



Politics, Money and Propaganda: British Public Perceptions Wrong On Most Important Issues

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Misinformation, disinformation and propaganda – you are subjected to all three every single day. The problem is that the media in Britain is heavily tainted by an agenda driven by politics and money. Many of the decisions you make will be based on your perceptions of life and the way you see it.

Cognitive dissonance – is the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioural decisions and attitude change, basically it happens when our beliefs do not match up with our behaviors.

So, will you vote to stay in the EU at the expected “Brexit” referendum based upon immigration? Many will, indeed, in the latest poll conducted by [The Independent](#) it shows that this has been central to the debate which has been bolstered by public anxiety over the triplicity of the refugee crisis, the Paris killings and fears over acts of terrorism on home soil – all inter-related. This poll shows about 52% of the population would vote for ‘Brexit’ right now as a result.

However, it is estimated that the empirical annual probability of a UK resident dying from a preventable cause (e.g. smoking, drinking, obesity, adverse hospital events, violence etc) is 1 in 417, this being 38,000 times higher than the empirical annual probability of a UK resident being killed by a terrorist which is about 1 in 16 million.

As far as terrorism is concerned, the government and media have conducted an impressive campaign in [frightening its citizens](#) to the point of hysteria to achieve their own aims.

[Statistically](#), you are less likely to be killed by a terrorist than by a lightning strike – about 1 in 10 million of the population. Food poisoning will kill three times as many, falling off a ladder will kill five times more as will falling out of bed in the morning.

So, armed with the fact that statistically speaking you will never be killed by a terrorist, who may or may not be a refugee, then voting for Brexit on this basis is wrong. However, deep down, you may want to vote for Brexit on this basis anyway. This is called cognitive dissonance.

Part of the problem is that the average adult thinks that Britain now has 25% of its population who are immigrants and that they are a threat to our traditional way of life.

The reality is that at the last [census](#), (the latest full data we have), there were 7.5 million foreign-born residents in the UK, corresponding to 11.9 per cent of the total population. The latest estimate shows that 4.76 million (7.7 per cent) were born outside the EU and 2.24 million (3.6 per cent) were born in another EU member state.

Don't forget that language often confuses. Foreign born resident, non UK national and migrants can mean different things in different contexts.

In the Political sphere, the home secretary [Theresa May claimed](#) that immigration is pushing thousands out of work, undercutting wages and bringing no economic benefit to the UK. This was reported all over the establishment press.

The facts tell a different story. There are currently 31 million people employed in the UK. Of these, 27.8 million are UK nationals, 3.1 million are non-UK nationals or 10% of the total workforce.

The Home Office, Teresa May's own department recently [published a report](#) confirming that migration was statistically insignificant to the displacement of UK nationals in the workplace. This is also supported by the fact that those out of work (in the entire working age population) but seeking employment has changed little in well over two decades, increasing by just 0.4% in that time.

The same can be said of wages. An [OECD report](#) confirms that there is no evidence that migrant workers have cut wages to UK nationals. EU nationals are statistically more likely to be in work than UK nationals and considerably less likely to be on benefits. The Office For Budget Responsibility [released a report](#) stating that the net contribution that migrants make will have a positive effect on reducing the national debt.

The distortion of such detail does not fit the narrative of those with an agenda or it may be that we want to believe what we think is right, irrespective of the facts. So, now you know that you won't be killed by a terrorist and that he/she won't take your job or push your wages down, Brexit makes no sense on this basis.

The facts that distort our perceptions can make us uncomfortable when we are shown evidence that contradicts our beliefs.

For instance - the wealth that the top 1% own, we massively overestimated. The average guess of the proportion of UK wealth of the 1% is a staggering 59% when the actual figure is 23%. It's a headline grabber for sure. As it turns out, Britain is most wrong on this out of 33 countries in a recent Ipsos Mori Poll.

When the public were asked what percentage they think the wealthiest 1% should own, they say on average 20%, only slightly below the actual figure.

Obesity is another subject we have wrong. It's in the press because of the financial pressures being overweight causes the NHS and with headlines like "[Obesity could bankrupt NHS if left unchecked](#)" one can see the concerns.

Britons think only 44% of those aged over 20 are overweight or obese, but the actual figure is much higher at 62%. The truth is worse than our perceptions. And our perceptions may be driven by the fact that [70% of obese people](#) think they are simply overweight.

The list of [misperceptions](#) goes on and mainly derived from misinformation and disinformation provided by the media.

1. Teenage pregnancy: the British think one in six (16%) of all teenage girls aged 15-19 give birth each year, when the actual figure is only 3%.

2. We think one in five British people are Muslims (21%) when the actual figure is 5% (one in twenty).
3. Benefit fraud: the public think that £24 of every £100 of benefits is fraudulently claimed. Official estimates are that just 70 pence in every £100 is fraudulent – so the public conception is out by a factor of 34.
4. 26 per cent of people think foreign aid is in the top three items the Government spends money on. It actually makes up just 1.1 per cent of expenditure.
5. 29 per cent of people think more is spent on Jobseekers' Allowance than pensions. In fact we spend 15 times more on pensions – £4.9 billion on JSA vs £74.2 billion on pensions.

The [relationship](#) between print and digital media, public opinion and government policy usually brings about distortion of the truth and is designed to point your perceptions and understandings of the world around you in one direction – a political one.

Research shows public opinion often deviates from facts on key social issues including crime, health, employment, benefit fraud and immigration – all of which are central to political ideologies.

How is it possible to develop good policy when public perceptions can be so out of shape with the evidence? And without doubt facts are often the enemy of politicians.

A good example is that [public support](#) for extending British airstrikes against Islamic State in Syria plummeted since MPs voted in favour of David Cameron's case that rested on the existence of 70,000 moderate ground forces in Syria, since found to be completely false. Public support fell from 60% to 44% as a result. One conclusion you could make from this is that armed with the evidence, we may not have gone bombing Syria and the threat of terrorism may well have fallen.

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