*. This had a stronger presence than the use of statistics in discussions about poverty. *Escape* was the only verb that implied the active role of people in poverty –

albeit often with someone else's help – whereas all other terms implied that an unspecified someone must help people so that they can get out of poverty.

Similarly there were references in the broadcast media to *getting off benefits and into work*, while there appeared to be no talk in terms of addressing low wages to get those *in work off benefits.*

Overall, unemployment benefits and working-age benefits were portrayed as something people should be encouraged to stay away from.

Despite the focus on cuts to child benefit, who would be affected by those cuts (such as *children*) were not as frequently presented.

Politicians

Both Ed Miliband and David Cameron noticeably talked about *working people* and *working families.* These expressions dominated speeches by Miliband in particular. There was a much weaker emphasis on those out of work, such as unemployed people. Both these themes were weak for Nick Clegg.

Statistics

Looking specifically at references to trends in poverty, the most common claims made by politicians and outlets were generally accurate but referred to one of a variety of measures only, particularly in the case of child poverty. This narrow focus meant that where measures showed different trends, claims gave a one-sided picture. Journalists rarely included the context of the alternate measures. This was despite the repetition of claims such as one made frequently by the Conservatives that child poverty had fallen under the Coalition when other measures suggested it had stayed the same or risen.

Factchecking case studies

We also looked at five case studies of significant stories during the campaign which related to people on low incomes. Within these there were specific cases of inaccurate claims which voters may feel, had they been presented differently, would have left them with a different view. This is true for claims on both sides of the political spectrum. This is not to say that all claims were inaccurate. Reasons for inaccuracy included incorrect explanations of statistics, citing trends which could not be substantiated by the figures, and claims which, while accurate, excluded the evidence of alternative figures or broader trends.

Often inaccuracy could have been avoided at the outset. Rather than journalists appearing to explicitly scrutinise or challenge figures from press releases, the coverage showed that claims either did not appear or their inaccuracy was repeated. Most corrections or explanations that appeared in print were made after inaccuracies were pointed out. This doesn't necessarily illuminate how journalists use figures that they find independently, nor whether journalists were choosing not to cover claims because they found them to be inaccurate.

It is clear though that journalists' initial coverage did not call to account campaigns using inaccurate figures.

Other cases of inaccuracy came from claims appearing in quotes from parties in the print media or in interviews on broadcast. In the case of the former these were rarely questioned while in the case of the latter presenters clearly couldn't be prepared for every inaccurate claim made.

After claims had been corrected, subsequent statements and coverage were mostly careful not to make the same error though in some cases inaccurate claims continued to be repeated by politicians and the media.

3 Representation in the media

It is important to note that the purpose of this research, and the methods used, is to look at these debates at scale. It is about the repetition of patterns in language and the overriding impression that these give. If we did find exceptions we may not always comment on them, and instead focused on the majority of cases. People who experienced the campaign will have different views of the detail of these debates.

This analysis is about use of the word poverty, which people use to mean different things.

Articles in the print media were put into five separate groups (for full details see Appendix 1): poverty-only, benefits-only, benefits and poverty, insecure jobs and unemployment. The poverty-only group encompassed articles that mentioned at least one of *poverty, poor, poorer* and *poorest*. The benefits-only group encompassed articles that contained at least one of *benefit, benefits, welfare* and *social security*. The benefits and poverty group contained at least one word from each of these search strings.

The linguistic analysis in this report uses three common methods. First, the identification of keywords — words or clusters of words which had a significantly higher frequency in one group compared with another. These were as far as possible grouped into themes, and excluded functional words such as 'is' and 'I' and ambiguous verbs such as 'say' and 'think'. Second, the identification of words (known as collocates) which tended to occur more frequently with words we were interested in. For example, the word living occurs frequently with the word poverty and is thus a collocate of poverty. In some instances, we compared these with collocates in the British National Corpus (BNC), a dataset designed to represent typical written and spoken English.[6] Third, the analysis of search terms in the line of text in which they appear (known as concordance lines). Where there were more than 100 occurrences of a search term, we looked at random samples of 30 lines. Where there were fewer, we looked at all of them. We pick out some examples of these in the report.

Throughout this section we feature specific themes and case studies where we have factchecked claims (including those by politicians) which exemplify the types of statistical claims that occurred in each story. Because there were so many, it was not possible to factcheck every single claim relating to each story. For some of the case studies, corrections by the media were due to a press release by Full Fact on the topic, which will have affected our judgements on the accuracy of claims made during and afterwards.

Poverty

Print

Poverty was most frequently used in the context of foreign need, and far more rarely used in the domestic context. The 100 strongest keywords used more frequently in the poverty-only dataset compared with the benefits-only dataset show that poverty seemed to be portrayed as a reality distant from the UK (as the use of keywords such as *global, international, Africa and American* would suggest) (see Table 1). It was used to refer to global problems, related to international issues. The presence of words related to art and entertainment such as *movies* or *novels* were also mainly in this international context and not always immediately related to poverty.

Poverty was also linked to education (*school, teachers, free school meals*). In these cases, the focus was on *children* and *pupils* who go to school being *sick, hungry, unwell, dirty* or *dressed in inappropriate clothes. Church* and *religious* were mentioned more often through indirect connections to poverty, with articles mentioning poverty or the poor more as one issue among many. Brixton in London was talked about in relation to its *gentrification* and the *prices* of houses in this area.

Table 1: Categorised 100 strongest keywords of the poverty-only group versus the benefits-only group

Categories		Keywords
Search terms		*poverty, poor, poorest, poorer*
Entertainment		*book, film, music, art, writer, arts, novel, artist, drama*
International		
	Development	*world, development, countries, global, international, developing, sustainable, planet, earth, goals, un, human*
	Climate change	*divestment, environment, emissions, climate, change*
	Resources	*water, rice, oil, food, energy, fuel, fuels, carbon, coal, fossil*
	Extra-UK	*baltimore, african, africa*
National		*brixton*
Society		
	General	*social, society, communities, community, class*
	Family	*family, parents*
	Religion	*church, religious, jesus, catholic, easter, nuns,*
	Education	*school, schools, pupils, education, teaching, university, students, teachers*
	People	*women, men, man, boy, children*
	Adjectives	*young*
Support		
	General	*aid, help*
Bodies		*charity, foundation, ngos*
Research		*study, data, published, research, found, University*[7]
Health		*health, stress*
Inequality		*gap, inequality*
Money		
	General	*wealth, rich*
	Bodies	*companies, bank*
Politics		*green*
Life/death		*life, live, living, death, lives*
Unpleasant circumstances		*war, corruption, issues, conflict*

What is absent from this list is any mention of money (both personal and public), and, despite the fact that the poverty-only material was collected during the run-up to the general election, any dominant mentions of politics. Only the *Green Party* came up, mostly mentioned in relation to climate change (e.g. *sustainable, development* and *environment)*, rather than in the context of political parties or the general election.

A comparison of leftwing newspapers with rightwing newspapers highlighted that poverty was explicitly mentioned more frequently in the leftwing press. The international focus seen here also comes specifically from its dominance in the leftwing press, rather than being common across all outlets. More details of this comparison are available in Appendix 1.

Explicit references to poverty

Poverty was mostly portrayed as something that must be eliminated (*tackle, eradicate, reduce, eliminate*). These verbs were often used in forms that did not require the subject to be specified (such as *tackling, to eradicate*) so there was little mention of who should tackle poverty, how or by when. Looking for instances of the verb *to tackle* in a random sample of newspapers in the same election campaign period suggested that this framing was similar for other topics too where who, how or when were also not commonly specified. *Tackle* was mostly used by the press to refer to 'problems', 'crises' or 'issues' such as

diseases (*malaria*) or international issues (*climate change, terrorism*) or other 'social' battles (*inequalities, disadvantages, sexual abuse, digital divide, homophobia*).

The most common adjectives referring to poverty were *child, extreme, food* and *fuel*, with *relative* and *absolute* (both occurring the same amount of times), *in-work* and *global* poverty appearing less frequently. In some cases poverty was described as *extreme, serious, abject* or *grinding* and in other cases it was associated with other unpleasant circumstances such as *homelessness, inequality, war* and *destitution*. In others poverty was also described as an active entity '*blighting*' – a word that is usually associated with plant disease that *mars* or *destroys – lives, people, communities* and *homes*.[8] This active description of poverty was uncommon as there were no other cases in which *poverty* was the subject that affects people's lives. Instead *poverty* was presented like a condition – something *people live in* (one of the words most frequently used with *poverty* is *living*, as in the expression *living in poverty*). Despite the talk of reducing poverty, it was rare that poverty was talked about in terms of its causes, demonstrated by both the keyword list and the appearance of poverty in the text.

In a few cases, poverty was associated with *inequality, exclusion* and, even less frequently, *unemployment*.

Occasionally poverty was talked about in terms of its causes or solutions, particularly in terms of income or employment (or lack thereof). This was particularly the case when poverty was talked about alongside benefits where it co-occurred with words such as *pay* and *wage*. *Pay* and *wage* co-occurred both as a cause of poverty (e.g. 'Too many people are being driven into poverty by current policies on wages and benefits') or a solution to poverty ('Billions are spent from the public purse each year to top up the incomes of low-paid workers, yet 1m people could be lifted out of poverty by paying them the living wage'). But in most cases the relationship between income and poverty was not one of cause and consequence. *Poverty pay* and *poverty wages* were talked about as existing, fixed things rather than in relation to someone's actions and, as such, they are void of responsibility. *Poverty line* was also mentioned, mostly in relation to people living below or close to the poverty line. Sometimes this was specified as a certain amount of dollars or euros per week or per day (once in relation to £1 a day) that *the world's poorest* live below. No definition or monetary value was given when the *poverty line* was referred to specifically in the UK context.

Poverty was also rarely explicitly defined. When something was said about what poverty *is*, it was never followed by a description of what poverty was actually perceived to be.

In some cases, *poverty* appeared in health-related contexts (especially *poor health)* and in relation to *food poverty* and *hunger*. In that case too, *food poverty* was not represented in terms of what it *is* or what it *does* or how it *affects* people, but as a circumstance in which people find themselves in or something to be *halted, dealt with* or *concerned about* but without mentioning who should deal with it. So lack of food and hunger were presented as a specific state of poverty rather than a consequence of poverty. There was some discussion linking together insecure work as causing food poverty, but this did not regularly appear in the immediate context of mentions of food poverty.

Broadcast

Poverty was only mentioned 80 times in the broadcast sample. As with the print media, when poverty was mentioned explicitly, it was presented as something unpleasant, associated with the need to lift people out of poverty or to escape poverty. It was also rarely talked about in terms of the causes and consequences usually tied to it (see Table 2).

Fuel and *child* were the only significantly frequently used words with *poverty* in the TV and radio group. What was missing were frequent references to poverty in terms of *inequality*, a poverty *trap*, the poverty *line* or in terms of *unemployment, pay and income*, which were frequent in the BNC dataset: in other words, terms which can be seen as relating to the state role in tackling poverty. *Trap* refers to poverty as something that is hard to get out of and implies the agency of someone or something that holds and prevents those in the trap from getting out of it. It refers to 'a situation in which an increase in income results in a loss of benefits so that you are no better off'.[9] *Poverty line* is defined as 'a level of personal income defining the state of poverty'[10] and is usually used in the context of statistics on employment and success or failure of welfare policies. There was also no mention of the term *welfare trap* in our broadcast group.

Table 2: Words most often used with *poverty* with the highest frequencies (among top 50) in the British National Corpus (spoken)

Trap
World
People
Families
Pay
Income
Line
Traps
Inequality
Unemployment

Families, *people* and *world,* other words that are often used in conjunction with poverty (see Table 2), indicate that poverty is often mentioned in terms of the groups affected by it or as a global phenomenon. This was only evident in the broadcast dataset in terms of child poverty.

Mentions of fuel poverty were spread across five TV and radio programmes and it was clearly discussed as a problem (e.g. it must be *cut, something* must *done about it,* people must be *lifted out of it,* it is a *problem* and sometimes a *serious* one). In four out of these five programmes fuel poverty was referred to because it was mentioned in reference to or by a politician from the Green Party.

Child poverty was discussed mostly in terms of its (past or future) reduction. It was also discussed sometimes in reference to particular areas with the *highest* or *worst levels* of child poverty.

With the exception of fuel poverty (which was linked to *poor quality homes*), poverty was not predominantly related to social problems such as unemployment despite having both terms (*poverty* and *unemployment*) as search terms that formed the TV and radio corpus. There was some mention of solutions such as [*child benefit*] *prevents* poverty, and *education, to take people out of poverty,* but this was less common. As in the print media, poverty was also talked about here as something people needed to *escape*.

This is demonstrated in the following examples:

infrastructure, education, to take people out of	poverty	, really lift the squeeze of the austerity.
similar journeys since January, escaping war and	poverty	in unstable parts of Africa and the Middle
of them have communities that live in abject	poverty	and suffer terrible discrimination and I
to build more housing just to stop this	poverty	that we're seeing for many people due
If way across the world. Desperation drove them.	Poverty	, unemployment, war, disease. The terror and

Similarly, poverty was again not talked about in terms of what it is, nor in terms of what it does and how it affects people. It was presented as something that people *need to be taken out of, lifted out of* or *helped get out of* and something that must be *prevented* or *stopped.* This had a stronger presence than the use of statistics in discussions about poverty. *Escape* was the only verb that implied the active role of people in poverty – albeit often with someone else's help – whereas all other terms implied that someone must help people so that they can get out of poverty.

When there was talk of tackling poverty, this was mentioned more in reference to the actions of third parties (often unspecified) than people in poverty. There was talk of *projects to tackle poverty* as well as politicians' pledges to lift people out of poverty. Occasionally, benefits (*child benefit*) or *welfare reform* were mentioned as tackling or preventing poverty.

P*overty* also appeared in association with other unpleasant circumstances, such as *war*, *disease*, *inequality*, *addiction*, *homelessness*, *hunger*. This more compassionate view of poverty is reinforced by the adjectives used to describe poverty: *desperate*, *grinding*, *extreme* and *acute*. As with the print media, several terms that co-occurred with *poverty* were those usually associated with diseases, infections or illnesses: *antidote*, *eradicate*, *blighted* and *acute*, i.e. things that are mostly due to independent causes rather than individual choice and responsibility.

In terms of specific adjectives that could have possibly identified people as poor or out of work (e.g. *poor*, *jobless*, *workless*, *unemployed*), these had zero or very low (less than 40) frequencies and did not show any significant patterns.

Case study: Food banks

On Saturday 18 April, the *Independent* and the *i* led with an exclusive that one million Britons would soon be using food banks.[11] The figures it referred to were officially published on Wednesday 22 April by The Trussell Trust charity and reported on by *The Guardian*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Star*, *The Sun* and *The Telegraph*.[12] No radio or TV in our sample reported this as a headline story; this is not to say that they did not report it, merely that no references came up within our overall search terms.

The figures as first reported were not correct. They refer to one million uses of food banks in 2013/14 rather than unique users: the number of people using them is likely to be about half a million. It is also difficult to say, based on the Trust's figures, whether or not the increase in uses represents a rise in need, as the number of food banks increased too.

Such a claim may not be entirely inaccurate: research recently published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) found that benefit sanctions and unemployment were associated with an increase in food bank use, even when rising supply is taken into account. However, the claim cannot be made on the basis of The Trussell Trust data alone.

An initial clarification from the Trust did not avoid widespread confusion, but articles were later published explaining the inaccuracies in the reporting. Future references were more accurate in referring to one million uses rather than one million people.

How many people use food banks?

The Trust collects its data from the vouchers used by people referred to their food banks. If one voucher feeds a family of four people, that represents four uses. If the same family visits again next week, that represents another four uses. The Trussell Trust says that on average people needed two food bank vouchers annually, so the number of individuals using food banks is likely to be around half of the 1.1 million figure.

The Trust describes its service as 'emergency food and support', not sustained food provision. About half of its users only needed one food bank voucher in a year, though a significant minority, about 15 per cent, used the service more than three times.

After being contacted by Full Fact, The Trussell Trust added a note explaining that 'these are not all unique users' to its press release but this did not avoid widespread confusion. For example:

The Guardian: 'Nearly 1.1 million people received at least three days of emergency food from the trust's 445 food banks in 2014-15'. *This article has been updated and now reads:* The trust's 445 food banks distributed enough emergency food to feed almost 1.1 million people for three days in 2014-15'.[13]
The *Daily Mail*: 'David Cameron this morning launched a furious attack on Labour MP's "bleating" about poverty after it emerged more than a million people turned to food banks last year'. [14]

The *Independent:* 'The latest figures from the Trussell Trust have revealed that in the first six months of 2014-2015 almost half a million people received three days' food'.[15]

There was also a later article in *The Guardian* which still continued to confuse users with uses:

'The Trussell Trust reported this week that its food banks have had 1 million users over the past year, an increase of 19 per cent from the previous 12 months, with experts saying this is "the tip of the iceberg"'.[16]

Several newspapers also reported why the figures were inaccurate, including *The Telegraph,* the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, following intervention from Full Fact.[17]

This may help to explain why later articles on the subject did get it right:

'Last month, the Trussell Trust, the charity that provides parcels to food banks, revealed that visits had risen to over one million a year for the first time.' *Independent.*[18]

The main references to food bank statistics on TV and radio came from questions from the public who had picked up on the initial interpretation of the figures, for example on Radio 1's *Newsbeat* (22 April).

A question asked on the *BBC Question Time Election Leaders Special* was also featured on *BBC News at Ten* (30 April) and *BBC News at Six* (1 May) as well as some of the papers:

'One middle-aged woman angrily challenged the Prime Minister over benefit cuts, saying: "You talk about the sort of country you want to hand on to our children. I don't want to leave my children a country where a million people rely on food banks, where people have been hit by really punitive benefit sanctions"', *Daily Mail.* [19]

These claims were not rebutted.

Supply is not the same as demand

Many papers also concentrated on the increase in food bank use over previous years, for example: 'According to The Trussell Trust, its food banks have been used more than a million times in the 2014-15 financial year, a 19 per cent increase on the previous 12 months. And, lest we are in any doubt that this is directly linked to the coalition government's policies targeting those on benefits, we just need to look at the increase in food banks themselves which have risen from 56 in 2010 to 445 in 2015 – an increase of almost 700 per cent. And this is only the tip of the iceberg', *Independent.*[20]

It wasn't just papers making this point either, with Labour's Rachel Reeves reportedly saying that food bank use during the 2010-15 Parliament had 'gone up 16-fold'.[21]

The rise in uses of Trussell Trust food banks came with a rise in the number of food banks themselves: from 56 food banks in 2009 to 445 food banks in 2014. This represents a major expansion of the Trust into new areas. The Trust served 29 UK local authorities in 2009 but that number increased to 251 by 2013.

The increase in supply doesn't necessarily reflect an increased demand for emergency food, nor increasing food poverty. There may have been people in need of emergency food in the past who would not have shown up in the Trust's figures because there was no Trussell Trust food bank nearby. The Trust's food banks open when local Christian churches and community groups apply to the Trust to open a food bank; the network launched in 2004 because the Trust said it had 'discovered that short term hunger was a nationwide problem'. So it identified a problem a decade ago.

Ever since then, the number of food parcels handed out has been increasing, so it is also not accurate to say this was an increase only seen under the Coalition Government. It was also pointed out by outlets that the previous Labour government did not allow job centres to give out food vouchers; the fact that job centres now do will have affected demand.

Some papers made this point about supply not necessarily reflecting demand, quoting Full Fact's press release. For example:

'Full Fact said that even Trussell Trust's figures for the number of food parcels handed out – from 913,138 in the 2013/14 financial year to 1,084,604 in the financial year which ended in March – did not mean that demand for free food was going up.', *Daily Mail.* [22]

Some articles linked food banks to the issue of benefit sanctions, with the *Mirror*[23] in particular claiming that over three million benefit sanctions were issued for recipients of Employment Support Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance between July 2010 and September 2014. There is reason to say that the increase in use and number of food banks is associated with spending cuts, benefit sanctions and unemployment, based on the recent BMJ analysis, which accounted for changes in the number of food bank numbers and the length of time for which each food bank has been open. This evidence goes further in substantiating the claims being made than do The Trussell Trust figures in isolation.

Increased awareness

'…when free food is handed out, people will always come forward to take it.' *Daily Mail.*[24]
'Food banks have become normalised…' *The Sun.*[25]

As this line of argument suggests, people are also more likely to be aware that food banks exist.

Everyone using Trussell Trust food banks is referred there by organisations such as Citizens Advice. In September 2011 job centres also began signposting people to food banks. The Trust says that people referred to food banks by job centres are only a small percentage of total referrals. If more organisations are referring people – and becoming more willing to refer people – the number of uses can increase although the number of people in need may not have changed.

Academics from Manchester University have said that, while a social stigma remains in using food banks, there is an increasing 'normalisation' in their use due to the growth in the number of food banks and food donation points in supermarkets. If more people are aware of food banks, it is likely that more people will ask for a referral. This does not necessarily mean, though, that the increasing use was simply due to 'free food [being] handed out', as some commentators argued.

Reasons for visiting food banks

The main reported causes of food bank use are 'crises' in a range of areas, coupled with low household income and rising costs. The Trussell Trust's figures included reasons given for visits to their food banks, which were widely quoted by the papers.

There were some examples of these being misinterpreted. For example, *The Guardian* claimed:
'The Trussell Trust figures show the biggest proportion, 44 per cent, of food bank referrals last year – marginally lower than the previous year – were triggered by people pitched into crisis because their benefit payments had been delayed, or stopped altogether as a result of the strict jobcentre sanctions regime.' *The Guardian.* [26]

We do not know that sanctions are a particularly significant driver of referral within this 44 per cent, which is made up of two categories in The Trussell Trust's figures: benefit delays (30 per cent) and benefit changes (14 per cent). The Trust describes delays as 'people not receiving benefits to which they are entitled on time, this category can also include problems with processing new claims, or any other time lags in people receiving their welfare payments' while changes 'refers to the problems resulting from a change in people's welfare payments, for example, people having their benefits stopped whilst they are reassessed. This can also include a sanction'.

The *Independent*[27] also referred to a separate survey by the Trussell Trust showing that:
'86 per cent of their food banks reported an increase in referrals due to benefit sanctions. Of these, 76 per cent said some or many of these sanctions were seemingly unfair.'

The separate survey to which the *Independent* refers was completed by 51 food banks in November 2014. 49 per cent reported a significant increase in the proportion of clients coming to their food bank as a result of benefit sanctions over the previous 12 months, and a further 37 per cent reported a slight increase. The 76 per cent figure refers to respondents who reported seeing people sanctioned for

'seemingly unfair reasons' – such as going to a funeral instead of a job club, even though the client had told their Jobcentre Plus.

The second most common reason for food bank usage at Trussell Trust centres was low income at 22 per cent, an increase from 20 per cent in 2013/14. This proportion was accurately referred to by the *Mirror*, *The Guardian*, and *Independent*.[28] These figures were often linked to people in work on low income, but that was not necessarily the case. Academic research found that, in The Trussell Trust food banks examined, 'low income' included a majority of households without anyone in paid employment.

This same research was referred to by the *Daily Mail* in support of the proposition that 'low pay is only a minor reason for people going to food banks', citing figures to the effect that four out of five users claim benefits and only one out of 40 users questioned was working on a zero hours contract. [29] It is correct that only one participant mentioned being on a zero hours contract. The research said that: 'Food bank use solely as a result of ongoing, chronic low income, without being attributed to a particular identifiable event, was less common', attributing food bank use to the result 'of an immediate income crisis' which was often the 'last straw'. It also gave reasons for income crises attributable to the benefit system in three food bank locations: the figures to which the Daily Mail may be referring. However the research was clear to state that it did not statistically represent all food bank users nor did it provide 'definitive data on prevalence of referral reasons'. Therefore it should not be presented as national data.

Trussell Trust food banks only part of the picture

One of the main difficulties with claims made about food banks in these stories is the lack of comprehensive data on food banks. The figures quoted mostly cover only the 445 food banks in the UK run by The Trussell Trust – and in some cases the research quoted referred to far fewer than this.

As reflected in the coverage of *The Guardian* and the *Mirror*, the Trust is not the only organisation running food banks in the UK: there are many independent local initiatives doing similar work.[30] All told, there may be around 800 food banks across the UK. There are in addition other providers of emergency food assistance, such as soup kitchens or Meals on Wheels. In total, there are estimated to be about 1,500 emergency food assistance providers in Britain. If so, The Trussell Trust food banks, with their 1.1 million uses, would account for almost a third of overall provision.

Even so, it is not possible to extrapolate from The Trussell Trust's figures to the number of people using all food banks in the UK. There is no information on whether other food banks have similar patterns of use, similar referral systems, or operate on a similar scale to The Trussell Trust.

Summing up the overall picture, a report commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in 2014 found that:

'It is impossible at present to give an accurate estimate of the numbers of people fed by food aid providers in the UK, in total or on a regular basis (monthly or annually).'

It concluded that:

'Those looking to monitor and respond to household food insecurity in the UK... should focus on the root causes of this insecurity, rather than on numbers claiming food aid, which are unreliable indicators of problems.'

Other criticisms

The fact that The Trussell Trust figures were not an official measure of food bank use led the Conservative's Iain Duncan Smith to comment that the numbers were untrustworthy due to being 'unverified'.

Lastly, some claimed that hunger was not an issue in the UK, saying that Britain was first out of 133 countries for its success in conquering hunger based on the US Social Progress Index. By this measure, some 70 countries had 5 per cent or less of their population who were undernourished, ranking them all joint first.

Benefits

Print

Politics and money (in terms of state expenditure) were dominant themes in the articles which discussed benefits alone, without explicit references to poverty. There was a much larger number of keywords belonging to these topics than to other topics (e.g. health, support) and these themes were both more frequent (mentioned more than in the poverty-only group) as well as more salient in the benefits-only group (mentioned more than the other topics) (see Table 3).

Table 3: Categorised 100 strongest keywords of the benefits-only group versus the poverty-only group

Categories		Keywords
Search terms		*welfare, benefits, benefit*[31]
Money/fiscal		*tax, taxes, spending, cuts, billion, deficit, ifs, credits, fiscal, income, pay, insurance, cap, borrowing, rate, economy, pension, bn, increase, cut, pensions, money, million, payments, paid, economic, per cent, financial, budget, cost, debt, pension, pensions, retirement*
Quantifiers		*per cent, million*
Immigration		*immigration, migrants*
Politics		
	People	*cameron, miliband, ed, clegg, leader, david, balls, osborne, sturgeon, minister, prime, Nicola*
	Parties	*labour, tories, ukip, party, lib, tory, snp, conservatives, conservative, parties, democrats, dem, dems, liberal*
Voting		*election, voters, manifesto, coalition, vote, seats, poll, general, referendum, campaign, polls, deal*
Health		*nhs*
Types of benefits		*child, disability, housing, allowance, pension, pensions*
National entity		*family, parents*
	Area/country	*britain, uk, country, british, scotland, eu, scottish*
	Governance	*parliament, government*
Employment		*hours, working, jobs, income, pension, pensions, retirement work, salary, workers*
Support		*carers*
People		
	Proper nouns	*holpin, mike, morris*
Law and order		*court*

The articles in the benefits-only group spoke more about employment and related factors such as *hours* and the creation of *new jobs*. However, these were mostly not directly tied to benefits and instead were topics in their own right.

What was absent was a strong narrative of benefits as a way to help or support people when they need it.

Overall, when comparing the representation of poverty and benefits as separate topics, benefits seem to be represented as a political issue that is much closer to home than poverty and one which has much more tangible effects on the population as a whole in terms of the costs of welfare. While benefits were portrayed as something that can be dealt with at government level (as the word *cuts* suggests, for

example), poverty was framed in an international perspective. Moreover, unlike poverty, benefits did not seem to be represented in terms of social problems and/or conflicts.

In the benefits-only group a very frequent subset of words represented two of the main topics in the articles – politics and money. The fact that in the benefits-only dataset the keywords accounted for 18 categories and sub-categories, while the keywords in the poverty-only dataset accounted for 27, demonstrates that discussions of benefits contained a more specific narrative than discussions of poverty.

Discussion of benefits without poverty

There were four times more articles mentioning *benefits* without explicit references to *poverty* (1,647) than articles mentioning both *poverty* and *benefits*. Comparing the benefits-only group against the Benefits and Poverty group made it possible to exclude the international perspective on poverty as references to benefits made it inevitably UK-centred.

More attention was paid to individual cases of benefit claimants when benefits were talked about outside the context of poverty. This is evident from the prominence of particular names of benefit claimants, talk of family members (*mum, kids, brood, baby, ex,* occurring predominantly in tabloids), individuals' health (e.g. *fattest, binge, drinking*) and their involvement in crime (e.g. *fraud, cheat*).

It is not rare to find proper nouns in keyword lists[32] so in the other comparisons we excluded them. However, given the number of them in this comparison they were included. A closer analysis of these nouns revealed that the majority (apart from *bouchart, starkey, luke, shillinglaw, hammond, mcevedy*) refer to cases of people claiming benefits or people related to benefit claimants.

Law and order, in particular, contained words that refer to crimes that suggest deception and it includes several terms related to the domain of justice and authority. The health category contained diet-related words with a sense of excess and indulgence (for example, excess weight) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Categorised 100 strongest keywords of the benefits-only group versus benefits and poverty

Categories		Keywords
Immigration		*calais, immigration, migrants*
Money/fiscal		*pension, tax, pensions, salary, cash, retirement, savers, lump, sum, pot, insurance, compensation, billion, investments, cashback, cost, borrowing, drawdown, ftse, contributions, isas, freedoms, pots, annuity, schemes, card, ifs, exemption*
Quantifiers		*per cent, pc*
People		*cameron, miliband, ed, clegg, leader, david, balls, osborne, sturgeon, minister, prime, Nicola*
	General	*dad, man, girlfriend, woman, mum, wife, daughter, kids, brood, baby, ex*
	Adjectives	*feckless*
	Proper nouns	*macdonald, holpin, mike, bouchart, prudham, starkey, morris, keith, chorr, amy, luke, johnny, wendy, thompson, clarkson, merner, pacteau, cheryl, shillinglaw, georgia, hammond, rochelle, mcevedy, wright*
Health		*hospital, weight, fat, liver, fattest, scales, binge, drinking*
Law and order		*family, parents*
	Justice system	*sentenced, guilty, jailed, pleaded, investigation, court, charges, police, officials, scales*
	Crimes (fraud)	*fraud, vegas, cheat*

Places	eu, french, ireland, vale (ebbw)
Politics	ukip
Speech act verbs	claimed, revealed
Life experiences	dating, wedding, life

Explicit references to benefits

The most frequent verbs associated with *benefit* or *benefits* across the two benefits groups were: *claim*, *cut*, *receive*, *restrict*, *tax*, *slash*, *lose*.

Table 5: Verbs most frequently used with *benefit* in benefits-only

claim	deny
cut	slash
receive	cap
protect	obtain
limit	lose
restrict	access
define	reduce
send	stop
tax	pay

Table 6: Verbs most frequently used with *benefit* in benefits and poverty

claim	stop
tax	remove
receive	sanction
restrict	lose
cut	freeze
slash	abolish

Benefits were discussed in terms of limiting access to them. *Cut, slash* and *lose* imply a loss with *cut* and *slash* implying a violent loss. There was no obvious difference in the use of these words across outlets. In the case of the benefits-only group, they were used almost exclusively with *child benefit* and in most cases the verb did not have an explicit subject and so it was not possible to see from the immediate context who such cuts were ascribed to. When benefits were talked about in conjunction with poverty this theme of cutting benefits was not exclusive to *child benefit*, as it occurred with *disability benefits*, *housing benefit, welfare benefits* or with *benefits* in a general sense too.

Restrict, a verb that does not have the same association with permanent loss, either occurred mostly with *migrant benefits* (in the benefits-only group) or with *child benefit* (in benefits and poverty). Immigration and migrants were not frequently used with *benefits* when they were talked about in the context of poverty.

Nouns such as *cap, system, sanction, payment* and *cut* were frequent in the benefits-only group and seem to reflect language used by politicians to talk about welfare policies.

Table 7: Nouns most frequently used with *benefit* in benefits-only

cap	bill
fraud	cut
system	payment
claimant	cheat
sanction	tourism
scrounger	scam

Table 8: Nouns most frequently used with *benefit* in benefits and poverty

cap	bill

sanction	*cheque*
system	*fraud*
claimant	*claim*
change	*calculator*
payment	*increase*
cut	*reform*

When *tax* occurred as a verb in connection to *benefits* (i.e. in the expression *taxing benefits*) it was almost always in relation to possible plans of the Conservative Party to tax disability benefits.

In the benefits-only group *receive* was used to talk about specific people receiving benefits and often had a distinct subject, i.e. the person who receives benefits could be clearly identified from the context, as demonstrated in the following quotes. Some of the people mentioned as *receiving benefits* were people who *fraudulently* claimed benefits.

material goods.' Mr *Holpin* has been receiving	benefits	for 13 years and admits his £195-a-week
Unemployed - Reportedly receives incapacity	benefit	for bad back of up £68.95 a week and £44
all her time taking drugs and receiving	benefits	because of her emotional wellbeing.
[*Mike*] Gwent, South Wales, has been receiving	benefits	for 13 years and admits spending his £195

There were also terms associated with dishonest activities (or people), i.e. *fraud, scrounger, cheat, tourism* and *scam*. This theme of fraud was also demonstrated by the use of the word *claim*. In some cases it was used with *dishonestly, fraudulently* or *falsely* and in others it referred to people who *claim* benefits with the implication that they do not need to (e.g. *The Prudhams claim £39,192 in benefits a year on top of Mr Prudham's monthly salary of £1,600 as a delivery driver – bringing their total annual income up to almost £60,000*). Similarly, *claim was* often used with *immigration* or *migrants* especially in relation to the possibility for migrants to claim (or not claim) benefits as soon as they arrive in the United Kingdom.

This theme of fraud was not evident in the use of *receiving benefits* when benefits were mentioned together with poverty, nor as common in references to *claiming benefits* (which were also less frequent in this group). Only in one case was there a reference to people who *receive* benefits rather than *engaging in paid work*. It was also rarely specified or implied in the immediate context whether the people were in work or not. In some cases, there was explicit connection between benefits and poverty (with references to *poor people*, *loss*) or flaws of the benefit system (with reference to *delays*).

What the benefits and poverty group did talk about was *benefit fraud*, although it was mentioned significantly less frequently than in the benefits-only group and it appeared almost always in the context of *reducing benefit fraud* or *figures about benefit fraud* rather than in reference to specific cases or people. *Benefit cap, benefit sanctions* and *benefit system* were among other frequent topics talked about in this context, demonstrating more of a focus on the state role in providing or restricting benefits.

Case study: Mike Holpin commentary

Our narrative analysis identified a particularly prominent story about a benefit claimant named Mike Holpin, about who articles appeared on the front page of the *Mirror* and *The Sun* on the 1 April.[33]

It was claimed that Mr Holpin, who appeared in the *Channel 5* documentary *40 Kids by 20 Women*, had fathered 40 children by 20 women and was costing thousands to millions of pounds in welfare through out-of-work benefits, housing benefit, child benefit and care costs.

While we do not seek to factcheck the claims relating to his particular circumstances, the story did demonstrate how examples such as these can be linked to claims about the prevalence of larger families claiming benefits.

The main emphasis of the coverage of Mr Holpin's story was in relation to how many children he had and the cost of providing benefits to them, 'although he has not worked for a decade'. While most of the

articles focused on Mr Holpin's story, some also mentioned examples of other families, and one in particular linked his story to figures from a Freedom of Information Request, saying '27,000 households with six or more children are getting child benefit, including 400 mothers with 10 or more children'.[34]

For this particular claim, the published statistics only tell us how many families with five or more children receive child benefit in the UK. They do not separate out these families any further. These statistics tell us that, in August 2014, 87,300 families with five or more children received child benefit, out of a total of 7,461,700 families. As a proportion, this represents 1 per cent. The prominence of this story in the newspaper articles in our analysis therefore does not appear to reflect the incidence of this type of claimant.

More broadly, in terms of families in poverty, the evidence suggests that while larger families are more likely to be in relative low income before housing costs (BHC), the majority of children in poverty are in households with two or fewer children. After housing costs (AHC), 32 per cent of children in relative poverty were in families with three or more children in 2012/13, rising to 34 per cent in 2013/14.

Broadcast

The most frequently used words with *benefit* and *benefits* in broadcast related to: financial assistance (*benefits*, *credits*), *taxes*, types of benefits (*child*), alteration (*cut*, *cuts*, *changes*) and *people* (see Table 9). Only the first of these groups refers to the dictionary definition of benefit and benefits – 'financial assistance in time of need' or 'something that aids or promotes well-being'.[35] The others, aside from *tax* (which appears mostly as *tax credits, tax benefits* or *tax and benefit changes*), relate to groups that can claim them or actions that can be applied to them.

Table 9: Nouns and verbs most often used with *benefit* and *benefits* with the highest frequencies (among top 30) in the group

child	cut
tax	people
cuts	changes
credits	

Table 10: Nouns and verbs most often used with *benefit* and *benefits* with the highest frequencies (among top 50) in the BNC (spoken)

housing	child
invalidity	supplementary
unemployment	benefit
state	claim
sickness	income

This contrasts with the usage of *benefit* and *benefits* in the spoken language section of the BNC which suggests that in English there is usually more diversity in the type of benefits people talk about (the first six occurrences in the list are modifiers that define *benefit* or *benefits*—*housing, invalidity, unemployment, state, sickness, child*) (see Table 10).

In terms of modifiers 'child' was the only common term. The references to the changes to benefits is absent from this list and so is the collocate *tax*. Our broadcast group also did not feature the verb *claim,* suggesting this group focused less on the perspective of individuals *claiming* benefits and more on the actions of people giving them (in terms of welfare policy).

This is reiterated by the focus on *cuts* to *child benefit,* where the emphasis was on the benefit rather than on *children* or *families* claiming the benefit. Potential cuts to child benefit featured prominently throughout the campaign and were a strong theme in our broadcast sample.
Verbs such as *threat, target, curtail, slash* and *attack,* which reflect direct or indirect quotes of politicians, suggest that these cuts were portrayed negatively. There were also references of *cuts to child benefit* as *secret plans,* or as something that the Conservative Party either *refuses to rule out, denies,* or *is accused of trying to deceive* over by the opposition.

In sentences referring to cutting benefits, the action tended to be presented as a noun (welfare or benefit cuts) or in passive structures. The former has the effect of removing the agents of who was doing the cutting and who was affected[36], while the latter directed the emphasis towards what was affected rather than who was making the cuts. 'Child benefit will be cut' or 'there will be cuts to child benefit' are agentless, vague clauses with no clear indication of who will make such cuts as in the claim that 'the Conservatives will cut child benefits' (which occurred less frequently). The exception was when cuts were denied (only two cases), where the subject was not only mentioned but also repeated twice (*we keep child benefits, we don't cut child benefits*).

Only one line of text analysed linked child benefits to poverty: 'the thing about child benefit is that it works. It prevents poverty'.

The presentation of other benefits

Housing, disability, and *unemployment* were the other most frequent modifiers of *benefit* and *benefits*. *Housing benefit* was mentioned far less. This may be due to the fact that cuts to child benefits were a dominant topic in the campaign of the opposition parties and were therefore frequently mentioned in the news. When housing benefit was mentioned it often was in relation to its reduction (five times) and mostly presented in a list alongside cuts to child benefits (see examples below). There was only one case where cuts to housing benefit were mentioned separately, as a specific problem of its own, affecting homeless people. The person making the statement was a homeless person who was talking about her own experience and how the cuts would affect her.

would imply bigger cuts for those on housing	benefits	and child tax credits and child benefit.
be looking at sharp reductions in either child	benefit	, disability benefits, housing benefits, and
would imply bigger cuts for those on housing	benefits	and child tax credits and child benefit.
or it again. Ruth Geddes: Well, cutting housing	benefit	would affect young homeless people like me

Housing benefits were also discussed in terms of possession (*get, lose*) or in terms of costs (*pay, overpayment*). Due to the limited number of occurrences of *housing benefit* (15 in the whole group) it is difficult to say if this was a strong theme.

Disability benefits (including benefits for the disabled and types of disability benefit) were talked about in terms of the potential to be means-tested, although this was less frequent than the pattern of discussions about cutting *child benefit*. That is despite the policy of means-testing disability benefits also being claimed to be a potential policy.[37] The few other cases in which disability benefits were connected to cuts were those in which disability benefits were mentioned together with child benefits (in that case they are *cut, taken away, reduced, attacked*). In one example, disability benefits were related to protection, but in the sense that: '*If benefits for disabled people were protected, it would have an impact on other parts of the budget*'. The budget was mentioned in relation to disability benefits on various occasions (see below).

That means 1 million people on disability	benefit	across the UK are going to lose £1,100 of
They say you are planning to cut	benefits	for disabled people, take child benefit a
I was asking you about specific benefits like	benefits	for the disabled or taking child benefit
be looking at sharp reductions in either child	benefit	, disability benefits, housing benefits, and
they need, whether that is through disability	benefits	, carers allowance, pensions, child benefit

Disability Living Allowance was only mentioned twice in our sample for TV and radio and *Employment Support Allowance* mentioned once. *Disability Allowance* and *Disability Living Allowance* were mentioned eight times in the print media, five of which referred to stories of people on disability benefits due to obesity and allegedly making an irregular use of benefits (e.g. by buying junk food).

The focus for *unemployment benefits*, *out-of-work benefits*, *work-related benefits* and *working-age benefits* was on a freeze to these benefits. They were not talked about in the context of a loss of money in real terms. Other potential references to *unemployment benefits* such as *Jobseeker's Allowance* were very uncommon. Benefits for the unemployed, unlike *child benefits,* were also often talked about collectively as 'benefits'.

Keeping in mind that the number of occurrences was very limited (24) another frequent pattern was the opposition between *claiming* benefits and *going to* work, between *being on* benefits and *getting off* benefits:

people's lives. Getting 900,000 people off	benefits	and into work is a major poverty tackling
of Pounds, which is freezing the work-related	benefits	, like unemployment benefit, for two year
on welfare and we will freeze working age	benefits	for two years. That includes jobseekers
migrants are coming to work, not to claim	benefits	, so there may not be a big impact
brought in, making work pay, getting people off	benefits	into work, but there is a lot of

In contrast, child benefits were not discussed in terms of getting on or off them, but instead as something necessary that needed protection from 'threats' such as cuts. Unemployment benefits and working-age benefits were not represented as equally necessary or in need of the same protection from cuts; overall they were portrayed as something people should be encouraged to stay away from.

Case study: £12 billion welfare cuts

The Conservative Party's pledge to cut £12 billion from the welfare budget if elected made three separate front pages, was prominent in many TV and radio bulletins, and was the topic of various communications from the parties. The subject of all this discussion was speculation on which benefits would and would not form part of the £12 billion cuts and who would be affected.

Two of the front pages focused on child benefit. The [front page](#) of the *i* on 8 April featured the claim by then chief secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander that Conservative welfare cuts would have to include the abolition of child benefit for over 4 million families.[38] The front page of *The Guardian* on 30 April then featured Mr Alexander claiming the Conservatives had previously looked at plans to limit child benefit and child tax credits.[39]

We cannot comment on the accuracy of figures that come from the leaked documents, but where equivalent calculations exist from the IFS they appear to broadly back up the figures.

One of the most frequent claims, reflective of the [IFS analysis](#), was that 4.3 million families would lose £1,000 a year if child benefit was incorporated into Universal Credit, saving the government around £4.8 billion in total. There was some confusion about the salary at which families would be affected by this, with one story (in *The Guardian*[40]) saying 'any family earning around the median £27,000 or more' would lose child benefit. This salary threshold in fact [relates only](#) to single-earner families with one child (who are in owner-occupied accommodation). For a single-earner family with two children (again in owner-occupied accommodation), the cut-off point is a gross salary of £33,000.

Another article, this time in *The Telegraph*, said that the change would mean a family with two children would miss out on £2,000 a year.[41] If this was based on doubling the £1,000 a year loss from the IFS calculations to account for two children this is inaccurate, as the £1,000 loss related to an [average loss per family](#) rather than an average loss per child.

The second claim was that limiting child benefit and child tax credits to two children per family would see families losing up to £3,500. [IFS figures](#) found this to be more like £4,500. Limiting child benefit to two children per family would cost 1.2 million families an average of nearly £1,000 a year, and would save about £1 billion a year, according to the [IFS](#). A limit on the payment of the child element of universal

credit (currently child tax credit) to the first two children in a family would reduce spending by around £3 billion and would mean 900,000 of these families losing an average of more than £3,500 a year.

Some confusion over who would be affected

It is not accurate to say that this means a 'working family' would lose this amount, as outlets such as *The Guardian* did.40 You [don't have to be working](#) to claim child tax credit and not all working families have children or claim child tax credit or child benefit.

Labour said the leaked plans meant middle income families were 'in the firing line' if the Conservatives were elected, as if implemented they would have restricted payments of child benefit to only those claiming other benefits.42 They also said it would mean four times as many families would be affected compared with the last changes to child benefit, which saw a high income child benefit tax charge introduced for parents with an individual income over £50,000, effectively cancelling out some or all of their child benefit payments. As reported by a couple of papers, 1.2 million families were forecast to be affected by that policy, according to [HMRC estimates](#).

Labour said this, alongside changes to tax credits, was a demonstration of middle class families having been 'clobbered' during the last Parliament. [IFS analysis](#) of the impact of tax and benefit changes on households over the last Parliament found that middle-to-top- income working households with no children gained from the reforms, while households with children lost out.

Labour was quoted twice (in separate Guardian articles43) on the proportion of tax credit recipients who were in work, one claiming they said 65 per cent and another saying 75 per cent. The [latest statistics](#) available at the time of the election, for 2012/13, showed 68 per cent of families receiving child or working tax credits were in work (in [2013/14](#) the figure was 69 per cent).

Different estimates of how many families would lose out overall

Labour also claimed that the Conservatives had a 'secret plan' to cut tax credits and child benefit that would lead to 7.5 million families losing £760 a year. They said this was based on an assumption that if there was a continuation of trends in the last Parliament, £5.8 billion of the cuts would come from tax credits and child benefit. Michael Gove claimed these figures were incorrect.[44] We cannot comment on the accuracy of the Labour claim as we have not been able to get any further detail about their estimate from them.

The Liberal Democrats said the £12 billion welfare cuts meant the equivalent of £1,500 being lost by 8 million of the 'most vulnerable families in the country'.[45] We have not been able to clarify with the Liberal Democrats what this estimate was based on.

Claim that child poverty had fallen based on just one measure

A claim by the Conservatives which appeared a few times in our sample of discussions on child benefit was that the Coalition Government had 'created a welfare system where child poverty is down, inequality is down, [and] we have a record low number of workless households'.[46] As discussed in Section 6, trends in child poverty depend on the measure used. Although inequality did show a slight fall over the last Parliament by the most common measure, the [Gini coefficient](#), fluctuations of about this size have been common over the last decade. The [number and percentage of workless households](#) in the last quarter of 2014 was the lowest in ten years (as far back as the statistics go).

Different interpretations of assurances

There was much discussion of how perceived assurances, or a lack thereof, from the Conservative Party that child benefit would not be cut should be interpreted. The source of the leaked documents was also much discussed. While we cannot check who commissioned them or what the parties' intentions were, there was one specific event which exemplified the confusion over whether or not the Conservatives were planning to implement this type of cut – David Cameron's comments on the *BBC Question Time Election Special* on 30 April. Some outlets reported that he had implied potential cuts were still uncertain, while others said he had promised it would not be cut. For example:

'Again and again, however, Mr Cameron repeatedly avoided giving any specific commitment over what would happen to child benefit after the election' (BBC Radio 4, *Today,* 1 May).

'PM says child benefit is safe as he's forced to rule out cuts after smear bid by Lib Dems' *Daily Mail* headline, 1 May.

The exchange was as follows:

Audience member: Will you put to bed rumours that you plan to cut child tax credit and restrict child benefit to two children?

David Cameron [DC]: No I don't want to do that – this report that was out today is something I rejected at the time as Prime Minister and I reject it again today

[Later] David Dimbleby [DD]: You said you didn't want to put to bed rumours that you were going to cut child tax credits – you meant you did want to put to bed the rumours?

DC: Yes – we have increased child tax credits.

Later the issue came up again:

DD: Clearly there are some people who are worried that you have a plan to cut child credit and tax credits. Are you saying absolutely as a guarantee, it will never happen?

DC: First of all, child tax credit, we increased by £450.

DD: And it's not going to fall?

DC: It's not going to fall. Child benefit, to me, is one of the most important benefits there is. It goes directly to the family, normally to the mother, £20 for the first child, £14 for the second. It is the key part of families' budgets in this country. That's not what we need to change.

Since the election, there has been continued speculation, this time over whether this exchange meant Mr Cameron said child tax credits would not fall. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury commented on [Newsnight](#) on 8 July that the comments were in reference to child benefit.

It is interesting to note that most coverage focused on what his comments meant for child benefit. This suggests that either outlets interpreted his comments as being in relation to child benefit, or – if they interpreted them as meaning child tax credits would not be cut – they were less interested in reporting about child tax credits. It was only Labour's comments reported in some newspaper articles which said that child tax credits were uncertain too.

Lastly, in an article in the *Mirror*, Danny Alexander was quoted as saying that cutting child tax credits would affect 3.7 million families with a loss of nearly £1,400 a year and with 300,000 children moved into poverty.[47] This would be the effect of reducing the per child element of child tax credit to its real 2003/04 level, according to [IFS analysis](#). This claim did not appear anywhere else.

Lack of clarity over existing savings and commitments

A regular claim – in print and broadcast – related to what welfare savings had been made since 2010. Ministers claimed they had saved £21 billion, with the proposed cuts for the next Parliament representing just half of this. What was not made clear was that the £21 billion savings did not mean a £21 billion reduction in the overall welfare bill. In real terms, the total amount spent on welfare has changed very little from the 2010 election to now, according to the [IFS](#). Journalists were perhaps not aware of this.

The £21 billion was also not an accurate estimate of the costs and savings of the different policies. About [£17 billion](#) is thought to have been saved, according to IFS analysis. Factors such as an ageing population, slow growth in earnings and increasing numbers of people in the private rented sector (and so expenditure on housing benefit) have acted against attempts to cut the bill.

The £21 billion figure was less frequent in the print media, appearing just in the *Daily Mail* and in The *Guardian*.[48] Two of the *Guardian* articles mentioning it provided some context to the claim, while the rest did not.[49]

The media were clear that the Conservatives' existing commitments to reduce welfare expenditure (the freeze to working-age benefit, lowering the benefits cap and removing housing benefit for jobseekers aged under 21) accounted for up to £2 billion of savings, a figure backed up by the IFS. There were some differences in the way this was presented, with Conservative politician Liz Truss saying a planned freeze to working-age benefits alone accounted for £2 billion, while others said it would account for £1.2 billion. Elsewhere it was claimed the Conservatives only had detailed plans for £1.5 billion of savings.

The media also accurately reported that the total welfare bill was £220 billion while the unprotected welfare bill (as in excluding universal pensioner benefits which the Conservatives had pledged not to cut) was £125 billion.

This uncertainty over where the cuts would come from was a very strong theme in media coverage. The IFS featured heavily in these discussions, including warnings from them that the tight timescale would be challenging.

It is important to comment that the dominant focus on the reporting of this story was on how many families would be affected by cuts to child benefit and tax credits and by how much. There were some articles and programmes which spoke about the cuts in the context of wider reforms or in the context of what impact child benefit and child tax credits have had – for example BBC Radio 4's *PM* on 30 April discussed trends in child poverty and a comment piece in The *Guardian*[50] – however since these claims were only seen once we have not detailed them here.

Insecure jobs and unemployment

Print

We excluded the themes of employment and the quality of employment from the search terms for our main dataset to avoid them skewing the sample towards these issues. However we wanted to see how these broader issues, which appeared in the discussion of benefits alongside poverty, were represented. In terms of content, unemployment was discussed more in terms of personal experiences (e.g. proper nouns, names indicating family relationships), culture and entertainment (*drama*, *film*, *documentary*, *series*) and words that refer to places abroad (*Baltimore*), compared with how job insecurity was talked about (see Table 11).

Table 11: List of the 40 strongest keywords of the unemployment group versus the insecure jobs group

unemployment	*film*
unemployed	*britain*
life	*man*
work	*dole*
cent	*young*
job	*uk*
jobless	*benefits*
per	*world*
growth	*stress*
old	*woman*
holpin	*labour*
economy	*home*
months	*mum*
court	*children*
mother	*dad*
police	*wife*

jobs	*love*
clarkson	*kids*
mike	*economic*
father	*man*
(Words in bold are search terms)	

In addition to a few word-related terms (*job, jobs, work*), words such as *mum, home, wife, dad, children, father* were among the most frequent terms in the group. The word *old* was also often use to refer a person's age and occurred very frequently with words such as *son, daughter, man, student* and *mother*.[51]

Job insecurity was instead discussed in relation to the election campaign, with words such as *Labour, Miliband, Cameron* and *Conservatives* appearing among the top keywords. The word *manifesto* was also one of the most frequent, suggesting that job insecurity was discussed in the political plans of these parties, with a relatively stronger frequency in relation to the Labour Party.

Table 12: List of the 40 strongest keywords of the insecure jobs group versus the unemployment group

labour	*childcare*
tax	*workers*
wage	*zero*
party	*policy*
miliband	*vote*
minimum	*living*
manifesto	*leader*
pay	*nhs*
time	*hour*
income	*uk*
cameron	*tory*
election	*pension*
government	*david*
paid	*scotland*
working	*ukip*
tories	*politics*
low	*snp*
contracts	*cut*
housing	*spending*
conservatives	*staff*
(Words in bold are search terms)	

The insecure jobs articles also mentioned topics that we might have expected to be talked about in terms of poverty. For example, *free* childcare (and sometimes in relation to the *costs)* and housing in terms of housing *associations*, housing *benefit, social* housing and *affordable* housing).

Case study: Zero hours and new jobs

Zero hours

'The problem of zero hours contracts is at the heart of the key question in this election: who does our country work for? Does it work just for the rich and the powerful? Or does it work for working people – the people looking for a job, trying to find enough money to support a family, to make ends meet? 'The explosion of zero hours contracts tells us the answer to that question in Britain right now.'

A Labour press release on 31 March and a speech by Ed Miliband the following day set up zero hour contracts as one of the main topics of the election. While the Conservatives hailed the 2 million increase in employment as a 'jobs miracle', Labour claimed employment was increasingly insecure and 'low-paid'.[52] It said it would give workers a right to a regular contract if they'd been working regular hours on a zero

hour contract for 12 weeks. The issue flared up again when new labour market figures were published on 17 April.

The alleged use of zero hours contracts by Labour politicians and councils was a major and contentious story during the election, and there were also discussions about living standards and wages tied to use of the contracts. We discuss the latter in the other thematic sections, focusing here on claims made about how common the contracts were and the experiences of people working on them, before discussing the issue of job insecurity in relation to the new employment figures.

The latest official estimates found there were around 1.8 million contracts that did not guarantee any minimum hours (mostly zero hour contracts but also a few others). These estimates exclude some contracts that saw no work done during the survey period. About 2.3 per cent of people in employment said they were on a zero hours contract in their main job. These contracts were particularly prevalent in certain industries and in larger companies.

The figures for the number of people on zero hour contracts rely on people recognising the term and accurately reporting their employment status. Increasing awareness of the contracts prevents comparisons over time, as we do not know how much of any increase is due to heightened awareness rather than greater use of the contracts. This sticking point was one out of three common reasons for inaccurate claims made about the contracts, with Labour claiming a 20 per cent increase in the last year and a threefold increase since the election. The second cause of inaccuracy came from a Conservative claim that 2.3 per cent represented one in 50 jobs. The figure is closer to one in 40 and referred to people in employment rather than jobs. The third cause was confusing contracts with people.

There is a legal distinction between the employment rights people have as a worker and as an employee and people on zero hours contracts can be either. For the purposes of brevity we have referred to all those on zero hours contracts as workers.

An increasing 'epidemic'?

Central to Labour's claim of an 'epidemic' of zero hour contracts was the use of figures which it said showed a 20 per cent increase 'in the last year alone'.

It is not possible to say whether the 1.8 million figure – to which Labour referred – is an increase from the previous set of figures. The estimate comes from asking employers how many contracts without guaranteed hours they are currently using (it does not tell us how many people are being employed on them as people can hold more than one contract). At the time of the election campaign there were only two surveys of employers (both in 2014) and they were not seasonally adjusted so we cannot compare them.

The 20 per cent increase appears to refer to the other way of measuring zero hour contracts – asking workers if their main employment is on a zero hours contract. In October to December 2013, about 586,000 workers were on a zero hours contract in their main employment – 1.9 per cent of all people in employment – while in the same period in 2014 an estimated 697,000 – or 2.3 per cent – were.
We cannot say how much of this change represents a genuine increase in the use of the contracts. The same problem applies to use of figures back to 2010.
Some people used these numbers to estimate what proportion of the increase in employment since the 2010 election came from people working on zero hours contracts. Again, this estimate cannot be made accurately.

The other thing is that both measures from the ONS have wide confidence intervals. The number of people on zero hours contracts is likely to be between 630,000 and 765,000, while the number of contracts is likely to be between 1.4 million and 2.2 million. Even without the complications posed by greater awareness, it is possible that any increase would not be statistically significant.
Confusion about which statistics referred to people and which to contracts was a source of confusion in many claims. References to an increase in the contracts also confused the two sets of statistics, for example taking the 20 per cent increase as relating to the 1.8 million contracts.

'Just one in 50 jobs'

The Conservatives argued that far from being an 'epidemic', zero hour contracts accounted for just one in 50 jobs; pointing out that only 2.3 per cent of workers were on them. As well as the 2.3 per cent figure being closer to one in 40, it is also not possible to say this is 1 in 40 jobs, as neither of the two measures of zero hours contract available – people or contracts – equate to one job. One person can have more than one job, and one job can have more than one contract. For the proportion of contracts in the economy that don't guarantee any hours (the 1.8 million contracts), the ONS figure is 6 per cent, or one in 17.

These contracts are more common in certain sectors (as prominent Labour politician Chuka Umunna said on Channel 4 News, 17 April). However, official figures do not enable any comments on whether they changed from being 'a very niche thing in the labour market' to being a 'regular feature and a norm in certain sectors' as Mr Umunna said. In hotels and catering, 53 per cent of companies make some use of them, compared with 3 per cent in information, finance and professional industries. About 11 per cent of businesses make some use of contracts without a guaranteed number of hours (aligning with Labour's claims that the 'vast majority' of firms do not employ people on zero hour contracts). Larger businesses are also far more likely to make use of them, with half of those employing 250 people or more making some use of the contracts compared with 10 per cent of businesses employing fewer than 20 people.

Private sector firms accounted for a minority (19 per cent) of firms using the contracts, as reported by one outlet, according to a 2013 survey from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Despite being from 2013, this survey was the basis for claims from the parties and the media about the satisfaction of workers on these contracts and appears to be the only data available on this.

Clarity about the inaccuracies did not completely prevent them being repeated

The *Independent, Mirror* and *Guardian* were the only outlets in our sample to refer to a specific rise in the contracts.[53] *BBC1 News at Six* (1 April) was the only broadcast programme we came across to say that the proportion (2.3 per cent) 'has been rising', without an explanation of the caveats. Other outlets (the *Daily Mail, The Sun, The Telegraph* and *The Times* as well as the TV and radio reports in our sample) reported the story but did not refer to any trends in the statistics.[54]

A press release by Full Fact on 1 April outlining what the evidence could and could not show led to some outlets publishing articles explaining the difficulty with the figures. When the jobs figures came out on the 17 April some outlets (for example, The *Guardian*[55]) were then careful to explain the difficulties in comparisons over time. There were still cases of inaccuracy after 1 April though. David Cameron repeated the one in 50 claim on the *BBC Question Time Election Special on 30 April*, a segment repeated on *Sky News at Ten*. The same claim was also quoted in many papers without being questioned (*The Sun, The Telegraph, the Independent, The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*[56]). Labour continued to talk of a 'horrific epidemic' of zero hour contracts[57], though no longer repeated a specific measure of any increase. The language of an 'epidemic' continued throughout the campaign and arguably perpetuated the perception that use of the contracts had shot up.

'Exploitation'

Underneath the disagreements over whether or not there were increasing and significant numbers of people on these contracts was the question of whether or not these workers were being 'left at the beck and call of an employer who can ask the world of you, but gives you no security in return' (Miliband speech). Ed Miliband said that 92 per cent of zero hour contract workers had been on these contracts for more than 12 weeks, and that offering them the right to a regular contract would give them the security of regular hours. Labour also claimed that zero hours contracts were particularly bad for young people, with more than half of them saying they were doing a zero hour contract job because they couldn't find a regular job with regular hours.[58]

Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith claimed that workers liked the flexibility of the contracts because 'the people that actually use that contract are for the most part people who have caring responsibilities, students' (Sky News).

He said that people on zero hour contracts were more satisfied with their work—life balance and that the average number of hours they work 'is not actually, as some people say, tiny numbers, it's actually 25 hours work a week'.

Media outlets were generally accurate when describing who worked on zero hour contracts with people being more likely to be younger (16–24) or older (65 and over), students and women. However, there is a question over whether or not these demographics justify Labour's emphasis on zero hours contracts 'undermining family life'. We were also unable to pinpoint the statistics behind Ms Reeves' claim about the experience of young people on these contracts.

In terms of hours, it was accurate to say that zero hour contract workers work on average about 23 hours a week, compared with 32 hours for other people. The lower number of hours is partly because a higher proportion of people on them work part-time. These people were less likely to work their usual hours though (although most worked their usual hours plus or minus five hours), so the frequent reference to fluctuations in hours experienced by zero hours workers was fairly accurate. A frequently quoted figure was that a third (34 per cent) of people on them said they wanted more hours or that two-thirds did not. In some cases this was phrased as 'only' a third, though this was higher than those not on zero hour contracts, of whom 13 per cent wanted more hours.

Job satisfaction for zero hours workers and all workers is roughly the same, according to the survey from the CIPD. About 60 per cent of zero hour contract workers agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their job, contrasted with an average of 59 per cent among all workers. Of those who said they were satisfied with having no minimum hours (47 per cent), 44 per cent said it was because they liked the flexibility. 27 per cent said they were dissatisfied with having no minimum contracted hours. Zero hour workers also appeared to be happier with their work—life balance, with 65 per cent of them saying they were satisfied with it, compared with 58 per cent of all employees.

Labour's claim that 92 per cent of zero hour workers had been with their employer for more than three months appears to come from the same survey. The official statistics only cover whether people have been on the contracts for less than 12 months or for time periods longer than this (as 60 per cent of people had, as reported by a few outlets). The difficulty with any figures of this type is that it provides the proportion of contracts that had been of that duration at a single point in time. The proportion may not be the same if a one-year period was selected and the number of contracts lasting less than three months were counted over that time and taken as a proportion of all contracts over the year.

This was also not the first time that Labour had pledged to reduce the use of zero hours contracts, as some outlets pointed out. In a speech in 1995, Tony Blair said 'there will be an end to zero-hours contracts'.

Lastly, it was also claimed by Labour that David Cameron had said he couldn't live on a zero hours contract in answer to a question by Jeremy Paxman.[59] David Cameron's response was explicitly in reference to exclusive zero hours contracts, which prevented workers from holding another job at the same time. He said 'we have outlawed exclusive zero hours contracts, so no, I couldn't live on one of those that is why we outlawed them'.
There were also differing claims made as to whether the rules to outlaw the use of exclusivity clauses had taken effect, were due to take effect or were Conservative (and Labour) policy. After a consultation on the plans, an Act of Parliament passed in March 2015 regulated for these changes to come into force. This was not the only legal claim made in these stories – for example, there were also claims that Labour's policy was a 'ban' on these contracts (rather than a legal right to a different kind of contract).

Critics of the Labour policy also warned that the proposals would 'run the risk of a return to day-to-day hiring in parts of the economy, with lower stability for workers and fewer opportunities for people to break out of low pay'.[60] The CBI was often quoted as commenting on the benefits of flexible labour for economic growth, while others blamed the contracts for falling productivity. This was part of a broader discussion about the nature of the overall economy not covered here.

The broader debate about the quality of new jobs

When the latest employment figures were published on 17 April the question of the quality and quantity of the jobs continued. While David Cameron claimed a 'jobs miracle' (*ITV News at 6:30,* 17 April) and Danny Alexander spoke of Britain being the 'job creation powerhouse of the western economies' (*Daily Mail*[61]), Labour claimed many of the jobs had been part-time, zero hour and low paid (*ITV News at 6:30,* 17 April). These discussions of the quality of the jobs occurred more in the broadcast coverage, which we focus on here, than in the print media's initial coverage of the figures. While overall the figures given by the media were mostly accurate, there were specific claims made by politicians and commentators with regard to the skill level of the jobs which did not provide the full picture.

The most common claims relating to employment appearing in both print and broadcast coverage were: 31 million people in work, a 'record high' (*Channel 4 News* and *ITV News at 6:30,* 17 April), and the 'highest employment rate since comparable records began in the 70s' at 73.4 per cent (BBC Radio 4 *PM,* 17 April). 'Over 2 million jobs in the past five years. That is a thousand jobs every day we have been in government' (BBC Radio 4 *World at One,* 17 April), 'more jobs created here in the UK than in the 27 other countries of the European Union put together' (BBC Radio 4 *World at One,* 17 April) or as *ITV* put it 'more vacancies in the last five years than the rest of the EU combined' (*ITV News at 6:30,* 17 April). There was also a reference to there being the highest number of vacancies on record (BBC Radio 4 *World at One,* 17 April and *Channel 4 News,* 17 April). Similarly there was talk of unemployment reaching a seven-year low with the unemployment rate standing at 5.6 per cent (*ITV News at 6:30,* 17 April).

These were all mostly accurate, based on the Labour Market Statistics for April 2015. The comparison to employment in the EU isn't all that useful, since some countries have seen employment fall since 2010. It's likely these were the numbers to which ITV referred when they said there were more vacancies in the last five years than the rest of the EU combined, as the EU figures for these are limited.

How good are the jobs?

Outlets like Channel 4 reported that experts had said most of the new jobs were full-time, an argument stressed by the Conservatives (Iain Duncan Smith on BBC Radio 4 W*orld at One,* 17 April). There was an increase of 1.47 million people working full-time between the 2010 and 2015 election and 0.53 million working part-time, about three-quarters full-time (as referred to by Iain Duncan Smith on *Channel 4 News,* 17 April).

There were examples of specific claims being made which were either unsubstantiated or which did not provide the full picture in reference to the quality of the jobs. First the claim made by Iain Duncan Smith on *World at One* that the proportion of part-time workers wanting full-time work had fallen from 18 per cent after the recession to 16 per cent ignores the broader trend. He's right (it's 16.4 per cent or 1 in 6), but looking back at pre-recession levels (9.9 per cent in Oct–Dec 2007) the proportion is still quite a lot higher. It's also higher than the average for the 2000s when it was fewer than 1 in 10. This was not queried on the programme and Radio 4 was the only broadcast or print outlet we came across to mention this trend in their main discussion of the figures (on *PM,* 17 April). A similar example of this was the print media's discussions of youth unemployment, which focused on a decrease in numbers over the last quarter but did not discuss how the youth unemployment rate was still yet to return to pre-recession levels.

The Conservative Party also contended that the jobs were mostly high skilled, so weren't low-paid jobs, while Labour said the opposite. Iain Duncan Smith claimed on *Channel 4 News* that '60 per cent of those jobs are managerial level jobs, so not low-paid jobs'. The figures available tell us about the net change in employment, though over a different time period to the overall 2 million increase as they only allow a comparison between the same quarter in each year (and they are not published as frequently as the monthly employment figures). Of the net increase in employment between autumn 2014 and autumn 2010 (1.6 million), managers, directors and senior officials accounted for 10 per cent of the increase. The Conservatives told us Mr Duncan Smith was referring to the top three occupations, which include professional and technical occupations. These accounted for 57 per cent over this period. The biggest increase was among professional occupations (the second highest occupation), which accounted for a third of the increase.

Some commentators, such as an expert from The Work Foundation appearing on Radio 4's *World at One*, pointed out that there had still been some increase in the lower paid sectors. Another, from the Resolution Foundation, appeared on BBC 1 *News at Six* and *News at Ten* and claimed that there had been a shift towards lower paying occupations such as caring, cleaning and sales assistants. It is accurate to say that caring, leisure and some services occupations made up 14 per cent of the increase in net employment between 2010 and 2014, though the share of net employment that these occupations made up did not change. The comment that there was a shift towards these occupations might have been referring to the last year which did see an increase in the share of employee jobs which were low skilled. Overall, the composition of jobs has also shifted towards higher skilled occupations, according to the ONS.

Claims made about the Living Wage to illustrate the number of low-paid jobs do appear to be backed up by the figures. Rachel Reeves claimed that the increase in low-paid jobs was demonstrated as the 'number of people paid less than the living wage has gone up by 1.5 million in the last few years' (*Channel 4 News,* 17 April), while Natalie Bennett claimed one in five workers were on less than a living wage (BBC Radio 4 *PM,* 17 April). About 5.28 million people in the UK are earning less than the Living Wage, according to research for KPMG. That's 22 per cent of all employees. The rise to which Ms Reeves refers comes from research by the Resolution Foundation, finding that the number of workers earning less than a living wage had increased from 3.4 million in 2009 to 4.9 million in April 2013. KPMG's research (which uses a different timeframe and a different set of figures) only goes back to 2012, finding an increase of 360,000 from 2012 to 2014.

Today, *World at One*, *PM* and the BBC *News at Six* and *News at Ten* all had features with experts or their own correspondents talking about low pay and the quality of the jobs. For example, Work Foundation Chief Economist Ian Brinkley mentioned on *World at One* that the noticeable increase had been especially in part-time self-employment. Of the 2 million increase in people in employment, 0.55 million of them (28 per cent) were self-employed. 0.31 million of these self-employed workers (56 per cent) were part-time. Mr Brinkley commented: 'that is a worry, because self-employed part-time work is often very low-income, marginal and very, very difficult to live on'. We did not see this mentioned elsewhere. The fact that the radio programmes were particularly good at this could be because they seek to provide more in-depth analysis and have more time to dedicate to this.

In the print media, where the skill level and quality of the jobs was mentioned it was more in the context of the majority being full-time, and experts focused more on trends in pay and productivity rather than the skill level of the jobs.

Broader debates

There were specific claims made that were less common or part of a wider debate and which we didn't look into. There were debates about how many of the new jobs were public or private sector, where they were as well as how many of them went to British people. More broadly, there were specific stories such as those about Labour MPs using zero hour contracts, something the Shadow Business Secretary denied. We did not look at these as they were not purely related to whether the new jobs were low quality. Ed Miliband's speech on migration and job insecurity also linked zero hours contracts to sectors that were 'increasingly reliant on low skill migration'.

Broadcast

References to *wage, work* and *unemployment* were the most common words from our search string for broadcast discussions of job insecurity and unemployment.

Work

The word *work* (including words such as *working* and *workers*) occurred most frequently with words such as: *people, hard, families* (mostly in the expressions 'hard-working people' and 'working families') as well as *time, hours, pensions, part* and *secretary*. *Part* and *time* refer to the expression part-time work, a dominant theme in discussions about new jobs, and *pensions* and *secretary* were very frequent as they

occurred in the expression *Work and Pensions Secretary. Hours* was used to refer to the number of hours of work, again perhaps given the emphasis on the quality of new jobs.

Table 13: Most frequently used words with work in the broadcast group

people
time
hours
hard
pensions
part
secretary
benefits
country
families
households

Work was also mentioned significantly more frequently near *benefits*, with the two words often juxtaposed (see Table 13). Claiming work-related benefits was presented as a negative thing with strong emphasis on encouraging people to *get off benefits*. The expression *lifted out* of benefits appeared only once, however the same verb was used in many cases with *poverty*. In one case people had to be *helped* off benefits. What is missing here is any discussion of people *in work* and claiming benefits and thus of the role of increasing income in getting people *off* benefits.

The following examples demonstrate this pattern:

Getting 900,000 people off benefits and into	work	is a major poverty tackling programme and that
help them off benefits and support them into	work	, and that has been a big success story
got to cut your benefits to make you	work	hard, but you say to rich people we
lifted out of benefits and more people are	working	because of the reforms… MK: But you haven't
be the case, migrants are coming here to	work	rather than claim benefits, then only UKIP's
we can get an extra million people into	work	, which will cut the benefits bill. We're

Unlike benefits, poverty was not clearly connected to *work*, with the exception of two interviews with David Cameron in which he talked about work as *the only route out of poverty*. Overall, poverty was discussed in more absolute terms, without tangible solutions. On the other hand, benefits were clearly related to the lack of work and so getting back into work was presented as the solution to the problem.

Theme: 'The best route out of poverty is work'

A key theme throughout all of the case studies was the question of whether 'the best route out of poverty is work'. This was a claim made by David Cameron a number of times during the campaign. For example, he commented on Radio 1 *Newsbeat* (22 April) that 'the best route out of poverty, the best way to avoid food bank usage, which was in your question, is to make sure more people get work, more people have a job'. Labour on the other hand argued that 'we've got almost half of our people in the country who are living in poverty who are actually people in work' (Chuka Umunna, *Channel 4 News*, 17 April).

Although there's no single, preferred measure of poverty in the UK, several show people in poverty split roughly half and half between families where at least one person works, and workless families. Recent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that while falling worklessness had acted to reduce absolute poverty, this was 'masked by rises in rates of poverty among working families'. It said the latter 'largely reflects the wider nature of the labour market since the recession: robust employment and weak earnings'. Nevertheless, research by the Office for National Statistics looking at the factors behind why people moved out of poverty between 2007 and 2012 commented that: 'Participation in the labour

Wage

References to the *minimum wage* and the *living wage* appeared more in terms of payments rather than the experience of people on the minimum wage (which only appeared in a few cases) or indeed trends in the minimum wage over time. References were made to *removing income tax* for people on (or below) the minimum wage, *increasing* the minimum wage or *prosecuting* employers that do not pay the minimum wage. This reflects statements of politicians (see below).

wage, making sure we tackle and raise the	minimum wage	, tackle exploitative zero-hours
is there with firms paying less than that	minimum wage	, undercutting their competitors, and
Minister: With the Conservatives, if you're on	minimum wage	, no income tax. If you're earning
also coming from that I've worked a	minimum wage	job in Thanet, I've worked on
on employers who pay migrants less than the	minimum wage	, but migrants would presumably

Although there seems to be no immediate link between minimum wage and poverty, there was an emphasis on the need to increase low salaries or prosecute those who pay below the minimum wage. As mentioned before, though, the option to increase low salaries was not mentioned in relation to *getting people off benefits* which was often used in relation to getting into work only.

In-work poverty was never mentioned in our broadcast sample, while the *working poor* were referred to once. These terms were more common in the print sample, particularly the *working poor* (which appeared 26 times in print).

Theme: Making work pay

There's also the question of whether the Coalition parties were, as the Conservatives often claimed during the campaign, 'making work pay'. A common claim made was that the increase in the personal allowance had 'taken 3 million of the lowest paid out of income tax altogether'[62] a claim also made by the Liberal Democrats.[63]

In contrast, Nicola Sturgeon (among others) claimed this policy delivered the most benefit to 'high income earners in the highest rate tax bracket'.

While it is correct to say that roughly 3 million people had been 'lifted out of income tax altogether' through the increase of the personal income tax allowance to £10,600, this didn't necessarily mean they weren't being taxed on their earnings at all. As IFS director Paul Johnson noted, national insurance contributions are made by some employees earning less than the personal allowance threshold. The Institute also previously said that the lowest income 17 per cent of workers would pay no income tax in 2014/15 anyway, and that 'a large majority of the giveaway would go to families in the top half of the income distribution, or with no one in work (mostly pensioners)'. It also said that many of the lower-income gainers would 'gain only partially as their universal credit and/or council tax support would be automatically reduced'.

David Cameron also said that the introduction of Universal Credit was 'ensuring it always pays to work'[64]. Universal Credit does strengthen the incentive for couples to have one person in work rather than none, but it also weakens the incentive for couples to have both people in work, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Overall, the policy is expected to reduce the number of households where no one works, according to the government. The IFS has not yet assessed the impact of recent announcements in the 2015 Summer Budget, which included lowering the income level at which Universal Credit starts to be withdrawn.

Theme: A 'cost-of-living' crisis?

While the Conservatives focused on work, Labour talked about the cost of living. They claimed wages were down by £1,600 a year, that people were £1,100 worse off a year as a result of tax and benefit changes, and that living standards were falling (a claim also made by the SNP), while the Conservatives said wages were growing and that living standards were up.

There's no single measure of living standards: the UK Statistics Authority has identified 15 different reports on UK incomes. Different measures look at different groups of people (individuals, households, the sum of all households), different income sources (taxes and benefits or just wages) and adjust for inflation in different ways.

Wages were growing in real terms in the UK by the time of the election, but by most measures they were lower than at the start of the 2010 Parliament.[65] However other sources of income and the level of employment also matter, and the Conservatives told us they were taking these into account in their measure. Looking at the broader picture, the director of the IFS said in March 2015 that 'average household incomes have just about regained their pre-recession levels. They are finally rising and probably will be higher in 2015 than they were in 2010'.

Labour was broadly accurate to say that the last five years had seen bills rise faster than wages. In late 2014 a combination of lower inflation and continued cash pay rises meant that workers got a year-on-year real terms rise in average weekly earnings for only the second time since the election, and the first sustained period of increases in real wages.

Looking at averages — to which the £1,600 and £1,100 figures refer — does not tell us much about the distribution of income, or the effects on different groups of people. For example, a £1 pay cut hits the poor harder than it does the rich. Some people will be earning more than they did in 2010. As the chair of the UK Statistics Authority has pointed out, the change in the median wage 'does not typically represent the pay rise that most people in employment would actually experience during that period'. The average wage figures also do not include the wages of self-employed people, who account for about 15 per cent of people in employment. While it is useful to have a figure to refer to in measuring people's experiences, we should be careful not to apply it across all individuals. The use of a single figure to represent all people's experiences inevitably conceals valuable detail.

Just looking at income also doesn't tell us everything about people's standard of living. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) points out a whole host of other things (like access to education and leisure time) matter for wellbeing.

Unemployment

Unlike *unemployment* in the print media, where the personal experiences of people who were unemployed were particularly evident, *unemployment* in broadcast was often talked about in statistical terms. This was especially in terms of lower unemployment, or the reduction of unemployment, as demonstrated by the quotes below. The only cases in which unemployment was said to be *high* were mostly when *youth unemployment* was mentioned with regard to specific regions (e.g. *Grimsby*, *Birmingham*) or times in the past. Overall, *unemployment benefits* (or *Jobseeker's Allowance*) were not commonly referred to. In one case, unemployment was linked to poverty and injustice.

all levels. You know, we have got falling	unemployment	, rising employment, record levels of
is a freezing of in-work benefits like	unemployment	*benefit* for two years, and incidental
machine here. Well, the region has the highest	unemployment	of anywhere in the country and the
have been suffering from longer-term youth	unemployment	. P: And my question to you was
1975, we were just coming out of recession,	unemployment	was high, inflation had rocketed, we
According to the CSJ think-tank, long-term	unemployment	rates here are three times higher
need to act on poverty and injustice and	unemployment	and neglect of the health service and
deprived areas in the UK, immigration and	unemployment	are big issues here.

4 Speeches

Conservatives

Conservative speeches focused more on topics such as the *economy* and *jobs* than the Labour speeches. These issues were related to some of their policies, such as their intention to create *economic security* for the country and *a strong economy.* They also emphasised the success of the Conservative Government in *creating more* and *new jobs* and the intention to create more in the future in order to offer *a good life* for *you and your family, those who work hard* or those *willing to try.* In some cases, the Conservatives also talked about the supposed plan of Labour politicians to create *higher* or *more taxes* as well as the cost of *debt interest payments* connected to the alleged Labour party's intention to *borrow* more money. In two speeches, Cameron mentioned *black and ethnic minorities* and their involvement in British public life (politics, education, employment).

Table 14: Top 20 keywords appearing more frequently in Conservative speeches than Labour

jobs
want
economy
economic
black
wales
job
created
conservative
taxes
welfare
spend
debt
life
good
extra
security
day
conservatives
money

Cameron talked about poverty mostly in relation to Labour's approach which he said had *trapped the poor on welfare* ('And today I want to spell out the four big things we're doing to end the scandal of Labour's poverty state' and 'the so-called Labour Party. The party that increased welfare spending by a half but under whom poverty actually increased') or successful action under the Coalition ('And we are tackling poverty: there are 600,000 fewer people and 300,000 fewer children in relative poverty'). On one occasion, he talked about it in abstract terms ('I believe passionately in reducing poverty').

David Cameron discussed welfare benefits from the point of view of reducing welfare through work, often creating an opposition between the two in which claiming benefits is represented as a choice and, as such, the negative part of the equation: 'And when you're getting up at the crack of dawn to get to work, you want to know that you're not putting in all those hours to pay for someone else who chooses not to take a job. That's why we're reducing the benefit cap to £23,000, because we, the Conservatives, believe that work should really pay in our country'. Cameron's speeches did not show frequent mentions of restrictions for specific categories of people (e.g. migrants, which Miliband referred to).

Comparing Conservative party comment and speeches in 2014 with those by Labour show that a year before the election they were more focused on international issues such as Europe and Ukraine. These were particularly dominant topics that did not appear as frequently in 2015. A comparison between the

Conservative speeches in 2014 and 2015 confirms that Europe in particular was a dominant topic in 2014, becoming less frequent during the run up to the election.

The presence of these topics in 2014 could also be explained by the fact that the Conservative Party was in government and so speeches made by its senior politicians were often in the context of an official visit to another country and were likely to include a broader spectrum of topics, such as foreign politics for example.

Labour

Labour speeches showed a strong theme of criticising the Conservatives. As well as explicit references to the Conservatives, there was also talk of *vat, cuts, tax* and *credits* which referred to alleged policies of the Conservatives such as to *reduce tax* for *millionaires* and *deeper* spending cuts, with an emphasis on *further* cuts to *tax credits* and *child benefit*. The word *benefit* was also used in the context of the alleged *cuts to child benefit* and there was also a reference to *Tory tax and benefit changes.* In this way *benefits* were mainly referred to in the context of what the Conservative plans might be rather than in terms of providing support to people. *Promises* was also used in the context of the *false* or *broken promises* made by the Conservatives, whereas *better* and *fairer* were used in the context of the Labour Party's *plan* for a *better future*.

Table 15: Top 20 keywords appearing more frequently in Labour speeches than Conservative

tories	*david*
will	*millions*
tory	*cut*
vat	*credits*
cuts	*immigration*
millionaires	*promises*
succeed	*labour*
tax	*public*
benefit	*better*
austerity	*fairer*

The word *million* appeared more in Labour speeches through the frequent phrase 'while millions are paying more, millionaires are paying less' (it was also used in a numerical sense). The words *rich* and *millionaires* were absent in the Conservative speeches. While this contrast hints at a theme of inequality, Labour did not explicitly mention *inequality* any more than the Conservatives.

Immigration, zero-hour contracts and *higher living standards* were the first topics to appear in the keyword list (some outside the top 20) that referred to Labour's policies. *Austerity* was also mentioned more frequently in the Labour speeches (taken as a whole) than in the Conservative speeches. These occurrences were in Balls' speeches rather than Miliband's.

In some cases, Miliband mentioned poverty in relation to *global* or *world poverty* (he referred to *child poverty worsening in the UK* in only one instance). However, he did not talk about poverty (including *poor*) any more than the Conservatives.

Ed Miliband discussed welfare benefits from the point of view of either criticising the Conservatives' cuts to *child benefits*, placing them in the wider context of criticism about Conservative policies, or in terms of specific instances of entitlement to benefits. For example, he talked about restrictions on migrants' ability to claim benefits: 'So we will make sure that people who come here won't be able to claim benefits for at least two years stressing that benefits must be earned'. Arguably this creates a different impression to the way he talked about child benefits, with child benefits seen more as an entitlement, while migrants claiming benefits were talked about in terms of *control* and something that needed to be *earned*. He also did not mention any other benefit type.

References to *unemployment* were not any more frequent in Labour speeches than Conservative ones. This contrasts with Labour speeches from 2014, when the themes that were particularly dominant in the Labour party speeches (compared with the Conservatives) during the first six months of last year were *employment* (or lack thereof), the *cost of living crisis* and *low wages*. Unlike during the election campaign, *poverty* appeared in the list of the 50 strongest keywords. There was also more talk of the need to *tackle* problems such as the *undercutting of wages, low pay, inequality, unemployment, cost-of-living crisis* and *the housing crisis*.

This is not just a case of this language being used more than by the Conservatives in 2014; the terms that also appeared more often in the 2014 Labour speeches compared with the 2015 ones were: *work, crisis, jobs, living, unemployment, poverty, benefits* and *housing*.

It appears from this that Labour moved more towards talking about Conservative policies for the 'rich' during the campaign – and so implicitly talking about inequality – and away from explicitly talking about poverty.

Liberal Democrats

Comparing the Liberal Democrats with Labour showed that the Liberal Democrats were more focused on political issues such as the possibility of having a *coalition government* or a *minority government* after the election. They also talked more than Labour about the *economy* as well as *(youth) unemployment, welfare, fairer society* and *opportunity for everyone.* There was also more talk about *cuts* in reference to both alleged *Tory tax cuts* and *planned* or *secret cuts* of the Conservative Party.

With the exception of welfare, these topics were also more frequent in Liberal Democrat than Conservative speeches.

Words such as *poverty, poor, poorer* or *poorest* were again not particularly frequent when compared with the other major parties.

Table 16: Top 20 keywords appearing more frequently in Liberal Democrat speeches

Vs Conservatives	Vs Labour
liberal	*liberal*
democrats	*democrats*
cuts	*conservatives*
democrat	*democrat*
society	*danny*
tories	*coalition*
tory	*lib*
fairer	*nick*
bn	*bn*
nick	*alexander*
books	*dems*
coalition	*minority*
plans	*youth*
danny	*society*
lib	*economy*
clegg	*unemployment*
conservatives	*chief*
alexander	*con*
dems	*cuts*
chief	*fund*

Scottish National Party

Nicola Sturgeon talked the most about *austerity* and *cuts*, when compared individually with Ed Miliband and David Cameron. *Austerity* was described as something that should be *lifted, ended* and replaced with an *alternative*. *Cuts* were described as *Tory, Westminster* and *savage* and *failing* or something that *we cannot allow*. Sturgeon talked about poverty more than Cameron and Miliband did. Some of her references to poverty were about how it could be tackled. For example, she suggested that an *increase in public spending* would tackle poverty. She also tended to give statistics about poverty and only referred to poverty in either a UK or Scottish context. In her speeches Sturgeon talked about disability benefits and in-work benefits in addition to child benefits, and in contrast with Miliband the SNP policy was about *raising* child benefits, *uprating* them rather than *freezing* them. She stressed that *benefit cuts have saved the public purse just £2.5 billion,* clearly stating her opposition to cuts to all benefits. Unlike Miliband, she did not appear to distinguish between different types of people and their entitlement to benefits.

Sturgeon also [claimed](#) that spending cuts had seen more children pushed into poverty and that in-work poverty was on the rise. In Scotland in the last year the proportion of working-age adults and children [in relative poverty (before housing costs) in working households](#) fell but overall it was at a higher rate than seen previously.

Plaid Cymru

There were significantly fewer comments and speeches by Leanne Wood published on the Plaid Cymru website, compared with SNP and Labour. This limits any quantitative comparison, but looking at her comments qualitatively shows the central themes were also the fight against austerity and cuts as well as support for the poor and Welsh communities, investing in public services and raising the minimum wage to the living wage.

Northern Ireland

There was only one speech by the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland mentioning benefits and welfare, partly because they did not publish many speeches. Sinn Fein did publish a lot of comments, but quite a few were more in relation to debates for the Northern Ireland Assembly. As with the nationwide debates, low pay and zero hour contracts came up. They also talked about austerity and the 'damaging impact' of cuts, 'especially on the working class and low- and middle-income families'. The lack of data here means we cannot comment more broadly on the debate in Northern Ireland.

5 TV debates

We analysed the ITV Leaders' Debate on 2 April and the BBC1 Election Debate on 16 April. Ed Miliband, Nicola Sturgeon, Leanne Wood, Natalie Bennett and Nigel Farage took part in the BBC1 Election Debate, joined by David Cameron and Nick Clegg in the ITV debate.

Employment was mentioned often throughout both debates. David Cameron referred to the creation of new jobs in the context of the achievements of the Coalition Government, and both he and Nick Clegg mentioned unemployment. Leanne Wood spoke of wanting to achieve a *living wage* (Bennett also referred to those earning below the living wage) and Clegg, Miliband and Sturgeon emphasised the need to increase the *minimum wage*. Farage spoke of taking the low-paid on the minimum wage out of tax. Wood also shared similarities with Miliband during the BBC1 debate in terms of bringing an *end* to zero hour contracts. Miliband often emphasised his intention to support *working families* and *working people* in general, on one occasion stating that the United Kingdom should not be run for *the richest and the most powerful*, but *for working families*. This contrasted the rich with the working people, rather than the rich with the poor, leaving the latter out of the picture.

In the BBC opposition leaders' debate, only the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party mentioned poverty explicitly. This highlighted the wider similarity between these three, the main focus of which was an opposition to austerity measures. *Austerity* was defined as a *myth,* as a *cause of poverty*. The weakening of public services and slow economic growth were also connected to austerity, cuts, lack of investment in public services and privatisation. The Green Party said its policies were aimed at protecting the most vulnerable in society, including children, old people, unemployed people and people using food banks. Miliband did not mention poverty explicitly, but on one occasion during the ITV debate he made what could be considered an indirect reference to poverty, stating that people could not *feed their families and make ends meet* because of job insecurity. Clegg was also one of the few to talk about disadvantage in schools, referring to the free school meals policy, and supporting disadvantaged children through the Pupil Premium.

Welfare was another dominant topic. Cameron described the welfare budget as *overblown,* criticising the previous Labour government for '*out-of-control' debt* and *welfare*. No distinction was made between welfare expenditure on working-age people and pensioners. Cutting welfare was presented by Cameron as something necessary in order to avoid *taxes and cutting people's pay*. While Nick Clegg accepted the need to cut the welfare budget, in particular in relation to benefits claimed by migrants, he criticised the alleged cuts planned by the Conservatives, especially those that would affect the NHS and the education system. Miliband also criticised the alleged Conservative intention of *doubling cuts in spending*. During the opposition leaders' debate, Miliband defined spending cuts as one of the biggest threats posed by the Conservatives; yet on many occasions he also referred to them as *difficult decisions* that were nonetheless necessary in order *to live within our means*. The sharpest criticisms of cuts came from Leanne Wood, Nicola Sturgeon and Natalie Bennett, whose emphasis was on protecting welfare and 'investment' in public services instead of cutting them. Miliband spoke about the NHS, education and international development as 'protected areas' but did not refer to them as investment areas. Nigel Farage talked about cuts but mainly in the context of the EU and foreign aid budget.

The TV debates were one of the few times when politicians mentioned housing. Cameron spoke about building affordable homes through starter homes and Help to Buy. Clegg spoke of helping young first-time buyers while Miliband spoke about insecure and substandard accommodation in the private sector rental market. In the BBC debate Miliband also spoke of a need for new houses and affordable rents, and said he was not 'opposed in principle' to the Right to Buy. In contrast, Sturgeon and Wood were against extending Right to Buy, saying there was a need to *protect housing* available for social rent instead, with Wood referring to rising levels of homelessness. Sturgeon wanted investment in schemes like Help to Buy as well as the protection of affordable housing. One point of agreement between Miliband, Bennett and Wood was the need to cap rents (which Sturgeon also said her party was 'considering') and to tackle housing insecurity. Nigel Farage mentioned housing partly in relation to the need to *cope with* current levels of immigration. Bennett also referred to private landlords receiving £9.3 billion from housing benefit, money that she said was being spent in part on people in private rental accommodation (claiming that 38 per cent of private renters were receiving housing benefit).

6 Statistics

This section details the main statements made about the most frequently referred to national measures of poverty that are not covered elsewhere in the report. The descriptions of these were mostly accurate, but the existence of several different poverty measures meant that trends in one were rarely mentioned alongside trends in another. Where the measures show different trends, this meant that providing just one of a variety of measures gave a one-sided picture.

Local statistics were also given, though we have not examined them here. We have analysed the national statistics based on the figures that were available up until the election, which they were based on; new statistics have since come out. Rather than singling out specific examples of inaccuracies, this section is designed to give an overview.[66] Pensioner poverty is not covered as it was rarely mentioned.

Overall poverty trends

The Conservative party claimed there were fewer people in poverty compared with 2010 (specifically 600,000 fewer people in relative poverty)[67] while other media outlets[68] quoted academics saying there were signs of an increase in poverty.

The number of individuals below the poverty line can be affected by an increase in the number of households in the economy. Looking at the proportion of the population below the poverty line takes account of this and can be more useful when looking at how poverty is changing over time.

Absolute poverty before housing costs had not really changed a great deal over the last 10 years or so, while after housing costs it had risen. The absolute poverty measure takes a certain low level of income and raises it every year at the same rate as prices. The IFS has pointed out that low-income households have seen their housing costs rise more than high-income households, so the before and after housing cost distinction 'has become particularly important'.

Figure 1: Absolute poverty

Percentage of individuals in absolute poverty over time

Source: Households below average income (HBAI); 1994/95 to 2012/13

The relative measure – which the Conservative claims referred to – tells us how many individuals live in households earning below 60 per cent of median income. The proportion of individuals in relative poverty before housing costs in 2012/13 (the latest figures available during the election) was at its [lowest level since the 1980s](). Both before and after housing costs the proportion has been falling or stagnant in recent years.

Figure 2: Relative poverty

Percentage of individuals in relative poverty over time

Source: Households below average income (HBAI); 1994/95 to 2012/13

The relative poverty measure can be more helpful for [longer term trends](). That's because if median income goes up (and with it people's opinions on what constitutes a minimum acceptable living standard), then so does the relative poverty line. When looking over shorter time periods (during which people's opinions are less likely to change), such as since the recession, the absolute poverty measure means that 'poverty goes down only when the absolute material living standards of poorer households improve', as the [IFS says](). It says this has the effect that 'when looking over short periods…the case for an absolute measure is arguably particularly strong'.

There was some mention of poverty trends under the last Labour government – namely by David Cameron in a speech on 'making work pay'. He claimed that under Labour, welfare spending had increased by a half and 'poverty actually increased'.[69] Taking the latter claim at face value, it's inaccurate, as both the relative and absolute poverty rates among individuals decreased over the time of the Labour government. The Conservative press office told us what Mr Cameron meant was numbers of working-age adults in relative in-work poverty. However a few sentences before he had been talking about overall poverty falling under the Coalition, so it is not clear from this context, or the statement, that the claim was referring to in-work poverty only.

The claim is also based on internal government analysis, which calculated the number of adults in in-work poverty. We can work this out roughly from the published figures by looking at the proportion of adults in relative poverty who were in work, and comparing this to the total number of working-age adults in poverty. This is affected by changing geographical measures though. On this basis, in 1997/98 about 47 per cent of working-age adults in relative poverty (before housing costs) in Great Britain had someone in their family in work – about 2.35 million adults. In 2009/10 in the United Kingdom the figure was around 50 per cent – about 2.85 million adults.

Child poverty

There is no single definition of 'child poverty' in the UK. Official bodies measure it in four main ways: relative poverty, absolute poverty, low income and material deprivation and severe low income and material deprivation. There's also persistent poverty, which is published separately and relies on longer term data. Each measure has its benefits and drawbacks and there are ongoing debates as to the best measure(s) to use. The Coalition Government argued that on the relative income measure, when everyone's income falls (as can happen during recessions), this can mean poverty falling as well, which is not very intuitive. On this measure (and before housing costs), as a proportion of all children child poverty fell from 20 per cent to 17 per cent between the last year of the Labour government and 2012/13. This works out at about 300,000 fewer children in poverty in 2012/13. The Child Poverty Action Group has suggested most of this fall is because of policies introduced during Labour's period in office, the effects of which were drawn out over several years.

On the absolute child poverty measure (before housing costs), the proportion changed only slightly, from 18 per cent to 19 per cent: an increase of about 200,000 more children in poverty. A bigger rise can be seen when accounting for housing costs.

Material deprivation was measured differently before 2010/11, so can't be compared over the whole period of Parliament. There were no significant changes in this measure between 2011/12 and 2012/13.

There was partisan use of the relative and absolute child poverty measures in particular during the campaign. Throughout the election the Conservatives claimed that child poverty was falling (sometimes quantified as a fall of 300,000 over the last Parliament), which refers to the relative income measure, before housing costs. Conversely, Labour claimed (less frequently than the Conservatives) that it was rising.

Despite the contradictory claims being made, they were rarely questioned in the same article or segment. We found at least 14 instances of a Conservative spokesperson either being quoted or saying directly in the media (on BBB Radio 4's *Today* on 1 and 6 May) that child poverty had fallen, often saying by 300,000, without this being directly questioned. The one quote in our sample of a Labour politician (Tristram Hunt) saying it was rising, was also not queried.[70]

The Conservative claim was mainly critiqued in articles reporting research by the New Policy Institute estimating that poverty figures published in the next two years would show relative child poverty rising.[71] The Child Poverty Action Group was quoted in *The Guardian* in response to the research saying the analysis 'shows the weakness of the claim' made by the Conservatives. A similar quote by the group appeared in a later *Mirror* article about a survey about hunger in schools by the trade union NAHT where it commented that 'the bald fact is that child poverty is rising not falling'.[72]

Rather than other trends being discussed alongside the Conservative claim to offer the whole picture, they were used to completely rebut it.

The repetition of the claim about relative child poverty by the Conservatives is also particularly noticeable given David Cameron's changing views on whether to continue with the measure. Since the election he has commented that 'because of the way it is measured, we are in the absurd situation where if we increase the state pension, child poverty actually goes up'. The Conservatives told us the change away from relative poverty was because it was a manifesto commitment.

A further point that stood out was that trends in child poverty were the type of poverty that politicians chose to focus on, with the Conservatives in particular referring more to child poverty than overall poverty trends (which they also commented were falling).

Across print and broadcast, *child poverty* or *poor children* were the most common ways children in poverty were described. Talk of *children living in poverty* was less frequent and references to children in *poor households* were rare (there was only one occurrence of this).

Children in working families

Just as with the overall poverty trends, child poverty was sometimes talked about in the context of working poverty. A couple of articles said 61 per cent of children living in poverty had working parents. Another (in *The Sunday Times*) said that the number of children in workless households was at a record low and that this counteracted claims of 'the number of children living in poverty being set to shoot upwards'.[73]

This 61 per cent figure is right according to the figures for 2012/13. Accounting for housing costs, most (61 per cent) children were living in a relative low-income household where at least one adult in the family was in work. The proportion is the same for those in absolute poverty.

There were around 1.5 million children living in workless households in 2014, the lowest since 1996 (as far back as these statistics go). The proportion of children in workless households is also at a record low.
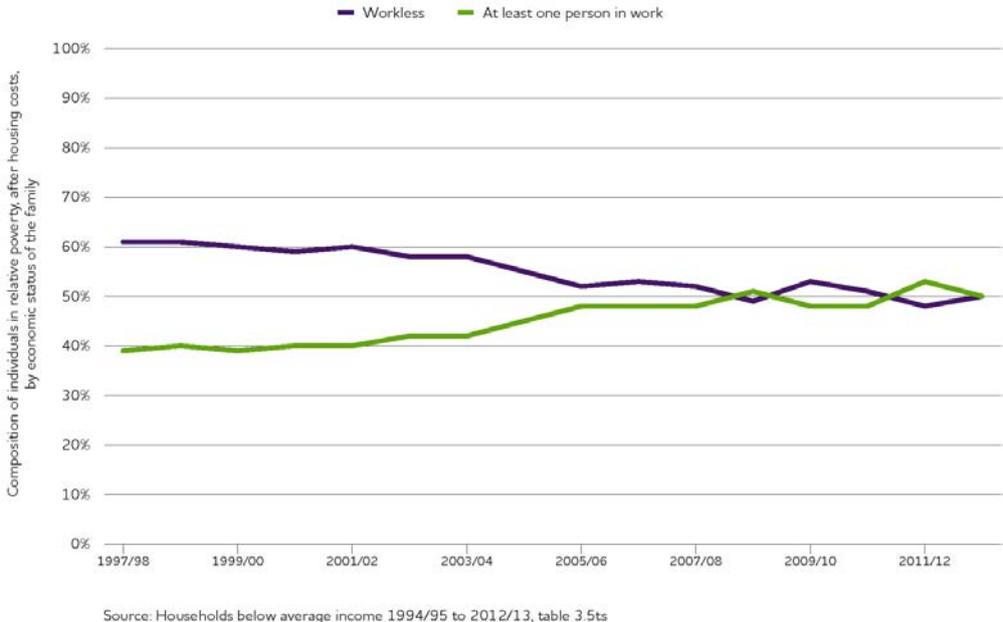
In-work poverty

One of the most common poverty statistics we came across related to in-work poverty. There are two ways of measuring this: either by looking at the proportion of people in work who are also in poverty, or the proportion of those in poverty who are in work. Most focused on the latter. Some claimed 'most' or the 'majority' of people in poverty were in working families (for example in the Mirror and The Guardian), while others claimed 'half' (Chuka Umunna on *Channel 4 News*, 17 April).

People in poverty have been increasingly in families where at least one member works, although the trend has flattened in recent years if housing costs are taken into account.

Of the 13.2 million people in relative poverty overall (after housing costs), about 50 per cent were in a family where someone was in work, though that falls to 35 per cent if only families with someone working full-time are included.

Figure 3: A breakdown of relative poverty

Composition of individuals in relative poverty, after housing costs, by economic status of the family

Source: Households below average income 1994/95 to 2012/13, table 3.5ts

Still, the vast majority of people in work aren't in poverty and work still remains one of the main reasons people move out of poverty. The in-work poverty rate for the UK (around 8 per cent of people in employment) has been largely stable for most years since 2005, apart from 2009 and 2010 when there was a slight fall in the rate.

Figure 4: In-work poverty rate in the UK

Percentage of people aged 18–64 in employment whose household disposable income was below the relative income poverty threshold
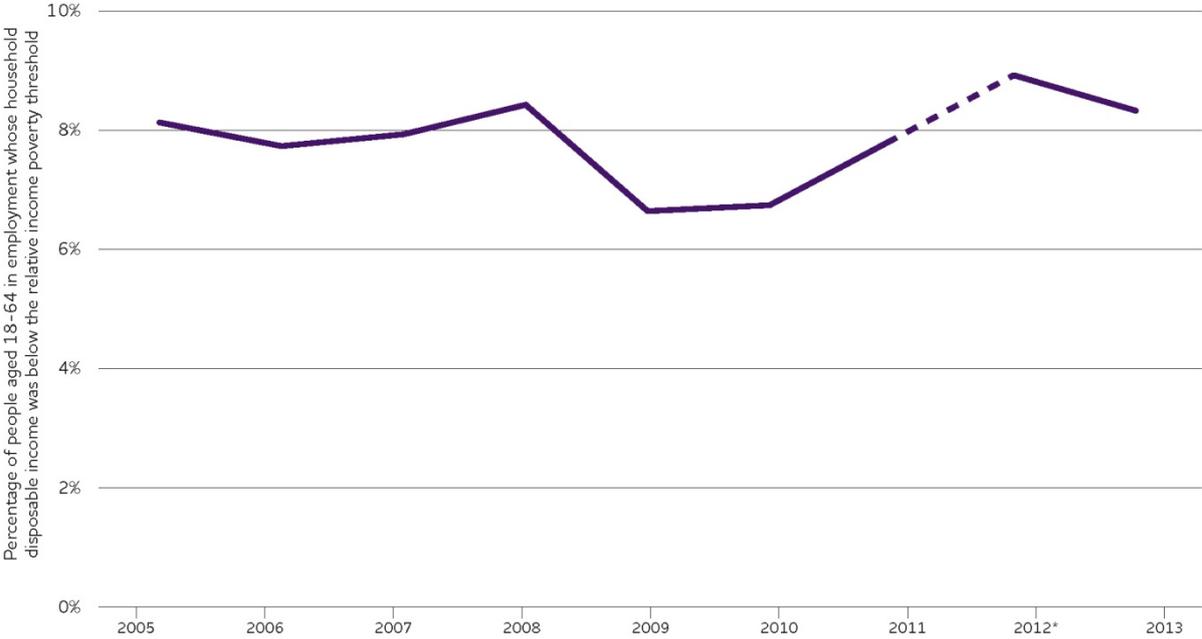
Source: ONS Poverty and Employment Transitions in the UK and EU, 2007-2012

* The data source changed in 2012, making these figures not directly comparable to earlier years.

Other measures of poverty

As well as global measures of poverty, outlets also referred to forecasts for child poverty by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Broader measures used to indicate poverty were also used, such as a reference to the number of families living in bed and breakfast accommodation[74], food bank use (as discussed earlier in the report) and surveys published by teachers' unions NASUWT and NAHT about children's access to essential items.[75] One of the difficulties of these surveys was that they were unrepresentative samples and therefore could not be seen as robust evidence.

7 Conclusion

One of the most striking findings of the report was the dominance of public expenditure as the main theme used to talk about benefits and the absence of this theme when discussions turned to poverty. The reduction of expenditure on benefits through welfare reform was posed as a necessity for the reduction of debt, and central to the general election campaign, while the positives of supporting people through benefits was barely mentioned. Meanwhile, the association of 'poverty' as a distant, international issue without tangible public impacts placed it firmly outside the arena of the general election campaign (with the exception of the SNP).

There was little sense that reducing poverty could in itself affect public expenditure. Poverty was presented as something that morally should be tackled, but there was no sense that if overlooked poverty would lead to rising public expenditure. This contrasts with the welfare system which was talked about as something which would lead to spiralling costs for the state if it was left unaddressed. This meant welfare was portrayed as something that financially affects everyone while poverty was not.

The most common verb used to talk about benefits was *to get off*, which is an interesting turn of phrase. It appears to suggest slightly more than the dictionary definition. This applies to other phrases too – for example, the word *cause* is not inherently negative, but it is often used to talk about causing negative events such as diseases, pain and conflict. In the same way, the frequent use of *get off*, which can be used in terms of *getting off the bus*, is most usually heard in political contexts in terms of *getting off drugs*. So it carries associations that are more negative. If the language had been about *moving away from* or *escape* (as in the case of poverty) for example, it would have carried more positive associations for the individual.

The solution offered for *getting people off benefits* was often that of getting them *into work*. Almost absent from this narrative was a solution for reducing the number of people claiming benefits while in work, such as improving employment or income prospects for those in employment. While low wages (and sometimes, for example, the policy of introducing a living wage) were talked about individually, these did not often appear to be directly linked to talk of how to get people 'off benefits'.

Overall the discussions on benefits focused on potential cuts or political rows over them rather than on the people who would be affected by such cuts or the support that benefits can provide. Neither politicians nor the media offered an alternative narrative.

This is despite the fact that media coverage suggested cuts to child benefit – a universal benefit – in particular were portrayed as unfair. Cuts to housing benefit received far less attention despite the IFS statement that this type of benefit was 'likely to be considered' as part of the £12 billion welfare cuts given how much is spent on it (£26 billion in 2015/16). Mentions of the impact of cuts on people with disabilities also did not appear to be common, despite households containing a disabled person losing more from benefit cuts, according to the IFS. While the emphasis on child benefit could be down to the release of leaked documents specifically relating to child benefit during the time period, potential restrictions on child tax credit – which was also among the proposals and which goes to a lower income group of families – appeared to be less in the limelight.

The IFS was one of the expert organisations referenced frequently in our case studies and was a noticeable voice alongside that of politicians and political parties. However specific named organisations with an expertise in poverty or welfare appeared far less often. What we do not know is how much this was due to these organisations not promoting their work so much to the press, and how much to the media choosing not to feature them.

The use of statistics

Within the case studies, there were specific cases of inaccurate claims which, had they been presented accurately, may well have left voters with a different view. Rather than journalists appearing to explicitly

scrutinise or challenge figures from press releases, the coverage showed that claims were either not featured or their inaccuracy was repeated.

In the case of the Mike Holpin example, this demonstrated how what may be perfectly accurate coverage can accumulate to create a distorted picture of the actual world. This is backed up by evidence such as the Ipsos Mori Perils of Perception study.

The uncritical inclusion of quotes from each of the main parties in the print media as a way of ensuring impartiality had the effect of promoting the repetition of one-sided or inaccurate claims. This occurred even if these quotes contradicted previous articles in the same newspaper pointing out the inaccuracies.

In the case of broadcast, the fact that inaccurate or out of context claims in the case studies came mostly from politicians or pressure groups suggests that broadcast journalists did not have enough information on trends in the frequently quoted statistics at their fingertips. For example, claims on child poverty and living standards that were frequently mentioned by politicians could have been questioned further by the presenter if they had information on these trends to hand. However, presenters cannot be expected to be prepared for every inaccurate claim that is made.

Overall, it was not clear that journalists or politicians saw it as their responsibility to give people a realistic view of the topic they were discussing.

8 Recommendations

For JRF and organisations in the same field

1. While benefits were often talked about in terms of their cost burden, poverty was not. This meant policies to tackle benefit dependency offered a clear economic benefit to everyone, while tackling poverty was discussed more as a point of morality. This might be because welfare reform is viewed as having more immediate benefits to public finances – within the same parliamentary term – than tackling poverty (which would also in time reduce welfare expenditure). JRF should consider if sufficient evidence exists which calculates the cost of poverty to the public purse and if it does, how such evidence could be better promoted to better demonstrate the broader economic impact of tackling poverty. If it does not exist then research should be commissioned which answers this question.

2. Our analysis highlighted prominent stories in the print media of excess and fraud in relation to specific named individuals claiming benefits. JRF could consider what examples of specific named individuals they could promote which offer alternative views of people's experiences on low income and claiming benefits.

3. Similarly, the election campaign saw two distinct types of people being discussed: 'working people' facing difficulties such as low income and insecure work, and unemployed benefit claimants. JRF should consider if they agree with these two categories, and the relative benefits and disadvantages of splitting up 'people living in poverty' in this way.

4. Neither of these categories was particularly talked about in terms of being 'poor' or 'in poverty'. JRF and organisations in the same field should consider if those it is seeking to influence associate the word 'poverty' with people today on low incomes in the UK. There are two ways they could deal with this.

- JRF and others could de-emphasise poverty by finding other ways to describe it that communicate what they think the word means using: a) more concrete concepts, and b) common parlance. Poverty in the UK was not widely discussed during the election while the specific issue of zero hours contracts received wide and prominent coverage. The Ipsos MORI report *Public Attitudes to Poverty* tests out phrases that may engage the public: for example, 'need' is a more commonly recognised term for what could be seen as the same issue.[76]

- JRF and others could re-emphasise poverty by drawing together issues that have been reported by the media and opening up a discussion about why they think it is important to identify all these aspects as poverty. Our research shows poverty is associated by the media with factors such as war, corruption and starvation – circumstances described as happening outside the UK. The issues that JRF would see as symptoms or results of poverty aren't talked about in the context of poverty or aren't talked about as showing poverty. The task for JRF would be to persuade the media to make that connection.

Either way, either message will be obscured if the research isn't high quality and well communicated. Discussions of the rising use of food banks did prompt discussion of poverty but the debate was hindered because the research being used was not clearly communicated and did not account for substantial caveats. For such arguments to be persuasive they should be backed up with robust research and clear communication of what research does and does not say.

5. Much of the media discussions of poverty and benefits were focused around politicians' viewpoints, with expert viewpoints only appearing sporadically. JRF should consider to what extent this was a feature of the election, or if it could do more to promote its own and other expert viewpoints to the media.

For the media

1. Journalists should be aware that politicians will use statistics selectively, and should either omit statistics or challenge them. For some of the inaccurate claims examined in this report, the answer to whether they were inaccurate or not lay on the first page of the statistical release.

2. The pursuit of balance often means journalists include an opposing comment in election coverage and we saw no examples of the claims in these being challenged, allowing them to be used as vehicles for the repetition of set narratives and inaccurate claims. Either journalists need to be more wary, or this practice might need further discussion.

3. While journalists may use stories about individuals claiming benefits to stimulate debate about welfare reform, editors should consider whether these stories, when viewed together, are presenting a skewed impression of the incidence of such cases, and what responsibility if any they hold for this.

For politicians

1. This research shows that voters reasonably distrust politicians. Enough claims made by politicians are inaccurate or give a skewed picture to mean it does not make sense to trust any individual claim. If politicians want to establish long-term trust they should consider being less selective in their use of statistics or more transparent in explaining at the same time as making a claim, why a certain set of statistics are being used over another.

For researchers

1. Researchers should consider whether academic research is fulfilling the Research Councils UK public engagement strategy (supported by the seven academic research councils in the UK) by answering the questions people have about welfare and poverty.

2. If researchers do feel that academic research is answering these questions, they should consider why academic research is not being widely referred to in public debate.

Notes

1   For examples of media analysis of poverty see Gans, H. (1979) *Deciding what's news: a study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, newsweek and time*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press; Golding, P. and Middleton, S. (1984) *Images of welfare: press and public attitudes to poverty*. Oxford: Martin Robertson; Bullock, H., Fraser Wyche, K., Williams, W. (2001) 'Media images of the poor', *Journal of Social Issues,* Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 229–246; Baumberg, B., Bell, K. and Gaffney, D. (2012) *Benefits stigma in Britain*. London: Elizabeth Finn Care/Turn2us; Chauhan, A. and Foster, J. (2014) 'Representations of poverty in British newspapers: a case of 'othering' the threat?', *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology,* Vol. 24, pp. 390-405.
      75 per cent of UK adults say they use TV as a source of news, according to Ofcom, 2014. *News consumption in the UK: 2014 report*. London: Ofcom. Available at http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/tv-research/news/2014/News_Report_2014.pdf (accessed 2 September 2015).

2   The full list of media and politicians included is available in Appendix 1.

3   See for example Ferragina, E., Tomlinson, M., Walker, R. (2013) *Poverty, participation and choice: the legacy of Peter Townsend*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/society-poverty-participation-full.pdf (accessed 2 September 2015).

4   https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-strengthen-child-poverty-measure.

5   See McEnery, T., Wilson, A., 1996. *Corpus linguistics: an introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

6   The British National Corpus, version 3 (BNC XML Edition). 2007. Distributed by Oxford University Computing Services on behalf of the BNC Consortium. http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/. Data cited has been extracted from the British National Corpus Online service, managed by Oxford University Computing Services on behalf of the BNC Consortium. All rights in the texts cited are reserved.

7   In this case University refers to a specific body that conducted a study or research. It was capitalised to distinguish it from the word included in the society category that refers to the general use of the word as an education institution.

8   Oxford English Dictionary (Online) http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/20206?rskey=kQm6h3&result=2#eid (accessed 2 September 2015).

9   WordNet (Online) http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=poverty+trap&sub=Search+WordNet&o2=&o0=1&o8=1&o1=1&o7=&o5=&o9=&o6=&o3=&o4=&h=10 (accessed 2 September 2015).

10   WordNet (Online) http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?o2=&o0=1&o8=1&o1=1&o7=&o5=&o9=&o6=&o3=&o4=&s=poverty+line&i=0&h=0#c (accessed 2 September 2015).

11   'One million Britons using food banks', *The Independent,* 18 April 2015.

12   'Food bank use tops million mark over the past year', *The Guardian,* 22 April 2015; 'Food bank use has escalated under Coalition', *The Daily Mirror,* 22 April 2015; '1m rely on food banks', *Daily Star,* 22 April 2015; 'Food bank's 1m user claim seize on by the (incomplete headline on Factiva)', *Daily Mail,* 22 April 2015; 'Number of different people visiting foodbanks is 500,000, not one million, says Trussell Trust', *The Telegraph*, 22 April 2015; 'Unverified figures used to blast Government over food banks', *thesun.co.uk,* 23 April 2015.

13   'Food bank use tops million mark over the past year', The Guardian, 22 April 2015.

14   'Don't you dare lecture us on poverty': Furious Cameron attacks Labour 'bleating' as it emerges a million people now use foodbanks', *Mail Online,* 22 April 2015.

15   'My money keeps getting stopped and I don't know why': The people behind the increasing numbers of food bank users', *Independent Online,* 22 April 2015.

16   'How to fix the UK's poverty problem? Listen to people at a food bank', *The Guardian* (online), 24 April 2015.

17   'Food bank admits its million users a year claim was false', *Daily Mail,* 23 April 2015; 'Food bank "fib"', *The Sun;* Number of different people visiting foodbanks is 500,000, not one million, says Trussell Trust', *The Telegraph*, 22 April 2015.

18   'Planned £12bn Tory welfare cuts will lead to two million a year using food banks, says study', *Independent Online,* 3 May 2015.

19   'Will Cameron's debate victory finally kickstart Tories' flat election campaign? Poll shows PM won TV showdown after stumbling Miliband suffered a "Kinnock moment"', *Mail Online,* 1 May 2015.

20   'The sickening truth about food banks that the Tories don't want you to know', *Independent Online,* 23 April 2015.

21   Quoted in 'More families will go hungry if Tories cut £12bn', *Independent on Sunday,* 3 May 2015.

22   'Food bank admits its million users a year claim was false', *Daily Mail,* 23 April 2015.

23   'Food bank use has escalated under Coalition', *The Daily Mirror,* 22 April 2015.

24   'Food bank's 1m user claim seize on by the [incomplete headline on Factiva]', *Daily Mail,* 22 April 2015.

25   The choice is...takers or makers', *The Sun,* 24 April 2015.

26   Food bank use tops million mark over the past year' *The Guardian,* 22 April 2015.

27   'The sickening truth about food banks that the Tories don't want you to know', *Independent Online,* 23 April 2015.

28   Food bank use tops million mark over the past year' *The Guardian,* 22 April 2015; 'Food bank use has escalated under Coalition', *The Daily Mirror,* 22 April 2015; 'The sickening truth about food banks that the Tories don't want you to know', *Independent Online,* 23 April 2015.

29   'Food bank's 1m user claim seize on by the [incomplete headline on Factiva]', *Daily Mail,* 22 April 2015.

30   'Food bank use has escalated under Coalition', *The Daily Mirror,* 22 April 2015; 'Food bank use tops million mark over the past year' *The Guardian,* 22 April 2015.

31   Social Security was also a search term. The word *security* appeared in the keyword list but it was not just in the context of *social security.* There were cases in which it referred to *national security, economic security, and financial security.* For this reason, we excluded it from this list.

32   Baker, P. (2006) *Using corpora in discourse analysis.* London: Continuum.

33   '40 kids ..with 20 mums', *Daily Mirror,* 1 April 2015; '40 kids by 20 women', *The Sun,* 1 April 2015

34   'Feckless fathers should have all benefits removed', *Daily Express,* 2 April 2015.

35   WordNet (Online) http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=benefit&sub=Search+WordNet&o2=&o0=1&o8=1&o1=1&o7=&o5=&o9=&o6=&o3=&o4=&h= (accessed 2 September 2015).

36   Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and social change.* Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing

37   'Potential Conservative welfare cuts revealed in leaked emails', *The Guardian,* 27 March 2015.

38   Also featured in 'Tories accused of secret plan to axe child benefit for most families', *The Independent,* 8 April 2015.

39   '"Secret" Tory plans for £8bn in welfare cuts exposed by Danny Alexander', *The Guardian,* 30 April 2015.

40   'Danny Alexander's revelation should be a wake-up call for everyone', *The Guardian,* 30 April 2015.

41   'Rachel Reeves challenges George Osborne to rule out child benefit cut', *The Telegraph Online,* 8 April 2015.

42   Quoted in 'Rachel Reeves challenges George Osborne to rule out child benefit cut', *The Telegraph Online,* 8 April 2015.

43   'Secret' Tory plans for £8bn in welfare cuts exposed by Danny Alexander', *The Guardian,* 30 April 2015. and 'PM does not rule out more tax credit cuts after Labour claim of 'secret plan'', *The Guardian,* 29 April 2015.

44   Quoted in 'PM does not rule out more tax credit cuts after Labour claim of 'secret plan'', *The Guardian,* 29 April 2015.

45   BBC Radio 4, *PM,* 30 April 2015.

46   See for example, 'Conservative spending cuts will hit middle-income families, says Labour', *The Guardian,* 7 April 2015 and 'Could 4.3 million families lose child benefit? Osborne refuses to rule out depriving more parents of cash to tackle deficit', *Mail Online,* 7 April 2015.

47   'George Osborne's welfare cuts are "spine chilling" if Tories win election warns his own deputy', *Daily Mirror,* 22 April 2015.

48   For example in 'The Tories' £12bn of further benefit cuts will add to growing poverty', *The Guardian,* 5 May 2015; 'Danny Alexander's revelation should be a wake-up call for everyone', *The Guardian,* 30 April 2015; '"Secret" Tory plans for £8bn in welfare cuts exposed by Danny Alexander', *The Guardian,* 30 April 2015; 'PM does not rule out more tax credit cuts after Labour claim of 'secret plan', *The Guardian,* 29 April 2015. In the Mail: 'Child benefit under threat: Michael Gove admits he cannot rule out fresh raid on parents to tackle the deficit', *Mail Online,* 15 April

2015; 'Could 4.3 million families lose child benefit? Osborne refuses to rule out depriving more parents of cash to tackle deficit', *Mail Online,* 7 April 2015.

49   'The Tories' £12bn of further benefit cuts will add to growing poverty', *The Guardian,* 5 May 2015; 'Danny Alexander's revelation should be a wake-up call for everyone', *The Guardian,* 30 April 2015.

50   'Danny Alexander's revelation should be a wake-up call for everyone', *The Guardian,* 30 April 2015.

51   These words appear among the 15 words used most frequently with *old.*

52   *ITV* Evening News at 6:30pm, 17 April 2015.

53   For example 'Labour lays down the gauntlet on zero hours', *The Independent,* 1 April 2015; 'Give zero-hours workers regular contracts after 3 months – Miliband', *The Guardian,* 1 April 2015; 'Ed's zero tolerance', *Daily Mirror,* 1 April 2015.

54   For example 'Miliband to ban almost all zero-hours contracts for workers employed for more than 12 weeks', *Mail Online,* 1 April 2015; 'Zero-hour ban 'would cost jobs'', *The Sun,* 2 April 2015; 'Ed Miliband's zero-hours proposals 'risk higher unemployment', *The Telegraph Online,* 1 April 2015. Also *ITV News* at 6:30pm, *BBC News* at 6, *Sky News* at 10, *PM, World at One,* all on 1 April 2015. Channel 4 News was missing from our sample as it did not come up on TVEyes.

55   'Solution to zero-hours contracts is to rebrand them, says Iain Duncan Smith', *The Guardian,* 17 April 2015.

56   'Solution to zero-hours contracts is to rebrand them, says Iain Duncan Smith', *The Guardian,* 17 April 2015; The night real voters finally had their say: Audience roasts party leaders for lying and dodging questions in stormy TV debate as Red Ed is shredded over economy and Cameron comes out on top', *Mail Online,* 1 May 2015; 'Give Ed Miliband the job of Prime Minister – and it could cost you yours', *thesun.co.uk,* 2 April 2015; 'General Election 2015: 7 charts that show why it is hard to trust David Cameron's manifesto pledges', *Independent Online,* 14 April 2015; 'Without the support of the business community, Labour simply is not fit to govern', *Telegraph Online,* 3 April 2015.

57   'Ed Miliband's speech in the West Midlands', *LabourPress,* http://press.labour.org.uk/post/118017789199/ed-milibands-speech-in-the-west-midlands (accessed 5 August 2015).

58   Rachel Reeves on *World at One,* 1 April 2015.

59   See for example, 'Ed's zero tolerance', *The Daily Mirror,* 1 April 2015.

60   John Cridland, director-general of the CBI quoted in 'Ed Miliband's zero-hours proposals "risk higher unemployment"', *The Telegraph Online,* 1 April 2015. Critics also said that Labour's policy would lead to employers firing those on zero hour contracts before the 12 weeks to avoid giving them the right to a regular contract, while Labour said this would not happen.

61   'Jobs joy after 2 million more people found work in five years but Cameron warns recovery at risk from 'Labour-SNP stitch-up', *Mail Online,* 17 April 2015.

62   David Cameron speech, 'Making work pay', https://www.politicshome.com/economy-and-work/articles/news/david-cameron-speech-making-work-pay (accessed 2 September 2015)

63   See 'Politics live', *The Guardian,* 10 April 2015.

64   David Cameron speech, 'Making work pay', https://www.politicshome.com/economy-and-work/articles/news/david-cameron-speech-making-work-pay (accessed 2 September 2015).

65   See 'What's happened to living standards?', *Full Fact,* 22 April 2015. Available at https://fullfact.org/economy/living_standards_parliament-41273 (accessed 2 September 2015).

66   Unless otherwise stated, all figures in this section come from the Households Below Average Income release for 1994-95 to 2012-13.

67   https://www.politicshome.com/economy-and-work/articles/news/david-cameron-speech-making-work-pay (accessed 2 September 2015).

68   For example, in 'Life expectancy increases but gap widens between rich and poor', *The Guardian,* 30 April 2015; 'Men near equality with women in life expectancy', *Times Online,* 30 April 2015.

69   https://www.politicshome.com/economy-and-work/articles/news/david-cameron-speech-making-work-pay (accessed 2 September 2015).

70   Indirectly quoted in 'Tristram Hunt promises a new deal for stressed and overworked teachers', *Observer,* 5 April 2015.

71   For example, 'Poverty – and child poverty in particular – is rising', *The Guardian,* 29 April 2015.

72   'Schools scandal', the *Daily Mirror,* 1 May 2015.

73   'Cameron won't talk up his successes; he just offers us a bribe a day', *The Sunday Times,* 19 April 2015.

74 ‘Coalition's "elitism" attacked by teachers' union head', *The Independent,* 4 April 2015.

75 For example, quoted in 'Teachers are having to feed children arriving at school hungry and cold in a return to "Victorian conditions"', *Mail Online,* 5 April 2015; 'Schools providing £43.5m of extra support to children due to cuts – poll', *The Guardian,* 1 May 2015.

76 Hall, S., Leary, K. Greevy, H. (2014) *Public attitudes to poverty.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: https://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/sri-ews-public-attitudes-to-poverty-2014.pdf (accessed 15 September 2015).

Acknowledgements

About the authors

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Appendix 1 Methodology

The analysis focused on the period from 31 March to 7 May 2015.

Newspapers

The research included the daily, Sunday and online editions[1] of nine national newspapers: *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Star*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Sun* and *The Times*. Separate searches were conducted in the newspaper archive database Factiva to group these articles into separate groups (corpora) to be analysed: poverty-only[2], benefits-only[3], benefits and poverty[4], insecure jobs[5] and unemployment[6]. We created different datasets for poverty and benefits to see if language differed between when these topics were talked about separately and when they were talked about in the same article. The poverty-only group encompassed articles that mentioned at least one of *poverty, poor, poorer* and *poorest*. The benefits-only group encompassed articles that contained at least one of *benefit, benefits, welfare* and *social security*. The benefits and poverty group contained at least one word from each of these search strings. Articles with irrelevant occurrences of these search terms, such as 'the poor performance' or 'the country will benefit' were removed.

The job insecurity and unemployment groups were separated to avoid the search terms skewing the other groups towards these issues. The search terms used for the job insecurity group were: *zero hour**, *living wage, low wage*, minimum wage, irregular work, part time work, part time job*, work* part time, on part time, part time contract*, temporary work, temporary job*, temporary contract*, low paid, low pay, low income*.[7] The unemployment group had to contain at least one among these words: *jobless, workless, unemploy*, out of work, dole*, with *unemploy** bringing up both *unemployment, unemployed*. Although *dole* refers to a type of benefit, we did not include it in the benefit-related corpora as it indicates a specific type of out of work benefit, rather than being a general term for welfare.

We also made use of an additional group of newspaper articles published during the election campaign by the newspapers mentioned above. As Factiva does not have a 'search all' function, we used *and* or *the* as search terms. This was collected based on stratified week sampling, where an artificial week was created based on randomly selecting a specific Monday out of all the Mondays in the timeframe, a specific Tuesday, and so on. This group was used to investigate whether certain patterns were typical of our group or whether they were frequent in a general group as well.

Articles about poverty in the leftwing newspapers accounted for more words (336,000) than those in the rightwing newspapers (331,000), even though these accounted for fewer newspaper outlets. The leftwing newspapers included here were *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Mirror*, while *The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Daily Mail, The Daily Express* and *The Sun* were categorised as the rightwing press, all determined by their editorial line taken for the election.[8] Comparing the leftwing against the rightwing groups, the word *poverty* occurred in the list of strongest keywords, despite being used as a search term in both datasets. This shows that poverty was mentioned explicitly more frequently in the leftwing press.[9]

Table A1: 10 strongest keywords of the poverty-only group (leftwing) versus poverty-only group (rightwing)

Development	*Fuel*
Fossil	*Fuels*
Climate	*Countries*
Global	*Carbon*
Change	*Sustainable*

Broadcast

TV and radio programmes were collected using the online search engine TVEyes. We used the same search terms as those used in the print group, although the search engine on TVEyes did not allow us to carry out as much of an advanced search as in Factiva. For example, we could not automatically exclude irrelevant occurrences of our search terms (e.g. *will benefit, must benefit*) so we had to remove them manually. We included the core broadcast news programmes: the BBC news at 6 pm and 10 pm, Channel 4 news at 7 pm, Sky news at 10 pm and ITV news at 6:30 pm and core radio news and current affairs programmes: *Today, World at One, PM (Radio 4)* and Radio 1's *Newsbeat* at 12:45 and 5:45 pm. We included the latter to provide a more diverse view of radio commentary during the campaign.

Unlike newspaper articles which tend to focus on one broad or specific topic, TV and radio programmes were more varied in the topics covered. For our analysis we therefore identified segments of programmes where our search terms were being discussed, rather than transcribing the whole programme. For example, taking just the segment of an interview where benefits were being discussed. This required a certain level of subjectivity regarding where discussion of one topic ended and another began. This differentiation in the way segments were cut could have affected keyword analysis but since the broadcast analysis was focused on concordance lines and collocations (i.e. the immediate context of search words) it did not affect the analysis.

For some segments we had to rely on the subtitles rather than a transcription as we did not have the clip downloaded from TVEyes.

While the newspaper groups were analysed in comparison with each other, including an analysis by political affiliation of the newspaper, the TV and radio groups were analysed as a whole (including all programmes). The search on TVEyes did not always pick up all occurrences and so we could not be sure that our groups were a complete representation of discussions of our topics. This meant a comparison between TV and radio or between two or more programmes had the potential to be inaccurate. This was especially the case for radio, where the search function was based on voice recognition software. We used our own records of the content of radio programmes during the election to try to account for any significant discussions of the topics that had been missed out. Moreover, both radio and TV belong to the broader categories of spoken language and broadcast media and were likely to show less variety in terms of vocabulary due to the high repetition that is typical of spoken language. In the case of broadcast, we made comparisons with the British National Corpus of spoken and written English to see how the representations offered in our groups differed to those made in other contexts. The British National Corpus was published in 2007, before welfare reform was really on the agenda. This means that the comparison between the two groups is likely to draw out greater distinctions in the way topics are talked about in our group than might be the case if we were comparing to a national group compiled more recently.

Politicians

For politicians, we searched for speeches and comments from: the leaders of the three main parties David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband; the Chancellor George Osborne and Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls; the Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith and the Shadow equivalent Rachel Reeves, and the Business Secretary Vince Cable and Chief Secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander (as they were). We also looked at the first half of 2014 on this basis. Due to the focus on the election campaign rather than a usual government timeframe, our analysis is limited to the use of statistics by political parties. It therefore does not look at the part that press releases from the government can play in encouraging certain inaccurate angles in media coverage, as warned about by the DWP Select Committee in 2011.

What we could include depended on what information was publicly available. While Labour, and to a lesser degree the Liberal Democrats, published quite a few of their speeches and comments, the Conservatives did not. Therefore we relied upon speeches which were published by news site PoliticsHome, and some speeches and press releases supplied to us by the parties but we do not know that we have an exhaustive list. As there were no available speeches or press releases including comments by Iain Duncan Smith which mentioned our search terms during the election, he does not appear in the analysis. That is not to say that he did not talk about the topics we looked at, merely that, from what we could find, he did not do so through official speeches or press releases. For the 2014 group, we avoided all these difficulties as we could use any speeches and comments posted by the

Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats on gov.uk while Labour continued to publish a lot of its output on press.labour.org.uk.

By assessing national debates about poverty, the project was inevitably going to be 'England-centric'. To provide some comparison to the narratives and debates that went on in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland we looked at speeches and comments by leaders of the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the DUP as the parties with the largest numbers of seats in the respective parliament/assembly. The speeches and comments were identified from each party's website news page. For the same reason, we also looked at the comments made during the ITV Leaders' Debate on April 2 and the BBC Election Debate with opposition parties on April 16.

For the analysis of speeches, we compared those given during the election campaign by the leading exponents of the three main parties in the UK. Due to the larger number of speeches published by the SNP we were also able to quantitatively compare Nicola Sturgeon's speeches with those of David Cameron and Ed Miliband. In the case of Labour and the Conservatives we also compared 2015 speeches with 2014 ones, to explore differences and similarities among patterns within the same party. Aside from the comparisons with Nicola Sturgeon, comparisons were made between parties (grouping together the politicians in the analysis) rather than between individual politicians.

Analysis techniques

The narrative analysis was conducted using corpus linguistic analysis while the accuracy analysis was conducted based on factchecking statistical claims.

Corpus linguistics is a type of quantitative analysis that uses statistical tools to measure the salience and frequency of linguistic patterns in large bodies of text. An advantage of using corpus linguistics to study language is that the data sample used is often very large, consisting of millions of words (as in this study). This makes it possible to identify trends within broader text samples rather than simply make claims based on the examination of a limited number of texts. The findings are therefore more likely to be generalised. Additionally, because corpus analysis tools perform statistical tests on data, it is less easy for researchers to pick out single examples which confirm initial hypotheses or biases (although the interpretation of data is still performed by a human researcher). In this study, we did not start with a hypothesis to then test in the group and instead looked at the group to identify frequent and salient patterns and trends.

The linguistic analysis in this report used three common methods.

Keywords

First, the identification of keywords – words or clusters of words which had a significantly higher frequency in one group compared with another. These were as far as possible grouped into themes, and excluded functional words such as 'is' and 'I' in order to focus on dominant topics. In some cases, words were ambiguous, i.e. they could not be categorised into just one group according to their meaning. Where possible, ambiguity in keyword groupings was eliminated through further analysis. For example, the term *goals* is potentially vague, but looking at the most frequent groups of words containing this word we saw that it occurred mostly in the phrase *development goals*, suggesting that it could be included in the 'international development' category. Where it was possible to say that one word belonged to two categories only, that word was placed into both categories. For example, 'scale' belonged to both the 'health' and the 'police' categories and we included them there. When these words belonged to two categories but both categories were part of one broader category, we only included it once. *Parents*, for example, may belong to both 'family' and 'people', but it was only placed in the 'family' category as both categories belonged to the main 'society' category. Finally, in some cases, words were highly ambiguous and it was not possible to include them in any category. This was the case with words such as *time, little, good,* and *high* and ambiguous verbs such as *say, think* and *make*. Although these words could have added value to the analysis, the keyword lists were meant to give an overview of the main topics existing in each group. Further analyses, such as the concordance and collocation analyses (see below) carried out for each group, made it possible to look at these terms in context, thus making it possible to look at them in more detail.

Collocations

Second, the identification of 'collocates' – words which tended to occur more frequently with our search terms. The concept of collocation can be better explained through an example. The word 'nails', for instance, often co-occurs with 'bite' in the expression 'to bite your nails' rather than, for example, 'to eat your nails'. When a word often co-occurs with another, it creates a pattern. Corpus analysis tools (in our case AntConc[10]) make it possible to explore recurrent patterns spread across the group.

As we were interested in the frequency of certain patterns, we selected collocates using T-score as a statistical measure. T-score shows high-frequency words that collocate with a search word. Looking at collocates of a search term can be a helpful strategy for drawing a general picture of the 'behaviour' of that particular word.

Concordances

Third, the analysis of search terms in the line of text in which they appear – known as concordance lines. With words occurring hundreds or thousands of times, analysing all concordance lines would be an extremely time-demanding task. Where there were more than 100 occurrences of a search term, we looked at random samples of 30 lines. Where there were fewer, we looked at all of them. We pick out some examples of these in the report.

BNC

The BNC is a 100-million word collection which contains samples of written texts (90 million words) and spoken language (10 million words) from a wide range of sources. It is 'designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English, both spoken and written, from the late twentieth century'.[11] Since the BNC contains texts that were produced before the introduction of the National Minimum Wage Act (1998), we decided not to compare our collection with the BNC on terms such as the minimum wage.

We used the BNC to compare the use of the word 'poverty' in the media during the election against the general use of the word. This allowed us to see what was missing in our collection in addition to what was immediately noticeable. In some cases, due to the high ambiguity of some words, we could not make such comparisons. For example, in the case of the word 'work', we could not compare our collocate list with that of the BNC as collocates in the BNC may indicate a relationship with another meaning of the same word (e.g. in the expression 'This machine doesn't work' the verb work does not belong to the semantic group of employment).

Wmatrix

The analysis made use of Wmatrix[12], an online tool for corpus analysis and comparison. It provides frequency lists and concordances and groups keywords according to their meaning. For example, in a standard keyword analysis, the words 'tax' and 'pay' would be counted as separate units. In Wmatrix, they would be grouped together under the label 'money and pay'.

Factchecking

For the purposes of factchecking, we examined in detail five case studies of stories that were reported during the election. These were selected on the basis of their prominence in the news cycle and their relevance to poverty and welfare reform. All were front page stories and three featured prominently in the broadcast headlines. We opted for this method rather than a random sample of articles and programmes as it allowed for comparison between outlets and media types in the way whole stories were reported. It therefore allowed for more conclusive statements to be made regarding the pathology of claims and where accurate and inaccurate claims stemmed from.

We defined a story as one which originated from a comment, press release or speech or one which emerged from our analysis, and traced it across the outlets it appeared in. In the case of print media we looked at articles where the main focus of that article was the story for the three days around the story and in the case of broadcast, any programmes talking about the story on the same day. In some cases, the story was closely defined, such as The Trussell Trust food bank figures, in others, such as a Labour press release regarding a rise in zero hour contracts, the distinction of where the story ended was less defined.

We do not claim these stories are representative of all media coverage during the election but they provide examples of how, in some of the major stories of the election, specific instances of accurate and inaccurate claims were made. We also focused on the most frequent statistical claims made in each story rather than attempting to analyse every single claim made.

We also identified statistics used to talk about poverty, by looking at collocates of poverty in the collection (again using the T-score statistic) and looking at the concordance lines of content collocates which were likely to refer to statistics, such as *work, children, food* and *line* rather than *not, with* and *tackle.* From here we identified any statistical statements made and gathered together the most common ones.

Lastly, we also identified themes which were underlying the factcheck case studies.

Each of the parties were contacted with questions we had about the evidence behind claims, following Full Fact's usual day to day factchecking procedure. We called each party's press office to ask who it was best to contact for this purpose and sent them an email briefly explaining the research, along with our specific questions, giving them four working days to respond. We sent a reminder email on the day the responses were due if we had not had a reply. The Labour party was the only party which didn't get back to us. Following the Conservatives' and Liberal Democrats' responses, we contacted them again with a further question which had arisen in the course of the research.

Appendix notes

1   The Daily Mirror online edition and The Sun on Sunday edition were not accessible via Factiva.
2   Number of words: 680,254.
3   Number of words: 1,103,810.
4   Number of words: 501,163.
5   Number of words: 867,280.
6   Number of words: 978,482.
7   The asterisk means that the search will pull out any words containing these letters rather than just the specific word. For example, in the case of creat*, the search will identify mentions of creating, creates, created and so on.
8   'The Guardian view: Britain needs a new direction, Britain needs Labour', The Guardian, 1 May 2015; 'In defence of liberal democracy', Independent, 5 May 2015; 'General Election 2015: Your chance to change the future of Britain and send the Tories packing', Daily Mirror, 6 May 2015; 'Britain's vital choice', The Times, 6 May 2015; 'This election deadlock can still be broken', Daily Telegraph, 5 May 2015; 'We are at a crossroads in our proud history and we must stay on course...not veer Left into disarray', Mail Online, 3 May 2015; 'Ukip is in touch with ordinary British people', Daily Express, 3 May 2015; 'The Sun says: It's a Tory!', thesun.co.uk, 29 April 2015.
9   Poverty is the 34th strongest content word in the list of keywords (around 250 words are significantly more frequent in statistical terms).
10   Anthony, L. (2014) AntConc (Version 3.4.3) (Computer Software). Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Available from http://www.laurenceanthony.net/.
11   British National Corpus website, University of Oxford http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/ (accessed 1 June 2015)
12   Rayson, P. (2008) 'From key words to key semantic domains', International Journal of Corpus Linguistics, Vol. 13, No. 4 pp. 519–549. doi: 10.1075/ijcl.13.4.06ray. Wmatrix tool available at http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/ (accessed 1 June 2015)

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