

Representation in UK Public Broadcasting

Brexit & the Iraq War on BBC Question Time

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Background

- BBC's flagship political debate programme (1979-)
- Weekly panel of politicians, journalists & commentators
- Political elites questioned directly by the public

Format applied in other countries:

- Questions & Answers (RTE), Q+A (ABC)

Accusations of bias in its:

- Audience, Location, and **Panel selection**

EXPRESS 

BBC bias: Question Time's most frequent panellists are ALL Remainers

THE BBC was slammed for inflicting "Remainergeddon" on its viewers after it was revealed the broadcaster's most frequent Question Time panellists overwhelmingly voted for Remain, as the broadcasters faces new accusations of a pro-Brexit bias.

By **CHARLES HARRISON**
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Public Access Programming

- Role of media & public broadcasting in democracies
 - Source of information on current events and party policies
 - Public engagement in politics
- Political communication outwith election campaigns

Research Questions

1. Which groups and viewpoints get represented in BBC Question Time panel selection?
2. How does this compare to the distribution of these groups in parliament and the public?

Previous Work on BBCQT

Academic

- **Single episode case studies** (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Cranfield, 2012)
- **Interviews with broadcasters** (Mair et al., 2003)
- **Online engagement, second screen social networks** (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Doughty et. al., 2012)

Journalism

- **Think tanks** Institute of Economic Affairs (2016-17)
- **Bloggers** Joel Rogrigues (2017-2019)
- **Anonymous episode trackers** Question Time Watch (2016-2021)

Theory

Media studies

- Factual accuracy and balance of news coverage
- Bias in journalism and news media (Street, 2011)

Representation

- In political bodies and policymaking
- **Descriptive** & **substantive** representation (Pitkin, 1967; Heath, 2013)

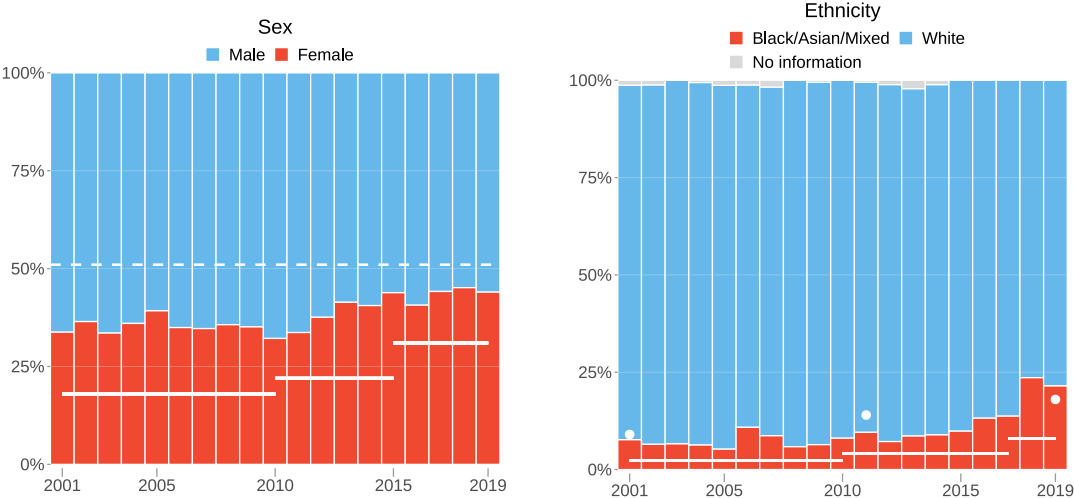
Data

BBCQT Appearances

- Collected panellist information for all appearances between 1979-2019 (6300 apps, 1400 eps)
- Combination of web-scraping and hand coding
- **Variables:** Party affiliation, gender, ethnicity, educational background, occupation

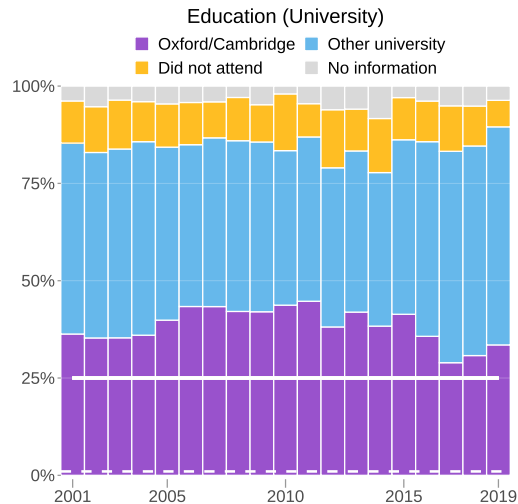
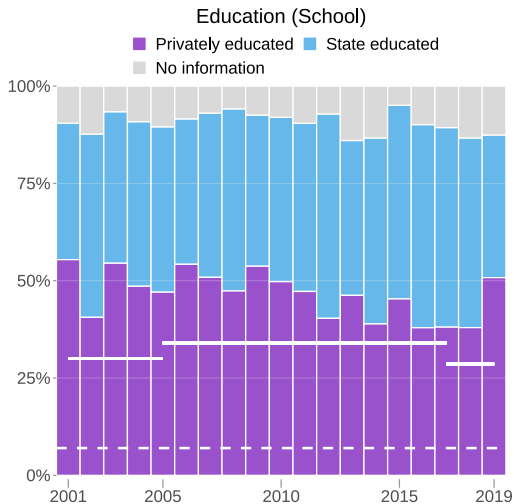
Descriptive Representation

Figure 1. Sex and Ethnicity for All BBCQT Panellist Appearances (2001-2019)



Notes: Solid white line = % MPs in bottom category. Dashed white line/points = % UK population in bottom category.

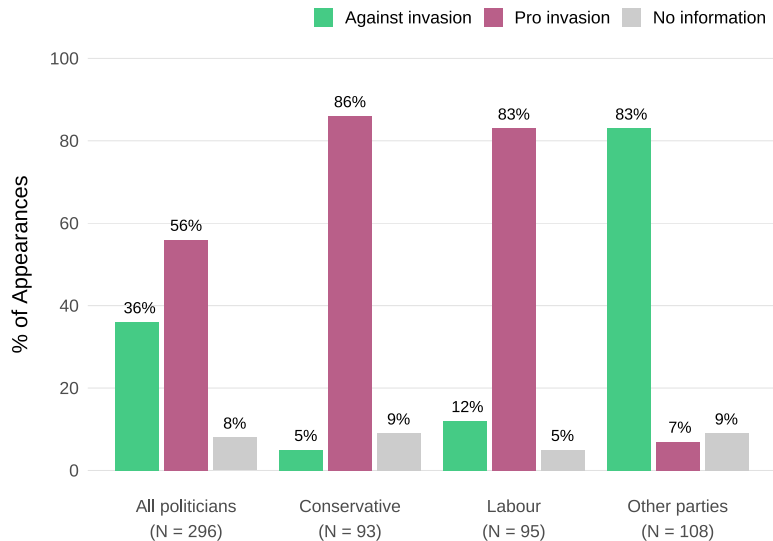
Figure 2. Educational Background for All BBCQT Appearances (2001-2019)



Notes: Solid white line = % MPs in bottom category. Dashed white line/points = % UK population in bottom category.

	BBCQT Appearances		Baseline Group		Net Difference	
	Politicians	Others	UK MPs	UK public	MPs	Public
% Ethnic Minority	8	14	5	14	+3	0
% Female	36	41	25	51	+11	-10
% Private School	44	51	30	7	+14	+44
% Oxbridge	40	36	25	1	+15	+35

Substantive Issue Representation

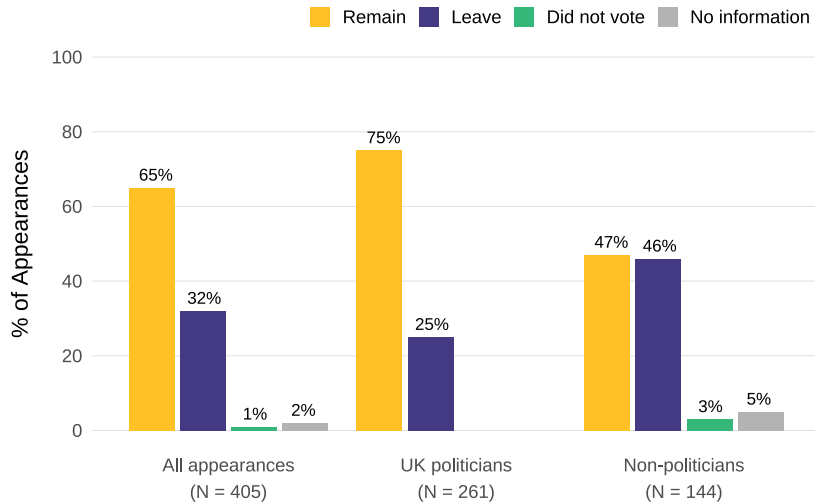


All MPs 2001-05

- 66% For
- 34% Against

MPs by party

- Con 91% For
- Lab 66% For
- Other
86% Against

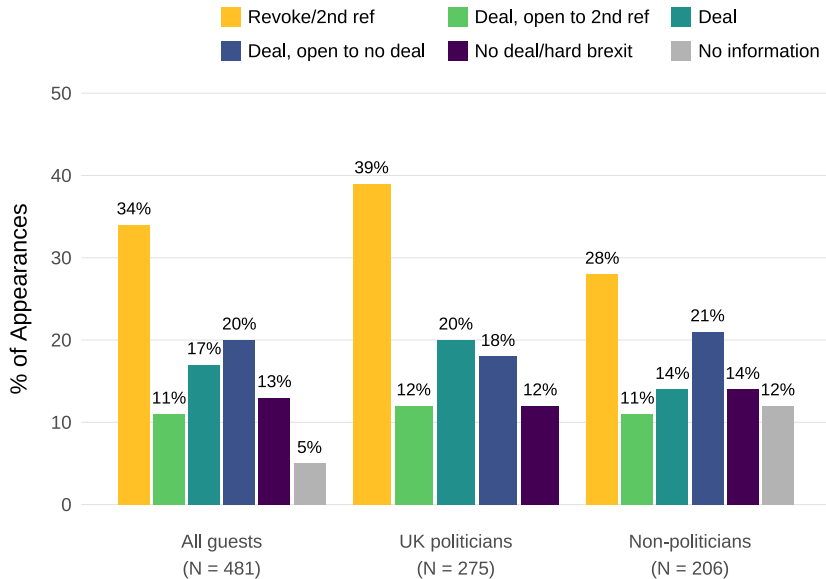


2016 MPs

- 74% Remain

Brexit result

- 52% Leave
- 48% Remain



Indicative votes

- 42% 2nd Ref
- 25% No deal

YouGov Polling

- 38% Remain
- 17% No deal
- 30% Deal

Data

MPs biggest sub-group of panellists

- 77% of all political guests

UK MP Dataset

- Collected political and demographic data on UK MPs in the 2001, 2015 and 2017 parliaments
- Party affiliation, gender, ethnicity, educational background, wikipedia views, previous appearances, attitudes towards the **Iraq War**, and **the EU**

Parliament	Iraq War	Conservative	Labour	Other
2001-05	Against Invasion	14	139	68
	Pro Invasion	150	273	11

Parliament	Brexit	Conservative	Labour	Other
2015-17	Leave	143	10	10
	Remain	187	223	74
	Unknown	2	3	0
2017-19	Revoke/2nd Ref	10	139	51
	Deal/Ref	4	67	1
	Deal	66	48	1
	Deal/No deal	155	4	7
	No Deal	81	2	3

Table: Dependent Variable: MP Appeared on BBCQT during 2001 Parliament

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Female			0.625* (0.317)
Ethnic Minority			1.315 (0.851)
Oxford/Cambridge			0.519 (0.295)
Did not attend Uni			-0.256 (0.425)
Labour		-0.723 (1.133)	-0.652 (1.260)
Other Party		1.689 (1.071)	1.958 (1.198)
Pro Invasion	0.481* (0.244)	1.299 (1.056)	1.049 (1.171)
Labour * Pro Invasion		0.256 (1.163)	0.548 (1.287)
Other Party * Pro Invasion		-1.405 (1.283)	-0.628 (1.415)
Previous Appearance			2.537*** (0.268)
Observations	655	655	653
AIC	569.9	546.6	430.6
Log Likelihood	-282.925	-267.299	-204.293

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Reference categories: Party (Conservative), Education (Attended other university)

Party x Iraq War

Figure: Predicted Probability of MP Appearing on BBCQT (2001 Parliament)

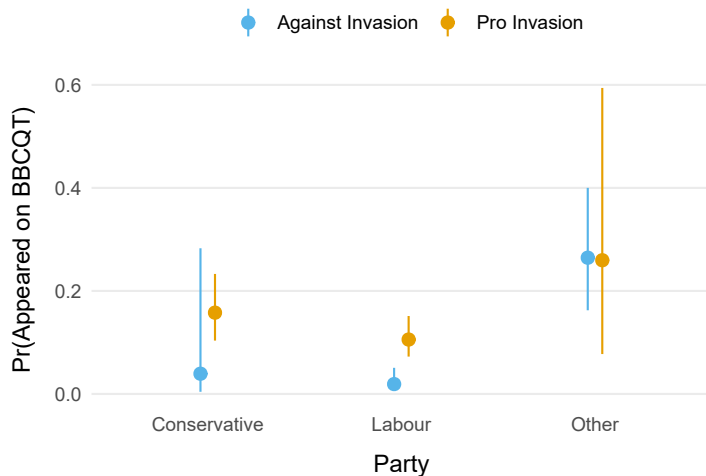


Table: Dependent Variable: MP Appeared on BBCQT during 2015 Parliament

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Female			0.424 (0.294)
Ethnic Minority			1.102* (0.440)
Oxford/Cambridge			0.025 (0.339)
Did not attend Uni			-0.345 (0.465)
Labour		0.210 (0.292)	0.041 (0.360)
Other Party		0.607 (0.365)	1.143* (0.444)
Leave	-0.445 (0.293)	-0.508 (0.385)	-0.734 (0.455)
Labour * Leave		1.427 (0.812)	1.565 (0.959)
Other Party * Leave		0.492 (0.926)	0.808 (1.128)
Previous Appearance			1.870*** (0.359)
log(Wiki Views)			0.464** (0.142)
Observations	652	652	627
AIC	513.8	514.3	393.9
Log Likelihood	-254.910	-251.139	-184.955

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Reference categories: Party (Conservative), Education (Attended other university)

Brexit x Party (2015-17)

Figure: Predicted Probability of MP Appearing on BBCQT (2015 Parliament)

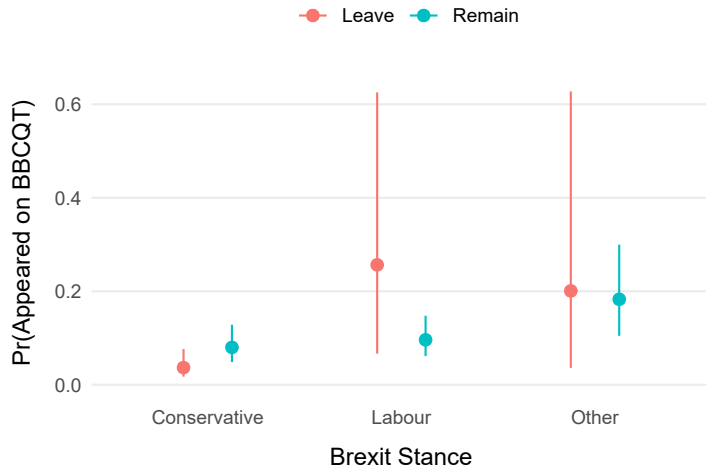


Table: Dependent Variable: MP Appeared on BBCQT during 2017 Parliament

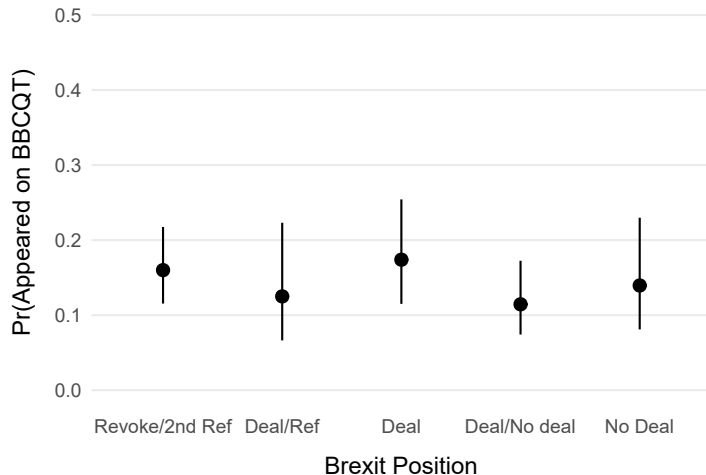
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Labour		-2.040** (0.686)	-1.218 (0.792)
Other Party		-1.291 (0.718)	0.156 (0.846)
Deal/Ref	-0.288 (0.405)	-16.566 (1199.773)	-17.574 (1558.382)
Deal	0.100 (0.313)	-1.504* (0.708)	-0.585 (0.834)
Deal/No deal	-0.388 (0.311)	-1.968** (0.678)	-0.707 (0.792)
No Deal	-0.161 (0.366)	-1.749* (0.706)	-1.379 (0.836)
Labour * Deal/Ref		16.608 (1199.773)	17.650 (1558.382)
Labour * Deal		1.934* (0.850)	1.388 (0.990)
Labour * Deal/No deal		-12.558 (1199.773)	-15.607 (1648.548)
Labour * No Deal		-12.777 (1696.735)	-14.696 (2506.818)
Other Party * Deal/Ref		34.423 (2682.773)	34.714 (4252.048)
Other Party * Deal		-13.771 (2399.545)	-15.622 (3956.180)
Other Party * Deal/No deal		-13.307 (906.943)	-14.981 (1437.109)
Other Party * No Deal		-13.526 (1385.378)	-15.746 (2085.148)
Observations	639	639	627
AIC	534.0	534.4	422.1
Log Likelihood	-262.002	-252.222	-190.051

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

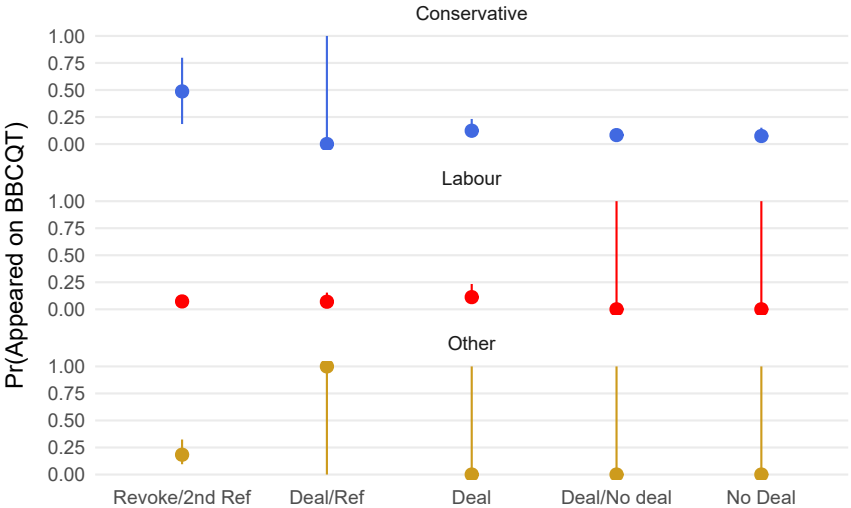
*Model 3 also includes all demographic variables, previous appearance and wikipedia views

Brexit (2017-19)

Figure: Predicted Probability of MP Appearing on BBCQT (2017 Parliament)



Brexit * Party (2017-19)



Summary

- Education the biggest source of overrepresentation on BBCQT
 - Privately educated, attended Oxford/Cambridge
- MPs who supported Iraq invasion more likely to appear
 - Driven by guaranteed spots for Lab and Con
- No clear bias in Brexit representation of MPs
 - Accounting for relevant target populations and measurement

Upcoming Data Releases/Projects

Data

- All BBCQT appearances (1979-2019)
- All audience questions (2010-2023)
- 10+ million BBCQT Tweets (2010-2023)

Projects

- Social media and news media claims of bias
- Impact on public participation and attitudes
- Party representation over time

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BBC Website FAQs

How does Question Time select its panel members?

- "...aims to select a panel with a broad range of views, knowledge and experience, with panellists who are relevant to the big stories or debates of that week.

How do you decide which political parties are represented on Question Time?

- "...there will nearly always be a representative from the UK government and the official opposition on the panel"
- "...representatives from other political parties across the series, taking as our guide the level of electoral support at national level which each party enjoys"

Feedback

- How to frame/structure the paper
- Where to submit

Paper Structure - Option 1

1. Descriptive and Substantive Representation (2001-2019)

- Which groups and viewpoints get represented on the programme
- Demographics, Iraq war, Brexit
- Compare with public and MP reference groups
- Which MPs are more/less likely to appear?
- Descriptive/exploratory

Paper Structure - Option 2

1. Issue Bias and Substantive Representation (2001-2019)

- Evaluating accusations of political bias on the programme
- What are the appropriate measures of political bias here?
- Were certain sides of the Brexit/Iraq issues more likely to appear?
- Explicit hypothesis testing of presence of overrepresentation

2. Descriptive and Party Representation (1979-2019)

- Who gets represented on the programme
- Demographics: sex, ethnicity, educational background
- What politicians/parties get to appear?
- Compare party representation versus polling/election results

Journals

- IJPP
 - Invited to submit for special issue 1st Dec
 - Can also submit individually afterwards
- Other potential journals?
 - Journal fit, time to publication, ranking