

# Revealed: The dark-money Brexit Ads Flooding Social Media

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*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.



**Britain's Future**

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In 2016 we voted to leave the EU.

Now the Remain Establishment - including YOUR MP- wants a second referendum

✗ Don't let them steal Brexit.  
✗ Don't let them ignore your vote.

**TELL LUCIANA TO DELIVER BREXIT**

Click to Email your MP   
[You Can Make A Difference By Emailing Your MP](#)  
[BRITAINSFUTURE.CO.UK](http://BRITAINSFUTURE.CO.UK)

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.



**Britain's Future**

Sponsored • Paid for by Britain's Future

Brexit on WTO terms delivers for Britain and honours the promises of the referendum.



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".



**Brexit Votes Matter**

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On a serious note Beautiful Brexiteers, whether you be Lab/Tory/Ukip etc we have a Saboteur amongst us, a SHILL if you will, working for and colluding with foreign actors to bring down his own party/govt/democracy itself;

Is it TREASON? Is it simply TREACHERY? Either way this sexist, bullying CREEP of a nasty little globalist scumbag is sitting in OUR Speaker's



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.

Hey Europe remember these days ?  
We didnt ask for a deal to FREE YOU



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%**

Sponsored • Paid for by We are the 52%

While a WTO Deal will not create a hard border, Mogg praised those, especially the DUP, who are working on an agreement that unifies parliament and hopefully the nation:



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.”

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