



# Election Debate Visualisation

## Envisaging the Future of Election Debate Replays

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EDV Project Briefing 2014.02

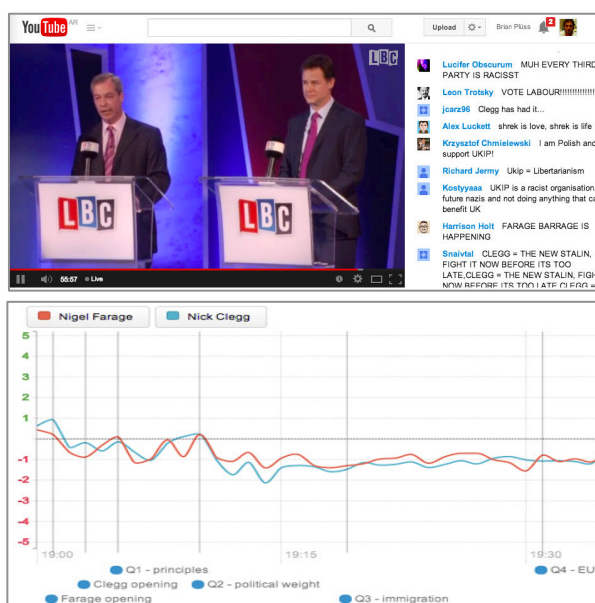
August 2014

[edv-project.net](http://edv-project.net)

**The Election Debate viewing experience is changing, with social media adding new channels for real time citizen reaction. However, this can be an information deluge, and not always very enlightening. The experience should be more engaging, informative and critical.**

## From two voices to many voices, all at once

In the UK's first televised General Election debates in 2010, social media were beginning to provide new channels for citizen reaction and media analysis. Five years on, more citizens than ever are used to reacting to the TV via tablets, phones and laptops, or are watching on those devices.

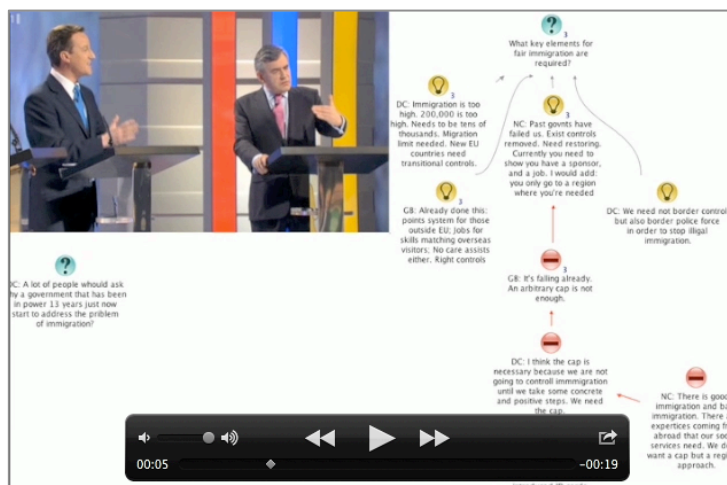


The recent Farage/Clegg EU debates provided a foretaste of 2015. Real-time sentiment analysis on tweets generated the LBC website 'Twitter Worm', rising and falling depending on how positive/negative tweets about the candidates were. There was live-blogging from politics correspondents, and viewers' comments on their YouTube channel. A web poll gauged viewers' positive/negative votes at different points in the debate. The new media channels provide a way for citizens to talk/shout back – albeit a very limited form of citizen voice. A welcome development was that a *Full Fact* team (<https://fullfact.org>) checked in real-time the truthfulness of leaders' claims and posted their findings on the LBC website. Annotations from such organisations provide a different kind of viewpoint, arguably

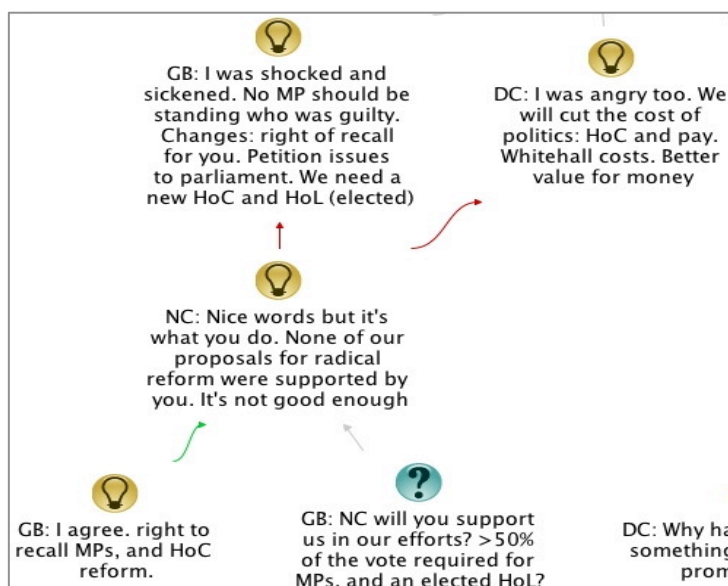
more authoritative to viewers. The Democratic Replay website we create will synchronise these secondary channels around debate videos for a more reflective user experience.

# Argument X-Rays: revealing a debate's skeleton

In high stakes leadership debates of this sort, there is clearly much more going on than a purely rational debate, as candidates seek to score quick points off each other, and communicate their own personalities to the public. The media – both ‘official’ and social – tend to prioritise these aspects, often focusing on ‘who won’, and drawing attention to instantaneous emotional reactions to incidents.



Complementing this, our focus is on the potential of the debates to improve citizens’ ability to make a more informed decision not only about the candidates, but about the issues at stake. One of the challenges of complex debates is that it’s hard to track how all the contributions connect (indeed, they do not always), and the societal challenges we face today are in fact so complex that no single person, party or perspective has ‘the solution’.



This is where debate visualization technologies have a role to play, helping to show how issues are being framed, who claims to have a solution, how contributions support and challenge each other, and what evidence, if any, is appealed to, or could be connected. Moreover, we can show who attacked/supported who on which issues. We have a way to see the ‘skeleton’ structure of the moves being made.

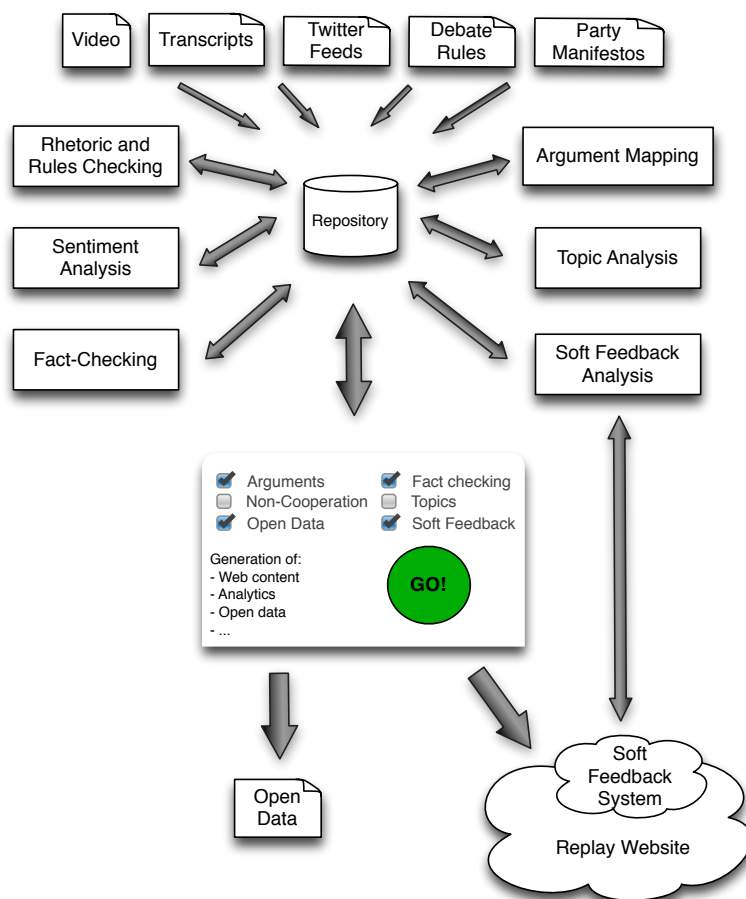
In the 2010 Election Debates, we showed what was possible when mapping in real time:

<http://bit.ly/ElectionDebateMaps2010>.

The EDV project will integrate argument maps as one of the elements of the Democratic Replay website.

# Harnessing collective intelligence

Like beauty, the 'meaning' of an event is in the eye of the beholder. As we have already illustrated, the Net is changing the sensory streams available to a viewer, and hence potentially, what they take from the experience.



We anticipate a future in which events such as Election Debates will be enriched by an unpredictable range of additional information streams from individuals and organisations, ranging from additional live reaction as events unfold, to retrospectively added resources which can be more reflective, and hence possibly higher quality.

If these channels could be brought together coherently, a Debate Replay becomes a learning experience in the broadest sense – informing different audiences in different ways, from a curious citizen to more formal educational contexts in schools and universities.

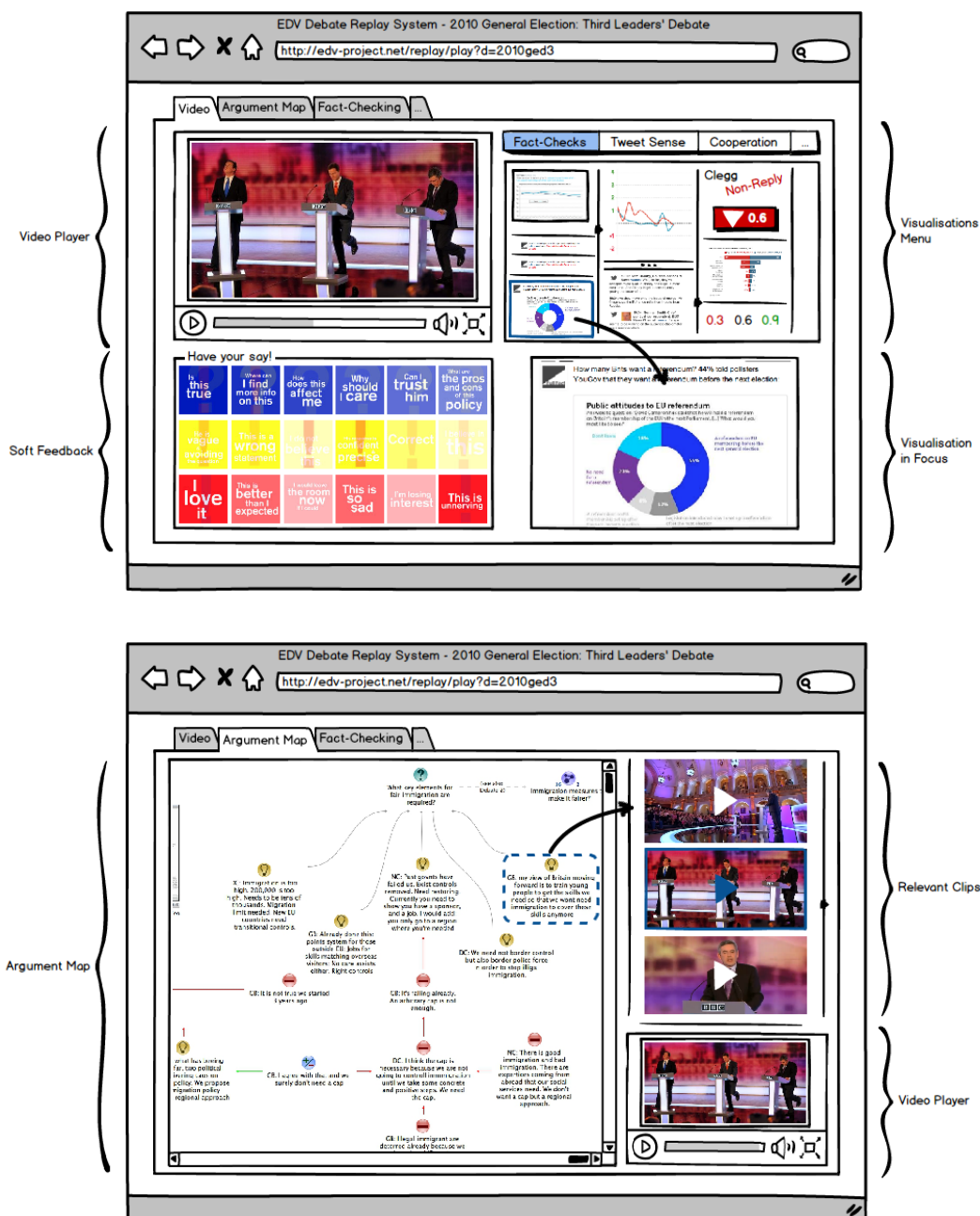
EDV is designing an information-architecture to harness this 'collective intelligence' that can be brought to bear on a Debate. The curators of the Debate Replay

Interface will select the sources they wish to publish with a debate video – possibly with a particular audience and purpose in mind (e.g. 'A' Level Politics students developing critical thinking; Euro-sceptics open to persuasion).

The EDV Project will provide a way for upload video annotations from trusted sources, so that they can be included in the replay. The dataset will be published as open data for others to analyse from new perspectives, and render in new ways.

# Customised Debate Replays

This system generates custom replays, organised to foreground different sources of information, or permit different kinds of audience response. Two storyboards are shown below to illustrate very different experiences.



The first mockup enables viewer feedback through the buttons under the video. Viewers can signal, e.g. *Is this true? How does this affect me? I love it. He's avoiding the question.* (See EDV Briefing 2014.04 for details).

Aggregate statistics could be shown once a user had expressed their views. In addition, several 'channels' on the right show third-party sources such as fact checking, twitter, or violation of the 'rules of the debate' (e.g. not answering the question – see EDV Briefing 2014.03).

The second mockup shows how one might navigate a replay via an argument map, displaying *the moment in a debate when a particular idea was proposed*, or, for instance, *all clips where Brown supports Clegg but challenges Cameron.*

# Enhancing Viewers' Democratic Capabilities

To summarise, our research into citizen responses to the televised 2010 Election Debates, and hopes for how the 2015 debates might be improved (EDV Briefing 2014.01), five *democratic entitlements and capabilities* were identified (see sidebar) as central to the citizen's experience of – and ability to engage with – the General Election. These principles provide us with a rationale for designing the web experience of the future.

1. To be respected as a rational and independent decision-maker
2. To be able to evaluate political claims and make an informed decision
3. To feel part of the debate as a democratic cultural event
4. To be able to communicate with and be recognized by the leaders who want to represent me
5. To be able to make a difference to what happens in the political world

For example, in *Rhetoric and the Rules of the Game* (EDV Briefing 2014.03) we describe how computational linguistics can be used help detect when politicians are not engaging with a point or question in the way that respects viewers' intelligence (see **point 1**).

As politicians make claims backed by statistics, fact-checking services (both human and computational) can link to relevant documents, and seek to verify the accuracy of those claims (see **point 2**). Argument Mapping is another approach to help viewers see what is being said, as illustrated.

Social media and the web at large already provide a dimension to a cultural sense of 'presence' and 'engagement' (**point 3**) which did not exist pre-Internet. Digital renderings of the citizen flashcards (EDV Briefing 2014.04) could provide a deeper level of engagement and richer feedback, as shown in the mockup.

**Points 4 and 5** are the most challenging in terms of their scale and ambition, and EDV can make contributions to these, by providing politicians with a new level of citizen feedback, and by providing citizens with new ways to engage with complex issues, and with each other. The implications of a proposal could become more apparent, more rapidly, when third-party information channels are connected to it.

We invite you to consider what services you could bring to enhance these democratic capabilities, and how these might plug into EDV's Democratic Replay.

## EDV Research Team

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