

Revealed: The dark-money Brexit Ads Flooding Social Media

By [Peter Geoghegan](#)

Global Research, February 06, 2019

[openDemocracy](#) 5 February 2019

Region: [Europe](#)
Theme: [Intelligence](#)

Over the past week tens of thousands of pounds have been spent on Facebook adverts promoting a 'no deal' Brexit. It is not possible to find out who is funding these highly targeted campaigns, despite new regulations intended to make political messaging on Facebook more transparent.

Over the seven days to last Saturday, spending by campaigners pushing for 'no deal' far outstripped that of anti-Brexit groups. Some of these paid-for Facebook adverts described pro-EU MPs as "traitors" and "globalist scumbags".

A single pro-Brexit group with almost no public presence spent almost £50,000 on Facebook. [Britain's Future](#) – which does not declare its funders and has no published address – is [running hundreds of very localised targeted ads](#) pushing for 'no deal'.

Politicians and campaigners have called for greater transparency of political advertising. Labour MP Ben Bradshaw said: "We have no idea who these people are or where their money comes from. It shows again how unfit for purpose the rules are that govern online campaigning and the use of data."

'Don't let them steal Brexit'

Some of the adverts claim that a 'no deal' Brexit "will reduce barriers to world trade and cut prices", a claim contradicted by most economists. Britain's Future has also run over 100 adverts in the last week urging voters in specific Labour constituencies to write to their MP.

These targeted adverts include messages such as "Don't let them steal Brexit" and include a link for voters to email their MP. Politicians have reported receiving a significant number of pro-'no deal' messages in recent weeks.



Over the past week, anti-Brexit groups have spent far less money on Facebook adverts than pro-'no deal' outfits, reversing a trend that had seen generally anti-Brexit groups spend more money on Facebook since last October.

Over the last four months, the People's Vote and Best for Britain campaigns spent £266,369 and £183,943, respectively. Neither of these anti-Brexit groups is fully transparent either: both publish some details about themselves, such as addresses, but do not publish full details of all funders and donors. During the same time period, [Britain's Future has spent more than £200,000 on Facebook ads](#).

While anti-Brexit spending has slowed down in recent weeks, however, adverts pushing a 'no deal' Brexit have spiked. Britain's Future has spent more than £110,000 on Facebook ads since mid-January. It is not clear where the money for this huge ad push has come from.

The only person publicly identified with the group is [Tim Dawson](#), a former 'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps' scriptwriter. Dawson is listed as editor on Britain's Future's website.

In November, Dawson told the BBC that he was "raising small donations from friends and fellow Brexiteers" after [it was reported that](#) a paid-for Britain's Future advert topped Google searches for "what is the Brexit deal" ahead of the UK government's own site. Dawson has yet to respond to queries from openDemocracy about the source of his funding.



Dawson has written for The Spectator, [Spiked](#) and other right-wing publications. In last year's local election, he ran as a Conservative candidate in Hulme, in Manchester. [He finished a distant sixth.](#)

During the 2016 EU referendum Vote Leave and other campaigns spent almost £4m on social media adverts, including [erroneous warnings that Turkey was joining the EU](#). Britain's Future's adverts are far more geographically targeted than Vote Leave's were, and appear to be focused on influencing Labour MPs not to back Theresa May's withdrawal bill on 14 February, which would increase the chances of a 'no deal' Brexit.

Brexit Defence Force

Some paid-for pro-Brexit ads on Facebook are more sinister. A group called '[Brexit Defence Force](#)' paid hundreds of pound for adverts that included messages about "remoaner Globalist scumbags" and calling for a 'no deal' Brexit.

In one advert posted this week (below), John Bercow, the Speaker of the House of Commons, was described as "a Saboteur amongst us" and a "nasty little globalist scumbag". Above a cartoon image of a witch in a long black hooded cloak a message says "Burkow must go".



It is impossible to find out who is actually paying for these adverts. Under rules introduced by Facebook last year, all political advertising in the UK has to be labelled and those placing the adverts to verify they are living at a UK postal address.

But Facebook's new rules, introduced following concerns about social media campaigning during the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US presidential election, do not force an advertiser to declare the ultimate source of the money for any political campaign. For groups such as Brexit Defence Forces and others it is simple to place adverts without having to disclose who is actually paying for them.

Sam Jeffers, co-founder of [Who Targets Me?](#), which tracks political adverts, said "While there are circumstances where anonymity for campaigners is necessary, we don't think any of these campaigns are performing a democratic service by hiding their true identity."

Last month, Facebook removed threats of violence against pro-EU MPs made in response to

a paid-for Brexit Defence Force advert. But [Facebook ruled that the advert itself – which accused anti-Brexit MPs of “treason” – did not breach its community standards.](#)



As well as paid for ‘no deal’ adverts, many popular pro-Brexit Facebook sites have shared images depicting the European Union as Nazis and Theresa May as a traitor. Others have even used iconography from 1930s Germany to spread a hardline pro-Brexit message.



Another obscure anti-Brexit outfit, [We are the 52%](#), has spent more than £4,000 over the last seven days. We are the 52%, which [has spent almost £25,000 on Facebook ads since October](#), has also been pushing for a ‘no deal’ Brexit.



We are the 52% [appears to be affiliated with Nigel Farage’s Leave Means Leave](#). The only person publicly connected with the group is [former Vote Leave activist Theodora Dickinson](#) (below).



Dickinson also runs a website that offers [political communications services](#) including “social media solutions for candidates and elected representatives”. openDemocracy has contacted We are the 52% to ask what the source of the funding for its Facebook adverts is but has yet to receive a response.

Labour’s **Ben Bradshaw** said:

“This is the latest example of shady groups that keep their identity secret pushing misleading and factually inaccurate hard-Brexit ads on social media. We have no idea who these people are or where their money comes from. It shows again how unfit for purpose the rules are that govern online campaigning and the use of data.”

Liberal Democrat MP **Tom Brake** said:

“There is a clear agenda from a clique of comfortable businessmen and donors to block attempts at preventing a chaotic No-Deal scenario – the very worst Brexit outcome.

“We must uncover the true nature of murky pro-Brexit groups like Britain’s Future, to help finally debunk their propaganda and lay bare the true devastation of the Brexit these secretive groups are desperate for.”

Sam Jeffers said:

“People spending large sums to influence voters and MPs should be transparent by default. Equally, Facebook could implement stronger rules to force greater transparency on organisations who want to reach people through its service. As soon as possible, we want to see new rules for transparency of

political campaigns, to reassure the voting public that the messages they see can be trusted – wherever they see them.”

The original source of this article is [openDemocracy](#)

Copyright © [Peter Geoghegan](#), [openDemocracy](#), 2019

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **[Peter Geoghegan](#)**

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca