



**Reuters Institute**  
for the Study of Journalism

# **UK PRESS COVERAGE OF THE EU REFERENDUM**

**David A.L. Levy, Billur Aslan, Diego Bironzo**







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**PRIME**  **RESEARCH**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. FOCUS AND GOALS OF RESEARCH

- This report is based on research that set out to examine the press coverage of the EU referendum in the UK and ask two key research questions. First, how did the British press cover the EU referendum story? Second, what were the main stories and issues deployed on each side of the argument? This quantitative analysis informed consideration about how the campaign was reported, but attempting a full qualitative assessment of all stories covered or of their accuracy was outside the scope of this project.
- The research involved detailed analysis by PRIME Research of two days of press coverage (Tuesdays and Saturdays) each week for the London editions of nine national newspapers over the four months of the campaign.
- Our sample consisted of 3,403 articles discussing the referendum, of which 2,378 were explicitly focused on the referendum. The analysis was conducted both at the article level and through close examination of the content of messages within all the EU referendum focused articles.
- The concentration on the printed press was dictated in part by resources, and the role of the press in helping set the agenda for other media, and in addition because newspapers still account for the largest share of investment in original journalism.

## 2. THE RISE OF EUROPE AS A POLITICAL AND PRESS ISSUE

- Europe was not a particularly salient issue for most voters in the period until 2010 and only became so after it was linked with immigration.
- The referendum campaign coincided with a decline in David Cameron's popularity.
- The Remain campaign went into the referendum campaign unable or unwilling to articulate a positive vision and more focused on the risks of Brexit.
- The strong Eurosceptic tradition of the largest selling newspapers continued in the campaign period.

## 3. VOLUME, VISIBILITY, AND PROMINENCE OF EU REFERENDUM NEWS

- The volume of articles was greatest in the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Tabloids such as the *Daily Star* and *Daily*

*Mirror* had the fewest but the strongly pro Leave tabloids, the *Sun* and the *Daily Express*, had a relatively large number of referendum focused articles given their size.

- Generally broadsheet newspapers were more likely to place EU referendum focused articles on the front page, but the *Express* bucked the trend by also doing this, thereby reflecting its strong political position.
- The size of the articles was greatest in the *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, and the *Guardian*.
- The number of articles built over time and the final month accounted for nearly half of all the EU referendum focused articles featured in the whole four-month period.

## 4. DEGREE OF PARTISANSHIP OVERALL AND BY NEWSPAPER

- Of the articles focused on the referendum 41% were pro Leave as against 27% pro Remain, marking a dominant pro Brexit bias.
- Six out of nine newspapers had this dominance of pro Leave articles, with the strongest positions in the *Daily Express*, followed by the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*. The *Daily Mirror* had the highest share of Remain articles, followed by the *Guardian* and the *Financial Times*. All newspapers, whether predominantly pro Leave or pro Remain, included some articles from a different point of view but this proportion was smallest in the pro Leave *Daily Express*.
- After factoring in the reach of different newspapers the pro Brexit bias is further accentuated, with 48% of all referendum focused articles pro Leave and just 22% Remain.
- Most newspapers adopted a clear position on the referendum in the last week of the campaign, with the Leave campaign supported by all the Conservative-leaning press other than *The Times*.

## 5. POPULAR TOPICS/ARGUMENTS COVERED AND TONE

- Discussion of the vote and campaign accounted for about half the headlines monitored, with the arguments and issues involved accounting for just 42% of headlines.
- When looking at the issues covered in articles the economy was first, followed by sovereignty and migration. But while the economy featured both in pro Leave and pro Remain messages, issues such as sovereignty, terrorism, and migration skewed heavily to Leave.

- The tone of the messages adopted throughout the campaign was quite negative but the Remain camp's future-focused messages tended to be the most negative, particularly on the economy, with the Leave camp's messages about the future much more positive or optimistic, especially around the issue of UK sovereignty.

## 6. SPOKESPEOPLE

- Almost half those cited in articles were either UK politicians or campaign representatives.
- Analysts/experts, academics, and foreign politicians featured relatively little (respectively 11%, 2%, and 5%).
- 64% of the UK politicians cited in articles were Conservatives, as opposed to 17% Labour.
- Theresa May kept a relatively low profile as the eleventh most cited politician.
- Jeremy Corbyn attracted very little attention, being quoted in just 3–4% of articles in the *Guardian* and *Mirror*, about a third as many times as David Cameron or Boris Johnson.
- Pro Leave campaigners were cited in 74% of articles as against just 26% pro Remain.
- Of the small number of academics quoted, just one, Professor Patrick Minford, strongly associated with the Leave campaign, accounted for a fifth of all quotes on our sample days.

## 7. EU REFERENDUM NEWS IN THE LAST FOUR DAYS

- In the last four days of the campaign the number of articles increased dramatically and generally all newspapers tended to be less inclined to publish articles opposed to their stated position.

- *The Times* was an exception, with a majority of pro Leave articles in the last four days, even after they had come out for Remain.
- The economy still dominated among issues discussed but with a significant increase in articles focused on sovereignty and a minor increase in those discussing migration.
- The newspaper front pages on referendum day reflected the very polarised nature of their coverage.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

- The press coverage focused heavily on a 'game frame' with a strong focus on the contest and the strategies and on politicians and campaign representatives with other voices, whether experts, academics, foreign politicians, or citizens, rather under-represented.
- In what was a very complex decision the detailed issues were underplayed and when they were covered this was done in a highly partisan way, reflecting the position of each paper and often following the lead of each campaign.
- This approach chimed well with the preconceptions of voters who already had firm positions but probably less so for voters seeking high-quality information to make up their minds.
- Press coverage may have worked better at reflecting the emotional and game-based aspects of the campaign than the issue-based ones.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 SUMMARY

- This report is based on research that set out to examine the press coverage of the EU referendum in the UK and ask two key research questions. First, how did the British press cover the EU referendum story? Second, what were the main stories and issues deployed on each side of the argument?
- The research involved detailed analysis by PRIME Research of two days of press coverage (Tuesdays and Saturdays) each week for the London editions of nine national newspapers over the four months of the campaign.
- Our sample consisted of 3,403 articles discussing the referendum, of which 2,378 were explicitly focused on the referendum. The analysis was conducted both at the article level and through close examination of the content of messages within all the EU referendum focused articles. We do not attempt an assessment of the quality or accuracy of stories covered.
- The concentration on the printed press was dictated in part by resources, and the role of the press in helping set the agenda for other media, and in addition because newspapers still account for the largest share of investment in original journalism.

## 1.2 FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

This report is based on research that set out to examine the press coverage of the EU referendum in the UK and ask two key research questions. First, how did the British press cover the EU referendum story? Second, what were the main stories and issues deployed on each side of the argument?

We did this research in partnership with PRIME Research, media insight specialists, who conducted the monitoring and detailed coding of press coverage. The analysis presented in this report is based on monitoring two sample days per week (Tuesday and Saturday) of press coverage in the London editions of nine national newspapers during the four-month period of the referendum campaign, from David Cameron's post-summit Cabinet meeting on 20 February to 23 June, a total of 36 days. Because we only looked at Tuesdays and

Saturdays the last date included within the routine monitoring was Tuesday 21 June. However, in the wake of the killing of the MP Jo Cox on Thursday 16 June and the subsequent suspension of the campaign over the weekend, we decided to look in more detail at the last four days of the campaign – 21–23 June – both to make up for the loss of the 'normal' Saturday campaign coverage and to see whether there was any change in the tone of the coverage in those final days before the vote. Later in the report we look at the evolution of the coverage over time and will provide some brief analysis of those four final days in a separate chapter.

The reason for choosing just two days in each week was to have a manageable number of articles because of the resource-intensive nature of human content analysis of newspaper content from the print editions. We chose Tuesday and Saturday to have one weekend and one weekday in our sample, roughly evenly distributed across the week. We acknowledge that the exclusion of Sunday editions may have had some influence on the results, particularly given that two Sunday newspapers, the *Mail on Sunday* (Remain), and the *Sunday Times* (Leave), adopted different positions towards the referendum than their sister weekday papers.

## 1.3 PRESS VERSUS WIDER MEDIA

The research addresses the national press rather than television channels and social media platforms. The research focused on an in-depth analysis of the positions adopted by British newspapers both in their editorials and news items.

The choice of press as opposed to TV was in part due to the issues involved in coding TV broadcasts for a fast turnaround project, and because we felt that we might see greater differences between UK newspapers than we would between TV channels, since newspapers have a long tradition of political partisanship and are not subject to the impartiality requirements imposed on broadcasters. Recent Reuters Institute research shows that two-thirds of people use BBC TV news each week compared to 14% who read the *Sun* in print and 17% who use the *Mail* online. (Newman et al., 2016). But the continued decline of newspaper circulation has not ended the relevance of the press to political debate and they are often credited with helping set the agenda for other media

(Wring and Ward, 2010). Further, UK newspapers collectively account for the largest amount of investment in original journalism and employ most journalists (Mediatique, 2012). Studies reveal that television news and the press together are still key outlets for mass appeals of the political parties and sources of information for voters during campaign periods (Deacon et al., 2005). As John Gapper wrote recently in the *FT*, Fleet Street may be ‘smaller, weaker and less profitable than before, but it still bites’ (Gapper, 2016).

It has long been recognised that one of the ways in which the press operates is indirectly, through its influence on TV. Greenslade has pointed out that the stories that newspapers select and the opinions they express often appear in the main TV and radio current affairs programmes and thus the British press continues to shape the agenda and frame problems (Greenslade, 2011).

We would suggest that this long recognised agenda-setting role of the press for the broadcast media may have been particularly important in the referendum. As noted above, unlike the press, UK broadcasters are bound by a requirement to offer due impartiality and broadcasters always face difficult judgements on how to do that, particularly during election periods. But the referendum was an unusual political campaign with debates that often divided parties. There were of course organised campaign groups on each side, but given the cross-cutting nature of the debate, it seems likely that the broadcasters may have relied on the press more than they would do in a conventional election in deciding how best to balance their campaign coverage.

Social media were not within the scope of this study, in part because of limited resources, but also because our primary interest was in the print editions of newspapers and their reporting of the campaign. It is worth noting however that such early research as has emerged based on a large-scale social media analysis suggests that ‘not only did Brexit supporters have a more powerful and emotional message but they were also more effective in the use of social media’ (Polonski 2016). Polonski finds that on Twitter ‘the Leave camp outnumbers the Remain camp 7 to 1’. He posits that ‘Using the Internet, the Leave camp was able to create the perception of wide-ranging public support for their cause that acted like a self-fulfilling prophecy, attracting many more voters to back Brexit’ (Polonski, 2016). In this sense it would appear

that social media to some extent amplified the preferences displayed in press coverage rather than providing an alternative view. This lesson from a national referendum stands in contrast to other more narrowly focused campaigns on social media, where, for example, Jeremy Corbyn has consciously used social media as a way of bypassing what he sees as the bias against him within the mainstream media (Perraudin, 2016).

## 1.4 METHODOLOGY IN SUMMARY

Data were provided by PRIME Research who collected them from nine newspapers. The sample included the London editions of the five largest tabloids and mid-market papers, namely the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Star*, *Daily Express*, and *Daily Mirror*, as well as the four broadsheets; *The Times*, *Guardian*, *Financial Times* and *Daily Telegraph*. PRIME Research used various keywords to identify EU referendum related news stories, such as: EU referendum, EU membership, Brexit, Vote Leave, Vote Remain, Leave campaign, Remain campaign, Project fear, Project fact, Euro, Euro scepticism, Euro sceptic/s, Cameron’s deal, Cameron’s negotiation, Exit terms. Once an automated search gathered all articles with at least one relevant mention of such keywords, a researcher assessed whether the articles were relevant before submitting them to a team of five analysts who performed the detailed coding in PRIME’s proprietary content analysis system.

Researchers constructed a total sample of 3,403 articles discussing the EU referendum, of which 2,378 articles were explicitly focused on the EU referendum and which were used for the bulk of the analysis in this report. Our articles included news items, opinion pieces, and editorials. Most of the analysis that follows is based on article-level analysis of those articles focused on the referendum. However, in a few cases we rely on message-level analysis. (See Appendix A for further information.)



# 2. EUROPE AS AN ISSUE

## 2.1 SUMMARY

- Europe was not a particularly salient issue for most voters in the period until 2010 and only became so after it was linked together with immigration. This benefited UKIP who won the largest number of seats in the European Parliament elections in 2014.
- David Cameron's requirement to deliver on his pledge to call a referendum post-2015 coincided with a decline in his own popularity.
- The Remain campaign went into the referendum campaign unable or unwilling to articulate a positive vision and more focused on the risks of Brexit. In that sense the accusation that they were too focused on 'Project Fear' had some truth to it.
- The strong Eurosceptic tradition of the largest selling newspapers continued in the campaign period.
- The UK press is strongly partisan but whether people choose the newspapers they agree with or newspapers affect their electoral choices is hard to establish. Newspapers do however appear to have influence in framing issues, and establishing the agenda that is discussed.

## 2.2 EUROPE AS A SALIENT ISSUE

The debate over the UK's membership of the European Union (EU) goes back to the 1960s. After several false starts the UK was taken into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 by Edward Heath. The first referendum on continued membership occurred in 1975 and was approved by 67% of voters. In the following decades while some were never reconciled to membership they were very much a minority in the population at large. However, disagreements within the Conservative Party over Europe were a prime cause of Mrs Thatcher's loss of the premiership in 1990 and then bogged down her successor, John Major, in the period from 1990 to 1997. Meanwhile, the dominant wing of the Labour Party had embraced the EU, and though Tony Blair resisted the single currency and welcomed the opt-outs that Conservative

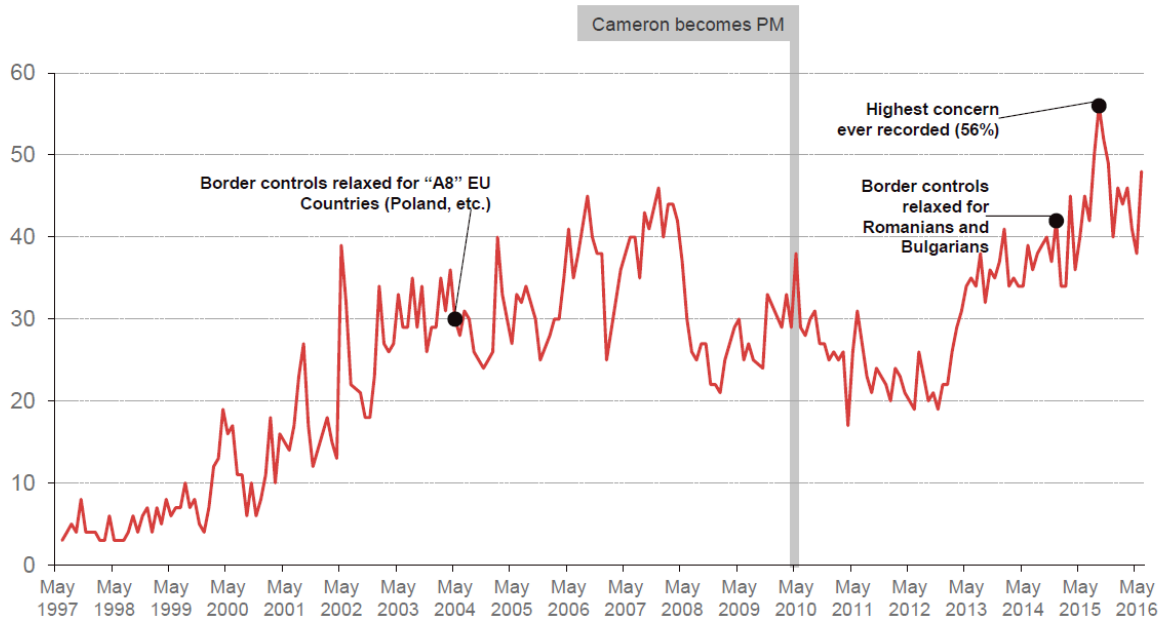
governments had won from some aspects of the treaties, he was generally seen as pro-European, facing a Conservative opposition still at war over the issue. Early on as leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron told the party conference in 2006 that the party's problems were in large part because they didn't connect with the concerns of ordinary people, citing his party's obsession with Europe as part of that disconnect:

*'Instead of talking about the things that most people care about, we talked about what we cared about most,' adding that 'While parents worried about childcare, getting the kids to school, balancing work and family life, we were banging on about Europe.'* (Parker, 2013)

However, one decision made by Tony Blair in the early part of this century, that the UK, alone apart from Ireland, would not seek any transitional period in the ability of citizens of new accession countries to come and work in the UK, had severe consequences for how the EU was seen. Many more people came to work in the UK than had been expected and over time this had an impact on public perceptions of the EU. Where UKIP had struggled to get media attention just focusing on the EU, when it managed to bring together the issues of immigration and Europe and deploy a more effective media strategy it started to give the European issue more salience and make more headway (Goodwin and Ford, 2014). Goodwin and Ford, who tracked the number of citations for UKIP and Nigel Farage in the press over time, showed that whereas UKIP was mentioned less than 600 times in the press in 2003, this had increased to 23,000 mentions ten years later. In the 2014 European elections, UKIP saw an unprecedented surge of support and with over 27% of the vote it emerged as the party with the largest number of votes and seats – the first time that Conservatives or Labour had been displaced in a national election. 20 years earlier UKIP had polled just 1% in its first European elections.

Ipsos-MORI's regular issue tracker conducted from 1997 onwards shows immigration as quite high as an issue of concern to people (either their most important or other important issue facing Britain today), but the figure peaked at 56% in 2015.

**FIGURE 2.1: MOST IMPORTANT/OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING BRITAIN TODAY? IMMIGRATION. MAY 1997–MAY 2016**



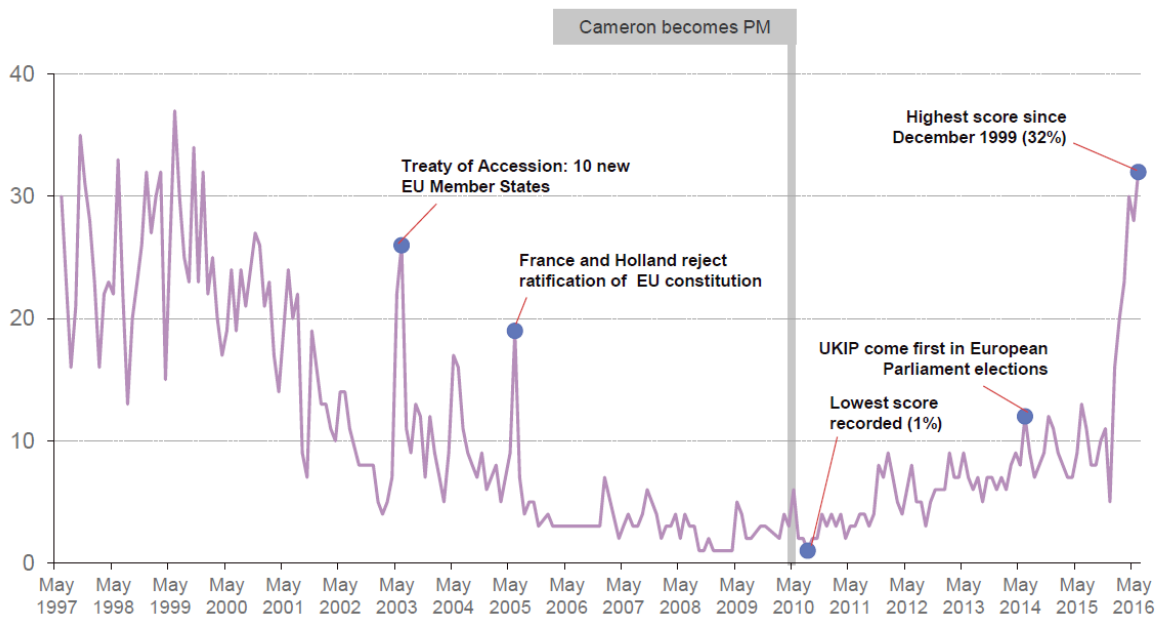
Base: representative sample of c.1,000 British adults age 18+ each month, interviewed face-to-face in home  
 NB Until Sept 2014 the code was race relations/immigration/immigrants

Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index

Source: Ipsos MORI, May 2016 Economist/Ipsos MORI Issues index

Meanwhile less than 10% of people chose Europe as one of their top two issues in the period from 2004 to 2013, with the lowest score at just 1% immediately after David Cameron’s election in May 2010. However, Europe moved steadily up after 2013 and peaked at 32% in May 2016, just a month ahead of the referendum.

**FIGURE 2.2: MOST IMPORTANT/OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING BRITAIN TODAY? COMMON MARKET/EUROPE/EURO/EU. MAY 1997–MAY 2016**



Base: representative sample of c.1,000 British adults age 18+ each month, interviewed face-to-face in home

Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index

Source: Ipsos MORI, May 2016 Economist/Ipsos MORI Issues index

## 2.3 THE REFERENDUM AS A POLITICAL RESPONSE

It was in 2013 in response to lobbying from Eurosceptic MPs, and the rise of UKIP, that David Cameron promised to hold an EU membership referendum after the 2015 election. Cameron probably did not expect to win the general election in 2015 but having done so immediately introduced a referendum bill and started renegotiating the terms of Britain's membership with European leaders. He achieved some of his goals in his final round of negotiations in Brussels in February 2016, but failed to deliver the controls on immigration from the EU originally promised. (This would always have been likely to be difficult given the EU's commitment to freedom of movement.) He had to settle instead for some limitations on the ability of EU immigrants to claim in-work benefits. Immediately after the 20 February Cabinet meeting to discuss his deal, key Conservative figures started campaigning in favour of Leave, notably Michael Gove, Boris Johnson (who announced his support for Leave on Sunday 21 February), and Chris Grayling, with David Cameron leading the Remain camp (see Appendix B for the full timeline).

The Remain camp focused on the risks to the economy of leaving the EU and secured the support of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as Presidents Obama and Hollande and Chancellor Merkel, who all issued warnings regarding the UK's exit from the EU. The Leave campaign meanwhile focused on more emotive ideas, such as 'retaking control of our country' or 'UK Independence day' and dubbed the efforts of Remain as 'Project Fear'. There was some truth in that accusation, with a succession of forecasts about the likely negative impact of Brexit on the British Economy and there is little doubt that David Cameron and George Osborne were hoping that UK voters might react as the Scottish voters had done a year earlier, in preferring the safety and economic security of the known – membership of the EU – over the more emotive pull of independence. But the long-standing Euroscepticism of the Conservative Party also meant that David Cameron may have felt unable to offer a positive vision of the EU, rather than just the dangers of leaving. In that sense it appeared that he only had fear rather than hope to offer the voters. In addition, David Cameron's leadership of the campaign was high risk. In part this was necessary because of the Labour leader's lack of enthusiasm to campaign for Remain, but it risked framing the referendum as a test of his own popularity. Ipsos MORI's polling suggests that perceptions of that plummeted soon after the 2015 election victory.

**FIGURE 2.3: DAVID CAMERON'S APPROVAL RATING.**



Source: FT based on Ipsos MORI data, Mance 2016

## 2.4 NEWSPAPERS AND THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

### 2.4.1 EXPLICIT ENDORSEMENTS

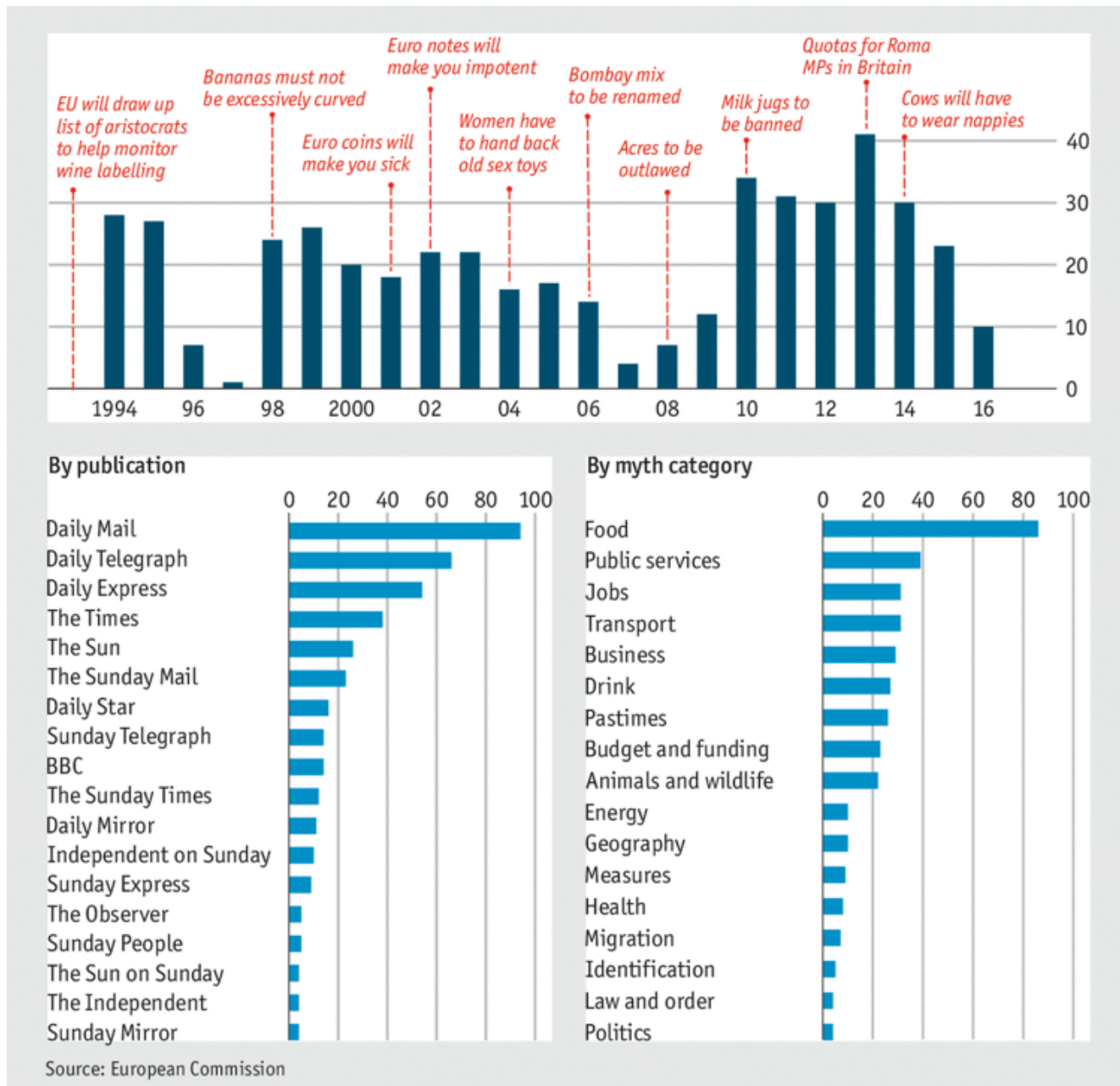
The rest of this report looks in detail at newspaper coverage of the referendum campaign. While most newspapers adopted highly partisan positions in the campaign they were generally slower to explicitly endorse one side or the other. The *Daily Express*, which has campaigned for Britain to leave the EU for many years, was the exception, coming out in support of Brexit at the beginning of the campaign. Many other newspapers only indicated their formal position in leader articles in the final weekend before the referendum, even if in some cases their coverage left little doubt about their position prior to that. While the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* urged their readers to vote Leave, the *Daily Mail's* sister paper the *Mail on Sunday* urged its readers to vote Remain. Another split became apparent with *The Times* supporting Remain and the *Sunday Times* Leave. Meanwhile, the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror* opted for Remain (Mortimer, 2016). The *FT*, for long the newspaper with the fullest coverage of the EU, also endorsed Remain while the *Daily Telegraph* endorsed Leave.

### 2.4.2 A LONG EUROSCEPTIC TRADITION IN THE MOST POPULAR PRESS TITLES

Coverage of the EU has often been described by scholars as dominated by the Eurosceptic press (Cole, 2001; Anderson, 2004; Morgan, 2004; Firmstone, 2008). For instance, the *Daily Mail* has run editorial campaigns against the EU for many years and its anti-European views were part of the newspaper's identity. The *Sun* has long adopted a similar position – back to its famous 'Up Yours Delors' front page in November 1990. The *Daily Mirror* has traditionally taken a much more positive view of the EU, as have the *Guardian* and the *FT*. As Berry (2016) put it, 'before the campaign even began large parts of the public had been primed by the media to be Euro-sceptic'. Equally though, some newspapers' positions may have been adopted in part to reflect the views of their readers.

Sections of the British press have long delighted in exposing what they presented as madcap schemes developed in Brussels. Some were well grounded but others became common currency in spite of shaky foundations and in the early 1990s the European Commission set up a website to debunk the myths they saw as being propagated by the British press.

**FIGURE 2.4: THE ECONOMIST’S ANALYSIS OF EU MYTHS DEBUNKED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION BY PUBLICATION AND TOPIC.**



Source: *The Economist Daily Chart* 22.6.2016 <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/06/daily-chart-15>> based on <<http://blogs.ec.europa.eu/ECintheUK/euomyths-a-z-index>>

**2.4.3 READERSHIP OF BRITISH NEWSPAPERS: STRONG PARTISANSHIP?**

For politicians, a largely unspoken assumption is that the press has some impact on public opinion. There is no doubt that Britain has a highly partisan press. Successive surveys have shown a strong correlation between press readership and voting patterns but establishing the direction of any causal link is much harder. It is often difficult to tell whether it is the media that affects the behaviour of the electorate or the electorate that chooses which paper to read on the basis of their political position (Curtice, 1997).

As noted above, most research suggests that it is easier to demonstrate the role of newspapers in helping frame the

agenda of a wider political debate than in having a direct influence on voting as such, as they have the ability to help set the agenda (Temple, 2008: 203). A large number of studies reveal that what appeared in the newspapers had an influence on how readers think and what they think about (Page, 1996: 23). People can make different decisions when the same problem is framed in different ways and the framing offers messages with positive or negative aspect of the argument (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). For instance, during the EU referendum campaign, newspapers that focused negatively on issues of immigration and free movement of labour in the EU might have pushed readers to think more about the arguments of Leave campaigners focused on this topic.

# 3. VOLUME, VISIBILITY, AND PROMINENCE OF EU REFERENDUM NEWS

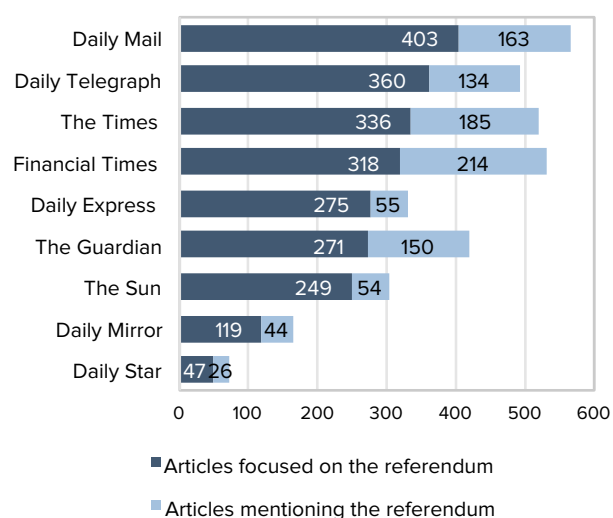
## 3.1 SUMMARY

- The volume of articles was greatest in the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Tabloids such as the *Daily Star* and *Daily Mirror* had the fewest but the strongly pro Leave tabloids the *Sun* and *Daily Express* had a relatively large number of referendum focused articles given their size.
- Generally, broadsheet newspapers were more likely to place EU referendum focused articles on the front page, but the *Express* bucked the trend by also doing this, thereby reflecting its strong political position.
- The size of the articles was greatest in the *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, and the *Guardian*.
- The number of articles showed a slight tendency to build over time with the third month exceeding those of the first month. The final month accounted for nearly half of all the EU referendum focused articles featured in the whole four-month period.

## 3.2 OVERALL VOLUME OF REFERENDUM NEWS

We started our analysis by assessing the visibility and amount of attention devoted to the referendum by the press. Our figures show that on an average day in this period there were 66 articles focused on the referendum across the nine newspapers, or 2,378 articles in total over the sample period. The volume of EU referendum news was greatest in two right-wing newspapers. The *Daily Mail* published 403 articles focused on the EU referendum, while the *Daily Telegraph* included 360 of them, followed by *The Times* (336), *Financial Times* (318), *Daily Express* (275), and the *Guardian* (271).

**FIGURE 3.1: TOTAL NUMBER OF ARTICLES BY NEWSPAPER**



Tabloids such as the *Daily Star* (47) and *Daily Mirror* (119) had the fewest number of articles focused on the EU referendum while the *Sun* (249) only had slightly fewer articles than the *Guardian*. One needs to interpret these figures with some caution because of the different size of these newspapers, as measured by the number of articles of all types. For example, looking at four sample days within our period, the overall size of the *Daily Star* and *Daily Express* was much smaller than the other papers in terms of the total number of articles of all types. Given their similar size, this suggests that the *Daily Express* gave proportionately more attention to referendum news and the *Daily Star* less. Using the same approach, the contrast between the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* in terms of referendum articles is clear, given that the newspapers are of similar size.<sup>1</sup>

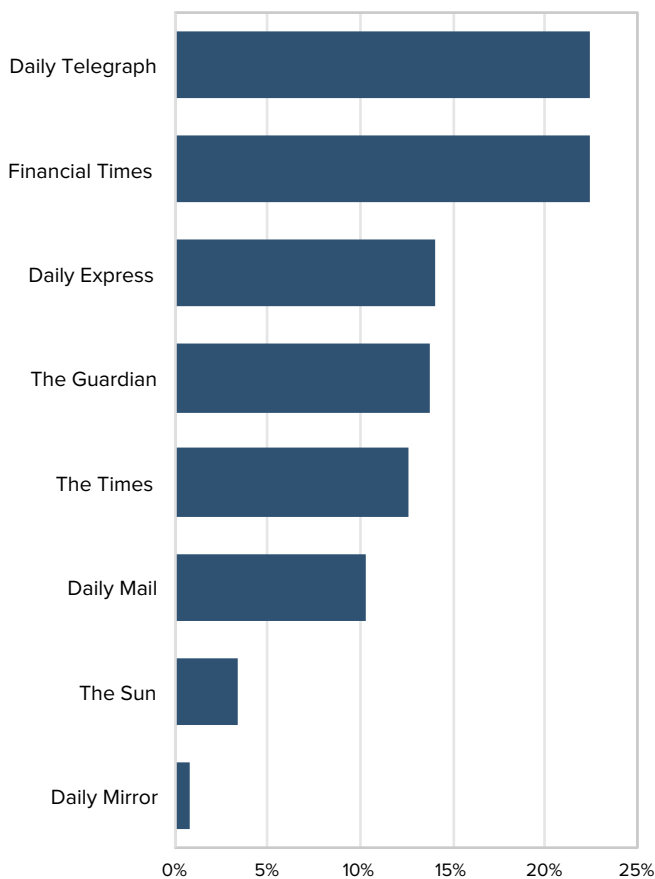
It is also interesting to note that the *Financial Times* was the newspaper that included the largest number of articles mentioning the referendum in passing, probably because of their interest in the likely economic impact of the referendum for much of their business coverage.

<sup>1</sup> We measured the total number of articles in each newspaper on four sample days (two Saturdays, 14 May and 11 June, and two Tuesdays, 17 May and 14 June). While most newspapers had more articles on a Saturday, generally the *Daily Mail* had the largest number of articles and the *Daily Express* and the *Star* the fewest, with the other six titles all occupying a similar range.

### 3.3 VISIBILITY: WHERE REFERENDUM NEWS IS PLACED

Where referendum news is placed was also important for our visibility assessment. While the *Daily Mail* accounted for the highest number of stories, of the total of 309 front-page articles focused on the EU referendum across all nine newspapers, only 10% were in the *Daily Mail*. EU referendum news was more likely to be displayed on the front page of the broadsheet papers, i.e., the *Daily Telegraph* (22.5%), *Financial Times* (22.5%), and the *Guardian* (14%). One exception was the *Daily Express*, a tabloid newspaper that has campaigned for the country to leave the EU for the last five years (Hall, 2016). Consequently, it gave more prominence to EU referendum news, publishing 14% of all front-page referendum articles. Other tabloids, such as the *Sun* and *Daily Mirror*, rarely covered the referendum on their front page, with just 3% in the *Sun* and 1% in the *Daily Mirror*.

**FIGURE 3.2: PERCENTAGE OF REFERENDUM FOCUSED ARTICLES ON THE FRONT PAGE**

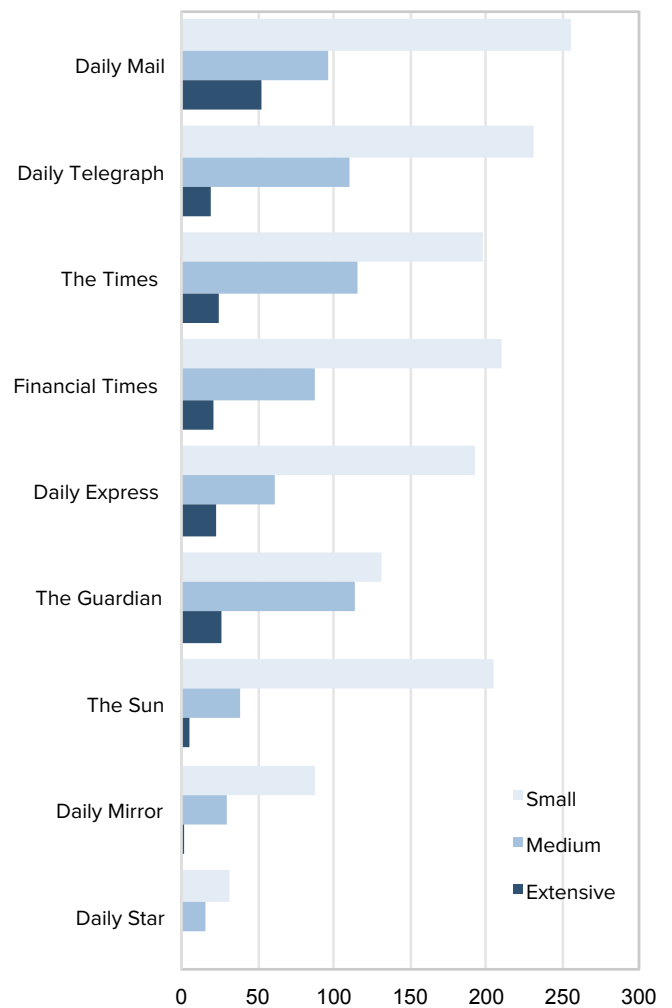


Base: 309 front page articles

### 3.4 SIZE OF ARTICLES

Our data also permit a more detailed assessment of visibility through information on the length of the EU referendum articles in each newspaper.<sup>2</sup> EU referendum news was particularly extensive in the *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, and the *Guardian*, with the *Daily Mail* standing out for having so many relatively lengthy articles. By contrast, when measured by the size of articles, the amount of EU referendum news that appeared in the *Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, and the *Daily Star* was quite small. For instance, the *Sun* had only five extensive articles, while the *Daily Mirror* only had two articles of substantial size. According to our findings, the *Daily Star* contained no large-size articles focused on the EU referendum on the Tuesdays and Saturdays during the campaign period.<sup>3</sup>

**FIGURE 3.3: SIZE OF REFERENDUM FOCUSED ARTICLES BY NEWSPAPER (BASED ON ASSESSMENT OF COLUMN MILLIMETRES)**



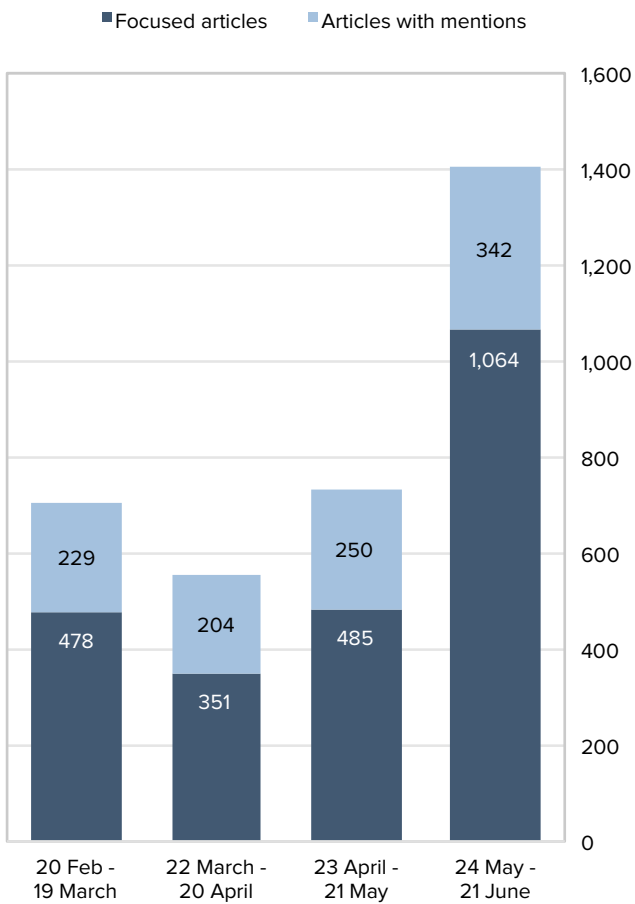
<sup>2</sup> The articles' size was measured by PRIME Research's media analysts in column millimetres. For analysis purposes, we classified the articles with a size below 250 column millimetres as small articles, those between 251 and 500 as medium and anything over 500 as extensive articles.

<sup>3</sup> Once again one should treat this finding with some caution, since the size of referendum focused articles will in large part vary by newspaper according to the average size of articles they publish.

## 3.5 NUMBER OF ARTICLES BY TIME PERIOD

We divided the campaign into four different time periods. The coverage was greatest in the first and last months of the campaign. The last month (24 May to 21 June) accounted for approximately half of all EU referendum news monitored in the entire four-month period (1,064 out of 2,378 referendum focused articles).

**FIGURE 3.4: NUMBER OF ARTICLES BY PERIOD**



# 4. DEGREE OF PARTISANSHIP OVERALL AND BY NEWSPAPER

In this section, to determine the political persuasion of articles within the nine UK's newspapers analysed, we summarised and compared the number of pro Leave and Remain messages in the 2,378 referendum focused articles examined. We then marked as biased those containing messages determined to be more than 60% in favour of Remain or Leave.<sup>4</sup>

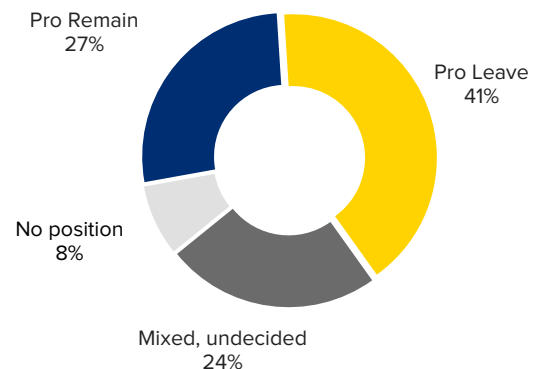
## 4.1 SUMMARY

- Of the 2,378 articles focused on the referendum in the whole period, 41% were pro Leave as against 27% pro Remain, marking a dominant pro Brexit bias.
- Six out of nine newspapers had this dominance of pro Leave articles, with the strongest positions in the *Daily Express*, followed by the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*. The *Daily Mirror* had the highest share of Remain articles, followed by the *Guardian* and the *Financial Times*. All newspapers whether predominantly pro Leave or pro Remain included some articles from a different point of view but this proportion was smallest in the pro Leave *Daily Express*.
- After factoring in the reach of the different newspapers the pro Brexit bias is further accentuated, since the *Daily Mail* and *Sun* articles had the highest reach. After factoring in reach, 48% of all referendum focused articles were pro Leave and just 22% Remain.
- Looking at positions of articles over time reveals that the number of pro Leave articles was well ahead of those favouring Remain in every one of the four months of the campaign.
- Most newspapers expressed a clear recommendation on the referendum in the last week of the campaign, with the Leave campaign supported by all the Conservative-leaning press other than *The Times*.

## 4.2 OVERALL POSITION OF THE PRESS

The findings demonstrated a strong overall press bias in favour of Leave. Of the 2,378 articles analysed, 41% backed leaving the EU, while only 27% supported remaining. We should also note that not all articles took a clear position with respect to the EU. 24% were classified as having mixed or undecided coverage,<sup>5</sup> while 8% took no position at all.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 4.1: OVERALL DEGREE OF PARTISANSHIP CLASSIFIED AT ARTICLE LEVEL**



Base: 2378 articles focused on the referendum

These results pinpointed an important difference between the referendum campaigns of 1975 and 2016. While most British newspapers backed the UK's membership of the European Economic Community during the 1975 referendum, in 2016, the figures revealed the opposite trend. The pro-European coverage of 1975 was largely supplanted by Leave arguments which dominated in 2016. There has been a long-standing tradition of hostility to the EU in the Conservative-leaning press since the 1980s (Daddow, 2016). Our results show that this trend continued during the 2016 referendum and the majority of the coverage supported Eurosceptic arguments.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for more information about message analysis.

<sup>5</sup> If the articles include a close number of Leave and Remain messages (up to 60:40 ratio), they would be recorded as mixed or undecided coverage.

<sup>6</sup> If 80% or more of the messages within an article did not show partisanship, the articles were classified as not having any position.

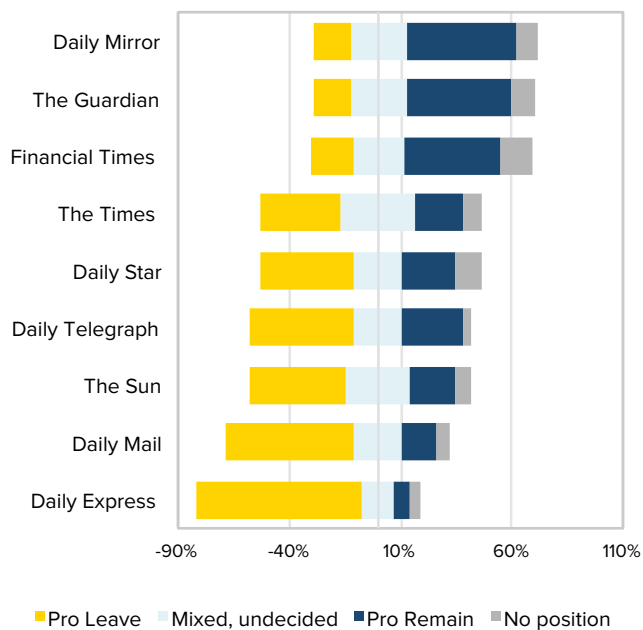


## 4.3 POSITION OF EACH NEWSPAPER

Although our findings showed that of the articles taking a position the majority was heavily skewed in favour of Brexit, the media are not a homogeneous block. Editorial opinion in newspapers is shaped by owners and editors but also by the editorial values of key journalists, whether those writing named op-eds or unsigned leaders (Firmstone, 2008: 224). Additionally, our data showed that editorials accounted for 27% of EU referendum focused coverage, while guest pieces accounted for 4% of the total, and interviews a further 1%. Of the remaining articles the vast majority feature at least one comment or an opinion by spokespeople and public figures active in the referendum debate.

Of the nine newspapers under scrutiny, the most extreme bias towards Brexit was apparent in the *Daily Express*.<sup>7</sup> In line with the newspaper's editorial position, 74% of all EU referendum-related articles in the *Daily Express* backed Brexit, while a mere 6% of articles were in favour of Remain.

**FIGURE 4.2: ARTICLE POSITION BY NEWSPAPER**



Base: 2,378 articles focused on the referendum

Although not as partisan as the *Daily Express*, a majority of EU referendum articles in the *Daily Mail* (58%) also favoured Brexit. A plurality of the articles published in the *Sun* (44%), the *Daily Star* (43%) and the *Daily Telegraph* (47%) were also pro Leave. Interestingly, while Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* and the *Sunday Times* supported Leave, its sister newspaper, *The Times*,

backed Remain. Yet, our results show that *The Times* had a slight preponderance of pro Leave articles (36% compared to 22% for Remain). The results displayed the heavy dominance of pro Brexit articles in six out of nine newspapers. This reinforces the view of those media observers who claimed that the Remain camp was hampered in running a campaign without the echo chamber of the right-wing press (Mandelson, 2016).

On the other side, the *Mirror* had the highest share of pro Remain arguments, which constituted 50% of its articles focused on the EU. Our results show that the *Guardian* had a more balanced stance, with a smaller gap between Remain and Leave articles at the start of the campaign period (43% pro Remain vs. 28% pro Leave).<sup>8</sup> Yet, over time, the percentage of its pro Remain articles grew to 46% overall, far exceeding Leave ones (which decreased to 16% overall). A similar level of pro Remain articles (43%) was also published by the *Financial Times*.

All newspapers, whatever their primary position, contained some articles from the other point of view, but the proportion was particularly small across three tabloids, namely: the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Daily Mail*. In the *Daily Express*, which claimed that 93% of its readers wanted to leave the EU, just 6.5% of articles focused on the referendum were pro Remain (Sykes, 2016). Among supporters of the Remain campaign, the *Daily Mirror* delivered the least amount of views from the other side (16%), but this proportion is still more than twice that of the *Daily Express* (6.5%).

## 4.4 NEWSPAPER POSITIONS WEIGHTED BY REACH

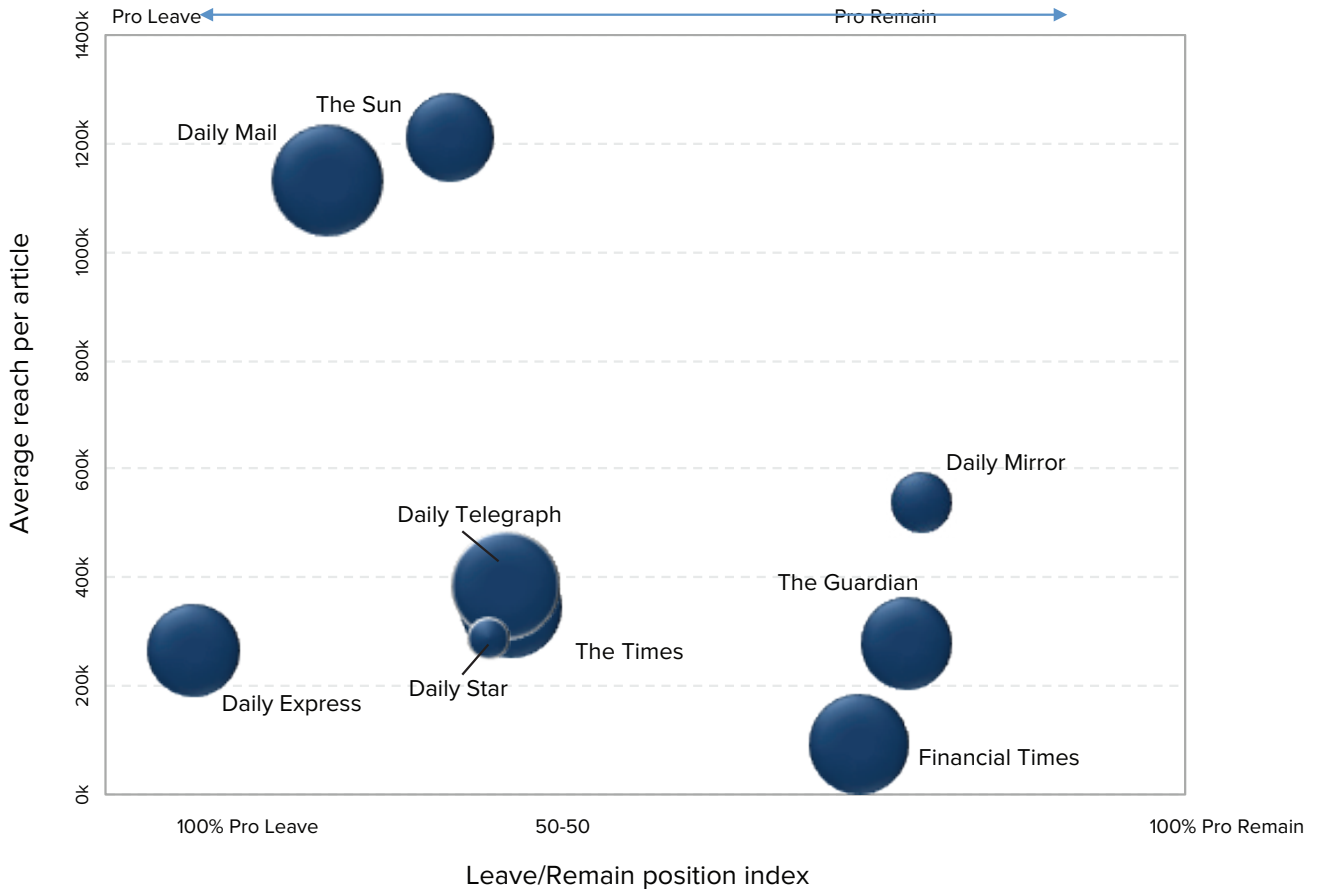
After analysing the share of articles favouring Leave or Remain camps in each newspaper and determining their overall positioning, we set out to measure which camp (Remain or Leave) had the greater overall impact through the press. PRIME's researchers analysed the volume of EU referendum articles in each newspaper and their reach. PRIME's reach analysis combined the following variables: newspapers' average daily readership, size and position of the EU referendum articles within the newspaper, and the 'obtrusiveness' of the article (presence of eye-catching elements). Using these factors, PRIME calculated which proportion of a newspaper's audience was likely to be exposed to each article,<sup>9</sup> and mapped this against the number of articles published on the topic and the balance between pro Leave and pro Remain articles. Figure 4.3 (overleaf) compares the average reach of the referendum articles in each newspaper (Y axis), their relative position in the debate (X axis) and the number of articles published (size of the bubbles). The results confirm the dominance of Brexit-favouring publications in the debate, in terms of both reach and number of articles published.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Desmond, owner of the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Star*, is a donor to UKIP.

<sup>8</sup> At the time, the *Guardian* covered Boris Johnson's decision to back the campaign to leave the EU as a blow to the Remain camp (in an article reporting the European's media reactions to the news on 23 Feb.), had John Crace's sketch on David Cameron's Project Fear rhetoric, a report on JD Wetherspoon's pro Leave Tim Martin (on 12 Mar.), and a three-page feature in which journalist Stephen Moss visited the pro Leave Romford and the pro Remain Aberystwyth, collecting the polarised views of local residents (on 15 Mar.).

<sup>9</sup> PRIME Research's 'Probability to See' measurement. See Appendix A for information on newspaper readership figures.

**FIGURE 4.3: NEWSPAPER POSITIONS WEIGHTED BY REACH AND VOLUME**

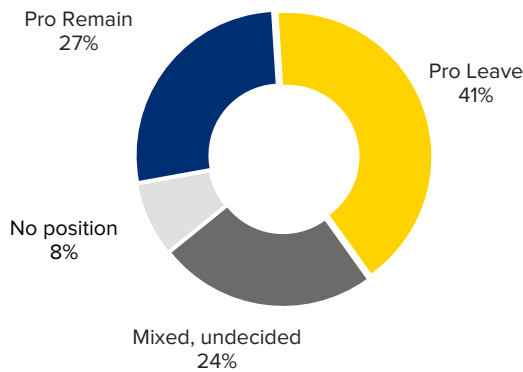


Having published the largest number of articles and being able to count on the second biggest overall audience, the *Daily Mail's* coverage, with its strong pro Leave stance, was clearly the most impactful according to our metrics. Although the number of EU referendum articles was smaller in the *Sun*, the newspaper also recorded a high reach, slightly higher than the *Daily Mail* in fact, if measured on an article basis. Compared to these two newspapers, all other publications had much lower reach levels.

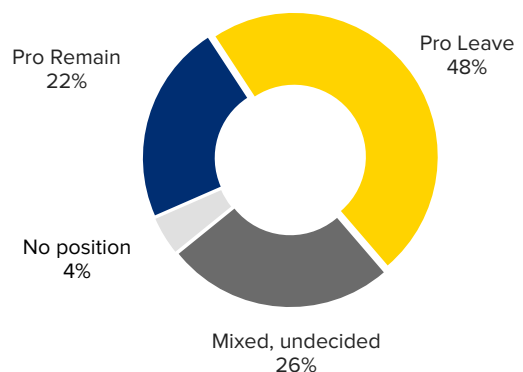
Figure 4.4 looks at partisanship to assess the impact of pro Remain or pro Leave articles after weighting them for the reach of each article within each publication. After factoring these reach data in, we can see that the lead of the pro Brexit coverage increases by seven percentage points to 48%, compared to just 22% for pro Remain articles (a 5% drop from the unweighted figure).

**FIGURE 4.4: OVERALL DEGREE OF PARTISANSHIP CLASSIFIED AT ARTICLE LEVEL AND WEIGHTED BY REACH AND VOLUME**

**UNWEIGHTED**



**WEIGHTED BY REACH**



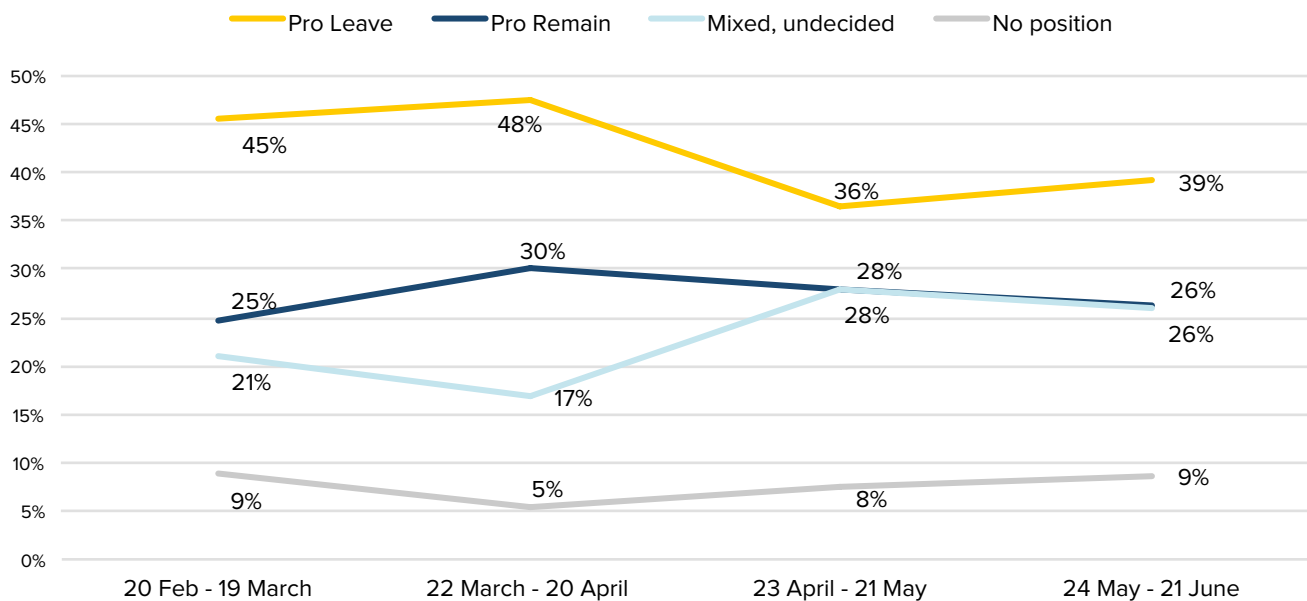
Base: 2,378 articles focused on the referendum

## 4.5 OVERALL POSITIONS OVER TIME

Overall, the figures show that a large proportion of the EU referendum news was skewed towards Leave during the

entire campaign period, albeit with some variations month by month.

**FIGURE 4.5: POSITION OF THE EU REFERENDUM ARTICLES OVER TIME**



## 4.6 FORMAL CAMPAIGN POSITIONS BY NEWSPAPERS

The UK's newspapers waited until the last week of the campaign period to officially declare their positions. Of the nine newspapers studied, four (*Daily Mail*, *Sun*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Daily Express*) openly declared their support in favour of Brexit, while three (*Guardian*, *Mirror*, and *Financial Times*) came out in support of the Remain camp. Only one publication, the *Daily Star*, did not express an official political leaning in the referendum debate.

Britain's left-wing tabloid the *Mirror* clarified its position just three days before the referendum by stating: 'The *Mirror* certainly has its issues with the EU but after the most divisive, vile and unpleasant political campaign in living memory we say vote Remain' (*The Mirror*, 2016). Similarly, the *Guardian* officially declared its support for Remain on 20 June 2016 with its headline arguing to 'keep connected and inclusive, not angry and isolated' (*Guardian*, 2016).

The Leave camp was officially supported by all the Conservative-leaning press other than *The Times*. Of those, the stances of the *Daily Mail* and *Sun* were less clear until the last week of the campaign period, while the editors of the *Daily Express* openly showed their support for Brexit from the start (Greenslade, 2016).

# 5. POPULAR TOPICS/ ARGUMENTS COVERED BY NEWSPAPERS

This section examines what issues were covered in EU referendum articles during the campaign period.

## 5.1 SUMMARY

- Discussion of the vote and campaign accounted for about half the headlines monitored, with the arguments and issues involved accounting for just 42% of headlines.
- When looking at the issues covered in articles the economy was first, followed by sovereignty and migration. But while the economy featured significantly in pro Leave and pro Remain messages, issues such as sovereignty, terrorism, and migration skewed heavily to Leave.
- The focus on the economy grew over the four months and there was a slight upturn in articles focused on migration in the last month too.
- The tone of the messages adopted throughout the campaign was quite negative but the Remain camp's future-focused messages tended to be the most negative, particularly on the economy, with the Leave camp's messages about the future much more positive or optimistic, especially around the issue of UK sovereignty. Even when discussing the present, the pro Remain arguments were predominantly negative in tone (albeit much less so than the pro Leave side), suggesting the Remain side had difficulty in articulating a positive view of the status quo.

## 5.2 CLASSIFYING ARGUMENTS

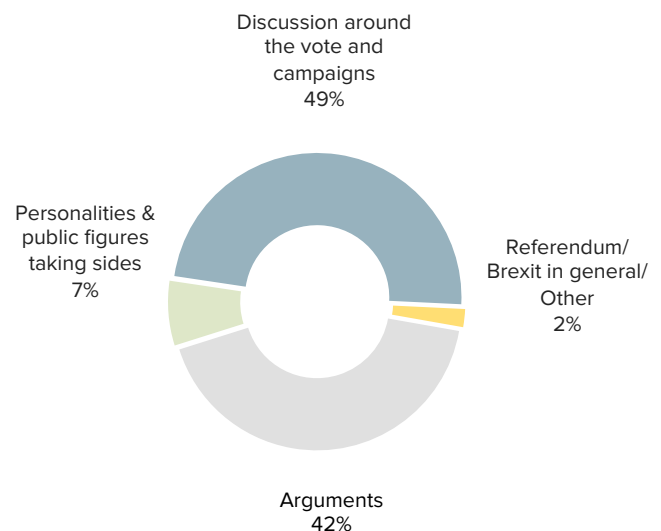
In order to identify the main issues in focus and all other supporting issues discussed in relation to the EU referendum, we conducted headline, image, and message-level analyses. Headline and image analyses are primarily used to identify the main focus of the articles. As explained in the methodology section, in order to categorise issues and sub-issues discussed as part of EU referendum news, the Reuters Institute and PRIME Research identified eight broad topic categories. Three of them were reserved for media coverage about developments in the campaign and generic coverage. These included news about political personalities and other

public figures taking sides, discussion about the vote (for example, results forecasts, political consequences) and the campaigns (their progress and strategies), and other broader topics (such as, for example, the concepts of Brexit, or Euroscepticism, or the referendum in general). The remaining five groups of topics instead categorised the arguments that were discussed (and used) on each side of the campaign: the economy and Brexit's possible impact on it, issues relating to migration and mobility, regulations, security (with a particular focus on terrorism), and the idea of sovereignty.

## 5.3 ANALYSIS OF HEADLINES BY TOPIC

Of the topics identified for classification, discussion of the vote and campaigns dominated, being mentioned in almost half of the headlines. Personalities and public figures taking sides were also covered in 7% of the headlines, while just 2% mentioned general topics, such as the referendum and Brexit.

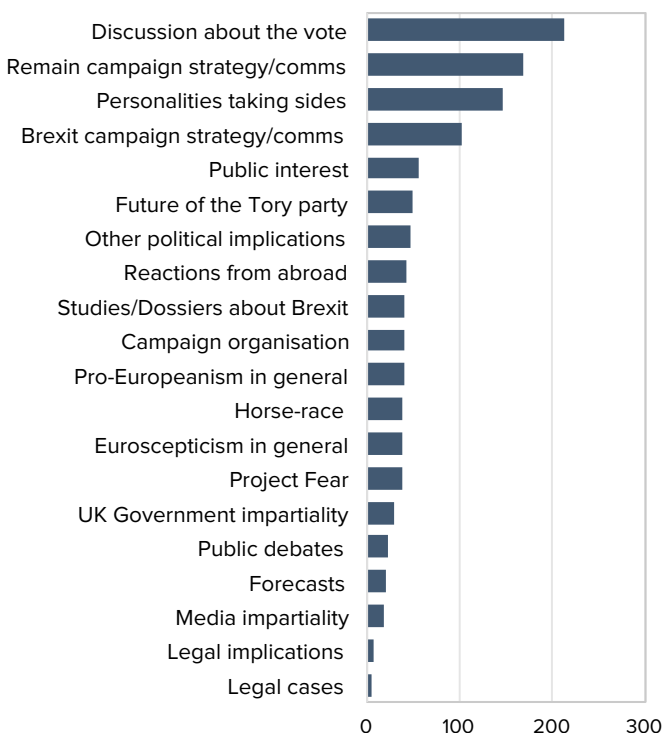
**FIGURE 5.1: HEADLINES' TOPICS IN EU REFERENDUM FOCUSED ARTICLES**



The data also suggest that in headlines focused on the referendum, the Remain campaign strategies were discussed slightly more often than the Leave campaign strategies. However, if one adds in the 37 headlines mentioning ‘Project Fear’ then there were significantly more mentions of the Remain camp’s strategies.

Interestingly there were relatively few headlines (20) looking at forecasts of the result and just eight looking at the legal implications of the referendum. Overall both figures show that the journalists wrote a lot about who was winning and losing, the performance of individual politicians, and the strategies and tactics of both campaigns. This sort of reporting is described in the literature as the ‘game frame’ or the ‘strategic frame’, referring to election coverage that emphasises the winning or losing strategy (Dunaway and Lawrence, 2015: 44). Journalists who adopt game framing focus on who is up and down in the latest poll (Lawrence, 2000). The analyses of academics such as Patterson (1994), Fallows (1997), and Cappella and Jamieson (1997) suggest that journalists who represented the politics as a game, tend to relegate the substance of politics to the side-lines (Lawrence, 2000). Some scholars such as Iyengar et al. (1994), suggest that game framing helps journalists reduce the complexity of politics to create a coherent, dramatic narrative that boosts public interest (Dunaway and Lawrence, 2015). Others, such as Fallows, criticise this particular framing of politics for undermining ‘the essence of real journalism, which is the search for information of use to the public’ (1997: 7). Capella and Jamieson (1997) also argue that game framing increases political distrust and cynicism. Some have seen the rise of always-on news – whether on TV or elsewhere – as accentuating the move to reporting politics as a strategic game. Our data show that the game frame was indeed a popular approach in press coverage of EU referendum campaign.

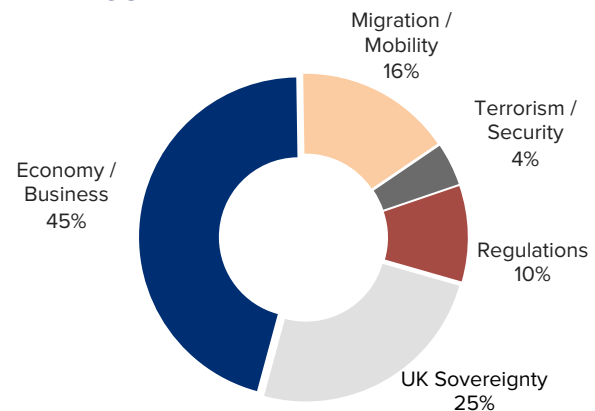
**FIGURE 5.2: SUB-TOPICS OF HEADLINES (ARTICLES FOCUSED ON THE REFERENDUM)**



## 5.4 ANALYSIS OF ISSUES COVERED IN ARTICLES

Turning to the articles in their entirety, our message-level analysis allows a more in-depth view. By identifying arguments in each message unit within referendum focused articles this not only provides information on the main issues, but also the supporting issues discussed in the EU referendum articles and the way in which they were discussed in terms of tone. By selecting only the coverage that used the arguments deployed on each side of the campaign (i.e. after discounting articles about the campaign, personalities taking sides and of the referendum/Brexit in general), our data confirm the headline-level analysis, showing that the economy was by far the most discussed topic: it monopolised 45% of all messages analysed in this sample. One quarter of all argument-based messages discussed sovereignty, migration accounted for 16% of our sample of messages, while regulation (10%), and especially security (4%) were less visible.

**FIGURE 5.3: TOPIC ANALYSIS CLASSIFIED AT MESSAGE LEVEL WHERE ARGUMENTS WERE USED**

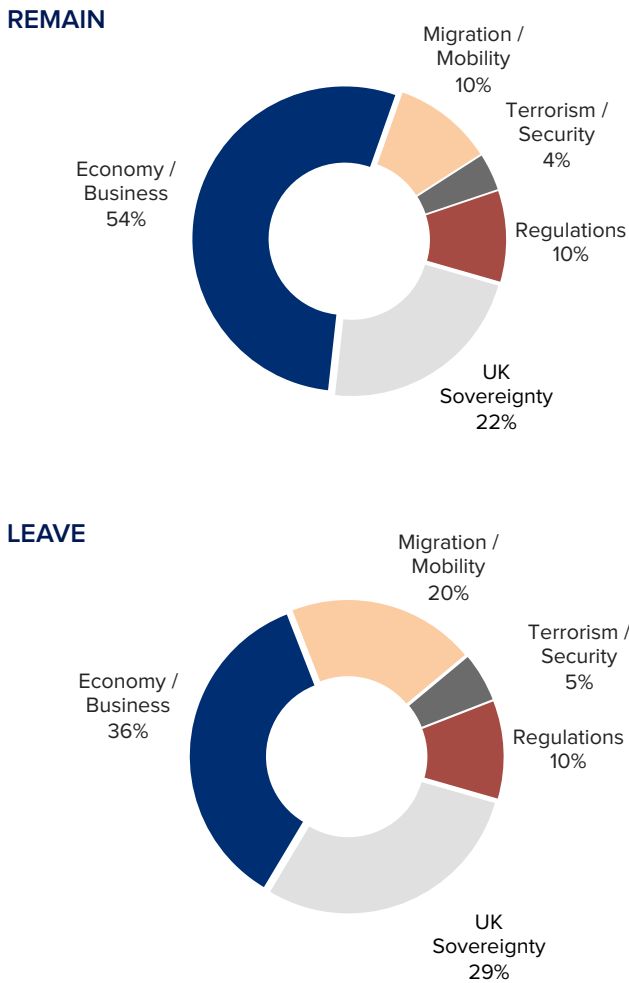


Base: 9,189 argument-based messages after excluding 9,969 messages about the vote, Brexit in general, other, and personalities taking sides

It is useful to also look at this type of analysis separating the two sides of the campaign: 54% of all the pro Remain arguments focused on the economy, 22% on sovereignty, and 10% each on migration and regulations. These figures compare to only 36% of all pro Leave arguments touching on the economy, followed by 29% about sovereignty, 20% on migration, and a further 10% on regulations. Both the In and Out camps only discussed security marginally, with respectively 4% and 5% of their messages. These numbers certainly reinforce the idea that the Leave campaign was able to use a more varied set of messages, or ultimately, as *The Economist* suggested, ‘disguise its internal division ... running, in effect, two different campaigns – one for a more liberal, less regulated and more open Britain, the other for a more closed, protected and less global one – [that] appealed to different sets of voters’ (*The Economist*, 2016). One last consideration stems from Jay Blumler’s recent comparison between this and the 1975 referendum campaign. He identifies the economic prospects as a theme common to both campaigns, but then adds that the topic was ‘somewhat

more disaggregated (in 1975) than in 2016' (Blumler, 2016). Our analysis by sub-topics shows that indeed the economy as an 'aggregated' concept was the main focus of this campaign's debate, with 24% of all economy-related messages. However more specific topics such as the impact on trade and the Single Market benefits (17%), the exchange rate (9%), jobs (8%), stock markets (7%), property and housing (6%), and the National Health Service (6%) were all discussed extensively.

**FIGURE 5.4: USE OF TOPICS BY EACH CAMP**



Base: 9,189 messages after excluding 9,969 messages about the vote, Brexit in general, other, and personalities taking sides

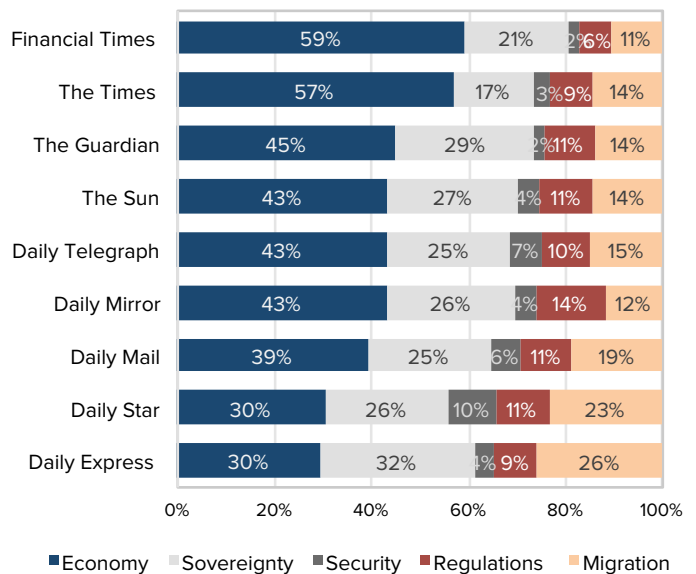
## 5.5 ARGUMENTS BY NEWSPAPER

If we break down coverage between tabloids and broadsheets, we can see that EU referendum news was mostly centred on the issue of the economy in the broadsheet papers, i.e. the *Financial Times* (59%), *The Times* (57%), the *Guardian* (45%), and the *Daily Telegraph* (43%). Even though the *Sun* and *Daily Mirror* had divergent positions, they both relied equally on the economy (43%). Meanwhile, as they made the case to leave, the *Daily Express*, *Daily Star*, and *Daily Mail* were all more focused on the issue of migration. For these newspapers the three combined issues of migration,<sup>10</sup> sovereignty and security accounted for over half the argument-based messages in their coverage.

The *Guardian* and the *Daily Express* have the highest shares of sovereignty-related coverage, but approached the topic with polar opposite views. The *Guardian's* Jonathan Freedland for example argued that 'the Brexit campaign is wrong: the UK is already a sovereign nation' (27 February), as the newspaper made the case for Britain to keep playing an active role in shaping the EU's future. Conversely, the *Express* often used patriotism in its call to vote Leave, describing the EU as an 'undemocratic superstate' that took away from Britain its 'hard-fought freedom' and calling for the UK to 'save democracy', 'regaining control' and its independence.

The *Daily Mirror* had the highest share of regulations-related coverage, with a focus on workers' rights in particular. The *Daily Star* and the *Telegraph* had the highest portions of security-focused coverage, as they suggested migration may represent a threat to security, while also dismissing claims that the fight on terrorism would suffer a set-back in the case of Brexit.

**FIGURE 5.5: SHARE OF MESSAGES USING EACH ARGUMENT**



<sup>10</sup> Coverage on migration had multiple dimensions, ranging from the fierce debate over the number of EU migrants arriving in the UK in 2015, to the possible impact of the refugee crisis and possible EU enlargement; from their supposed reliance on benefits to their impact on jobs, housing, public services, and crime rates. Our data show that lack of control over the UK's borders was perceived as the main issue (24% of all migration-related arguments). In terms of types of migration, economic migration was the most debated (17% of coverage), while interestingly the demographic angle (e.g. ageing UK population) or education-related migration (i.e. influx of foreign students) only accounted for 1% each of all arguments about migration.

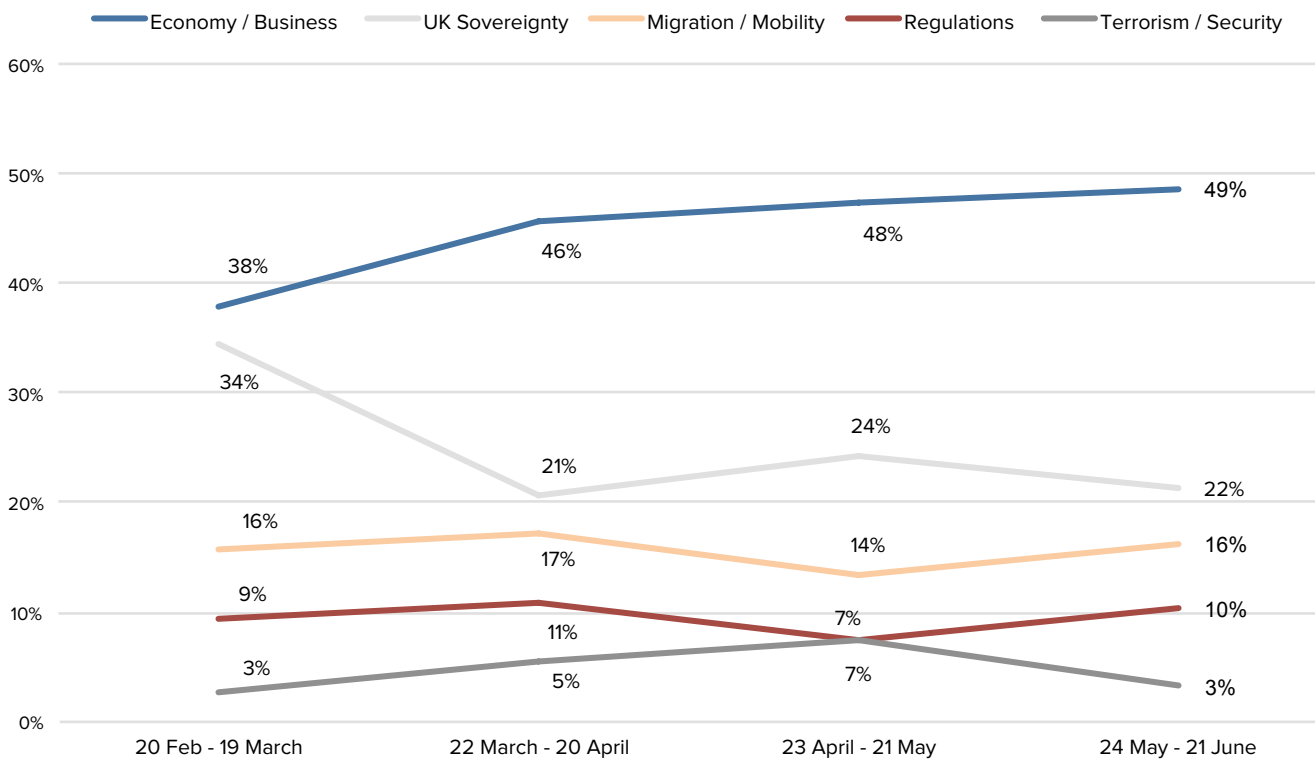
## 5.6 VARIATION OF ARGUMENTS OVER TIME

When the variation of the arguments is analysed over time, we can see that the issues covered in EU referendum news were fairly consistent. The British press was increasingly focused on the economy during the four periods analysed. UK sovereignty, the second most popular topic overall, experienced a high in the first phase<sup>11</sup> but became less relevant as the campaign continued. Migration, regulations, and terrorism/security all had steadier volumes of coverage over time, but the fluctuations we noticed in the third period analysed suggest a substantial, if temporary, change of agenda from late April to mid-May.

Figure 5.7, tracking daily share of coverage for each macro-topic, shows a number of interesting peaks. For example, media discussions about the economy reached a high (65%) on 24 May immediately after HM Treasury analysis suggested that Brexit would ‘push the UK into recession and lead to a sharp rise in unemployment’ (HM Treasury, 2016).

Unsurprisingly, arguments focusing on terrorism and security issues increased in frequency after the Brussels attacks on 22 March. Their second peak, on 10 May, was caused by David Cameron’s suggestion that ‘Brexit could trigger World War Three’ (Mr Cameron’s speech at the British Museum in London on 9 May, as reported by the *Mirror*). The amount of coverage about migration also appears rather volatile, with peaks at around 30% of all messages on 8 March,<sup>12</sup> 29 March,<sup>13</sup> 2 April,<sup>14</sup> and 24 May.<sup>15</sup> Finally, regulations-related coverage remained rather steady.

**FIGURE 5.6: USE OF ARGUMENTS OVER TIME – BY THE FOUR TIME PERIODS**



<sup>11</sup> Among the top coverage drivers for sovereignty, the debate about Cameron’s deal, and the *Sun*’s ‘Queen backs Brexit’ front page.

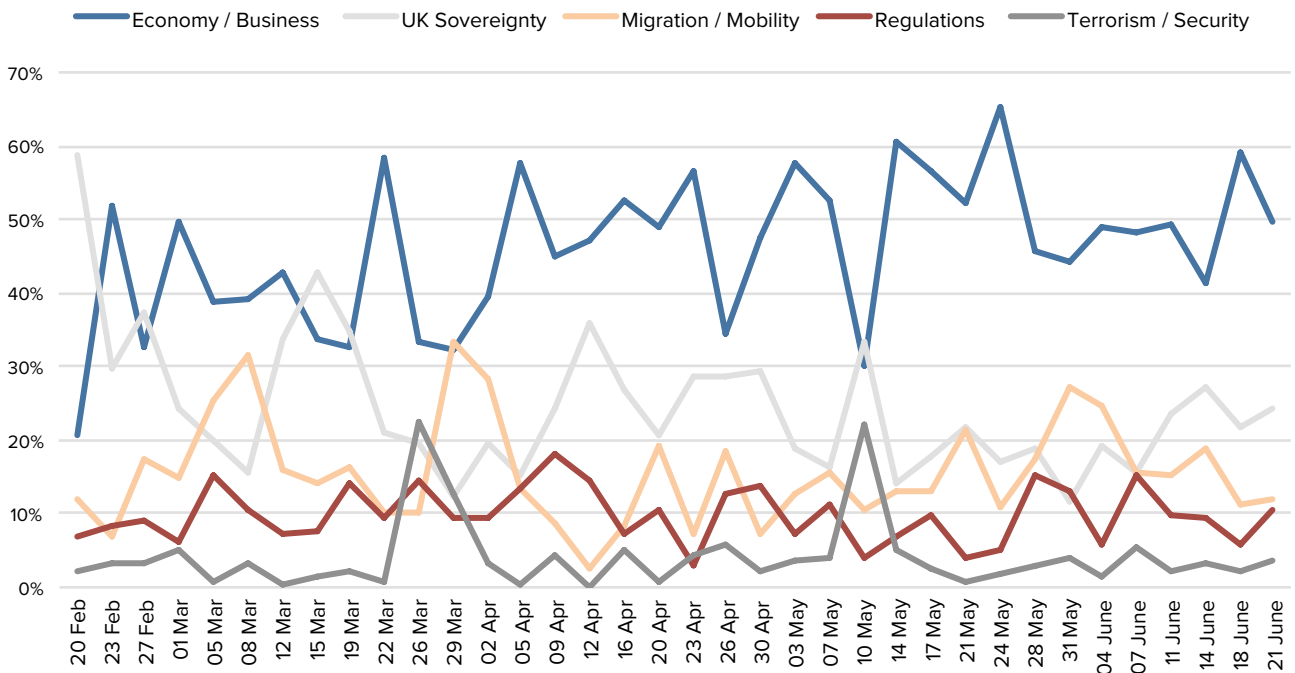
<sup>12</sup> Rachel Sylvester’s column in *The Times*, ‘Don’t think Brexit will solve the migrant crisis’ or the *Telegraph*’s comment ‘Uncertainties over immigration’.

<sup>13</sup> Vote Leave’s controversial dossier documenting serious crimes by EU citizens in Britain.

<sup>14</sup> Pro Brexit campaigners, including Boris Johnson, claim the National Living Wage is a ‘migrant magnet’.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Mason’s *Guardian* op-ed speculating on how the attitude towards migration will change after the vote (expecting a Remain win), but also an *Express* article quoting a Netmums poll and describing ‘women angry at the impact of immigration on family life’.

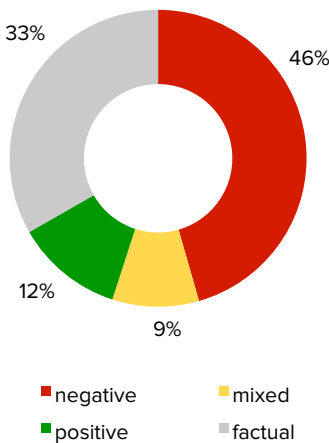
**FIGURE 5.7: USE OF ARGUMENTS OVER TIME – FOR EACH DAY MONITORED**



## 5.7 THE TONE OF EU REFERENDUM FOCUSED ARTICLES

In order to measure the tone of arguments, our researchers went through each message unit and analysed whether the argument presented had a neutral, positive, or negative tone.<sup>16</sup> The overall results unsurprisingly showed that negative sentiment prevailed, with 46% of all messages compared to only 12% positive ones.<sup>17</sup>

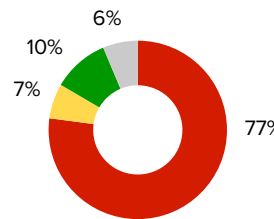
**FIGURE 5.8: TONE OF OVERALL MESSAGES**



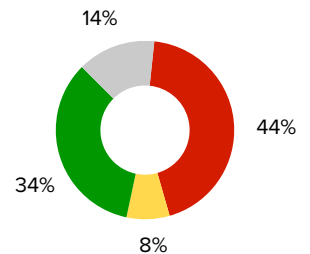
Interestingly, in arguing about the post-referendum future, only 10% of all pro Remain arguments were coded as positive, compared to 34% of the pro Leave ones.

**FIGURE 5.9: TONE OF MESSAGES BY POSITION AND TIME PERSPECTIVE**

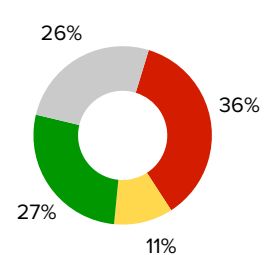
**PRO REMAIN ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE FUTURE**



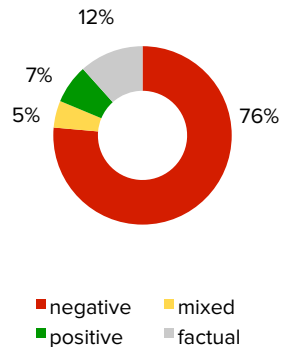
**PRO LEAVE ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE FUTURE**



**PRO REMAIN ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE PRESENT**



**PRO LEAVE ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE PRESENT**



negative mixed positive factual

negative mixed positive factual



When the press instead put forward arguments about the present, the share of positive tones for Remain increased, reaching 27%, but remained still relatively small compared to the share of positive arguments supporting Brexit.

Another striking difference between the two camps lies in the percentage of arguments about the present that used a mixed tone (11% vs. only 5% on the Leave side). Again, pro Remain messages appeared to be more cautious in assessing the status quo, often accepting that, regardless of any benefit they indicate, the UK's membership in the EU leaves much to be desired, even though they were naturally far less negative about the status quo than the Leave camp (36% vs. 76%)

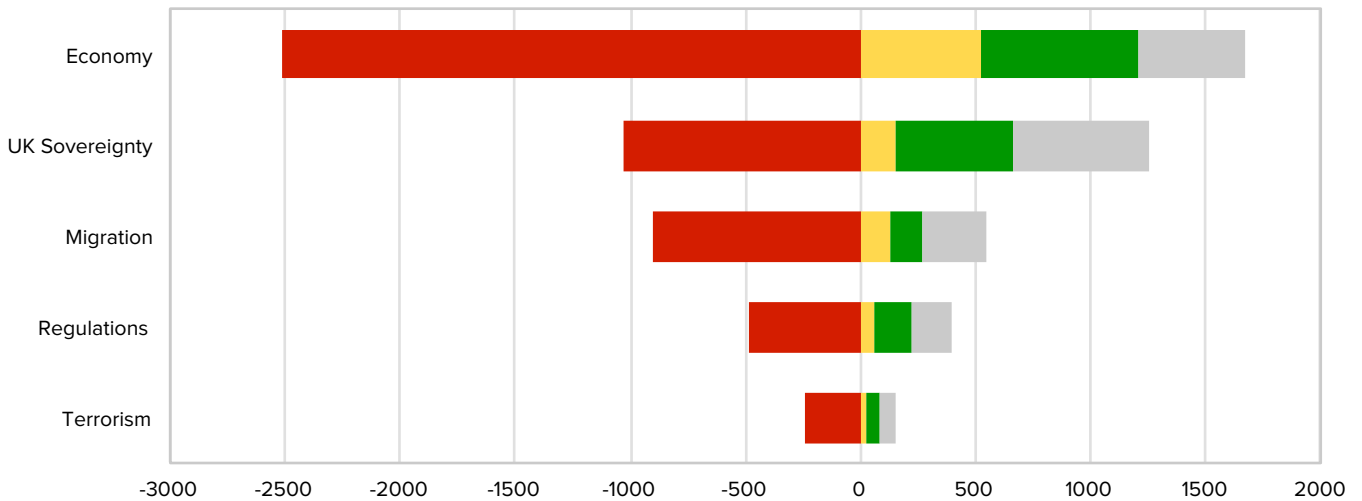
In this sense, our data suggest that the Remain campaign struggled to make a positive case for voting in favour of the

status quo. Conversely, the pro Brexit camp managed to balance more successfully messages criticising the status quo with messages offering 'hope' for the UK's future outside the block.

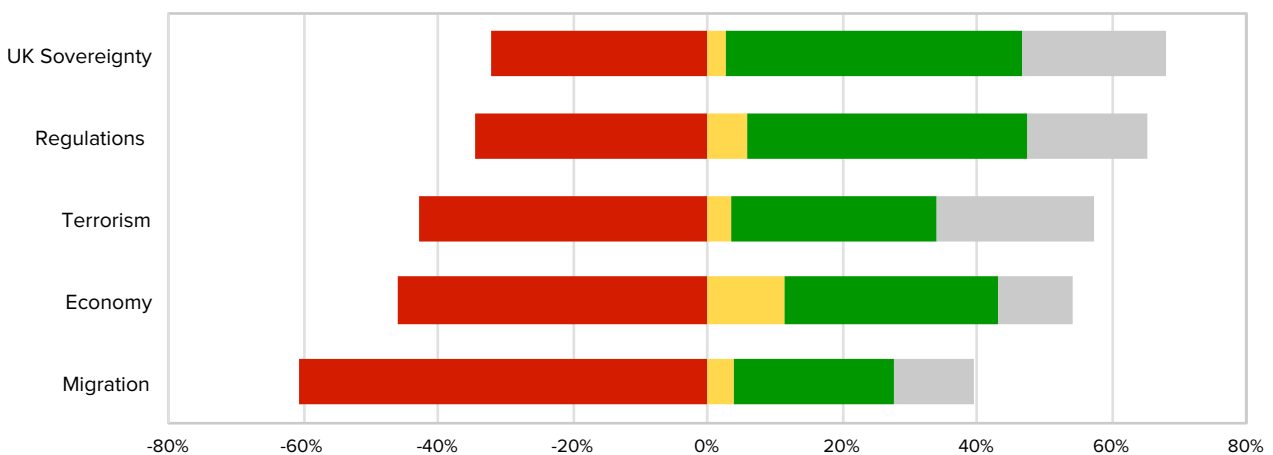
The sentiment analysis applied to specific topics shows that 60% of arguments around the economy were put forward using a negative tone.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand sovereignty-related arguments had a more evenly spread combination of tones.<sup>19</sup>

To this last point, when looking more specifically at pro Leave messages about the post-referendum future, we can see that those discussing sovereignty were much more positive (44% vs. 32% negative), while the issue of regulations also netted a more positive balance (42% vs. 35%).<sup>20</sup>

**FIGURE 5.10: TONE BY TOPIC GROUP – ALL MESSAGES**



**FIGURE 5.11: TONE OF PRO LEAVE MESSAGES – FUTURE**



<sup>16</sup> E.g. an expert predicting the impact of Brexit on the economy to be bad or a pro Leave politician describing the EU regulations as excessive were analysed as negative. Conversely, a pro Remain campaigner's praise for EU regulations on workers' rights, or a *Daily Mail* editorial describing a possible Leave victory as a desirable return to independence were analysed as positive.

<sup>17</sup> Exactly one-third of the messages were coded as factual, while 9% were mixed, i.e. containing an assessment balancing positive and negative elements.

<sup>18</sup> Overall, the negative arguments about the economy amounted to 49% of all negative arguments.

<sup>19</sup> Although 45% of all messages discussing sovereignty were negative, they were counterbalanced by 23% of positive messages and 26% of factual ones.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that, based on our methodology, a portion of these negative pro Leave arguments about the future would also be discussing the consequences of a pro Remain win.

# 6. WHO WAS CITED IN THE UK PRESS?

## 6.1 SUMMARY

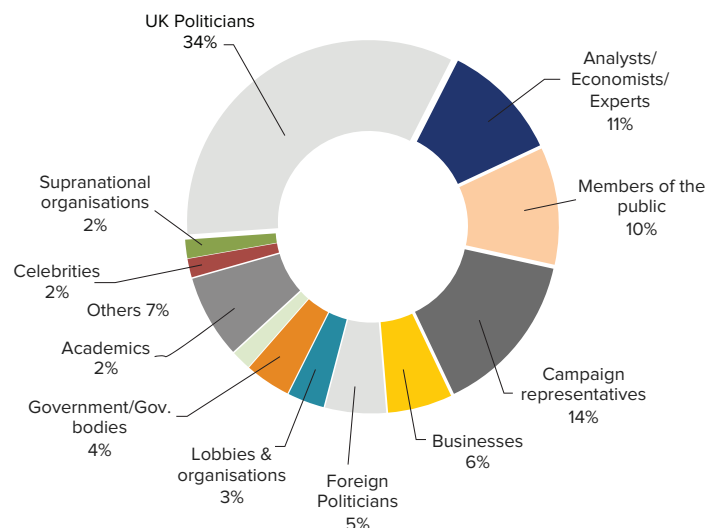
- Looking at the people who were cited in articles, one sees almost half were either UK politicians or campaign representatives. Analysts/experts, academics, and even businesses (6%) or foreign politicians (5%) featured relatively little in the campaign coverage.
- Of the articles citing UK politicians, 64% cited Conservatives as opposed to 17% which cited Labour spokespeople. Of the top ten politicians cited, eight were Conservatives, with just two others, Nigel Farage in fifth position and Jeremy Corbyn in eighth position. Theresa May kept a relatively low profile as the eleventh most cited politician, quoted in just 1.1% of articles.
- The dominance of quotes from Conservative politicians was evident across all the newspapers almost regardless of their own political position, ranging from 75% in the *Daily Telegraph* to 47% in the *Daily Mirror*.
- Jeremy Corbyn attracted very little attention. He was quoted in just 3–4% of articles in the *Guardian* and *Mirror*, about a third as many times as they quoted David Cameron or Boris Johnson.
- Pro Leave campaigners were cited in 74% of articles as against just 26% that cited pro Remain campaigners.
- Analysts/economists and experts were cited most in the broadsheet newspapers and skewed slightly in favour of Remain.
- Of the small number of academics quoted, just one, Professor Patrick Minford, strongly associated with the Leave campaign, accounted for a fifth of all quotes.

## 6.2 PEOPLE QUOTED IN TOTAL

Another way we used to assess the nature of the coverage was by looking at the people quoted in articles. In analysing which spokespeople were quoted in the media, PRIME's researchers logged the name and affiliation (where available) of each single spokesperson. In a second step, these names were then classified according to 11 categories<sup>21</sup> (listed in

Figure 6.1). Of these, UK politicians received the highest attention in the articles focusing on the EU referendum (34%), followed by campaign representatives (15%), analyst/economist/experts (11%), and members of the public (10%). Only a marginal amount of EU referendum focused news cited business representatives (6%), foreign politicians (5%), government/government bodies (4%), lobbies and organisations (3%), or academics (2%).<sup>22</sup> The analysis reveals the very high attention granted to UK politicians and the low amount of space that the press accorded to experts and academics. This omission is particularly significant in a complex and often technical debate (Meyer, 2016). It suggests that, while Michael Gove's statement from the Leave camp that 'People in this country have had enough of experts' was much criticised, the press as a whole had no great appetite for citing experts or academic sources.<sup>23</sup>

**FIGURE 6.1: GROUPS QUOTED IN ARTICLES**



Some interesting findings emerge from examining the arguments made using quotes from each of these groups. Those from foreign politicians and supranational organisations and business favoured Remain, while quotes from the public tended to favour Leave.

Amongst the 58 EU referendum articles in our sample which quoted academics, the majority was skewed in favour of

Brexit. This might in part be explained by the fact that 12 articles – more than 20% of the total – cited Patrick Minford, Professor of Applied Economics at Cardiff Business School, making him the single most cited academic in our sample. Minford’s views were not typical of those of academic economists:<sup>24</sup> he advanced the argument that Brexit would boost the economy and for this was criticised by Labour politicians such as Alistair Darling MP (Elliott, 2016). However, his ‘contrarian’ views earned him a number of quotes, mostly in *The Times* and the pro Leave publications, throughout the campaign period.

**FIGURE 6.2: SPOKESPEOPLE’S PARTISANSHIP**

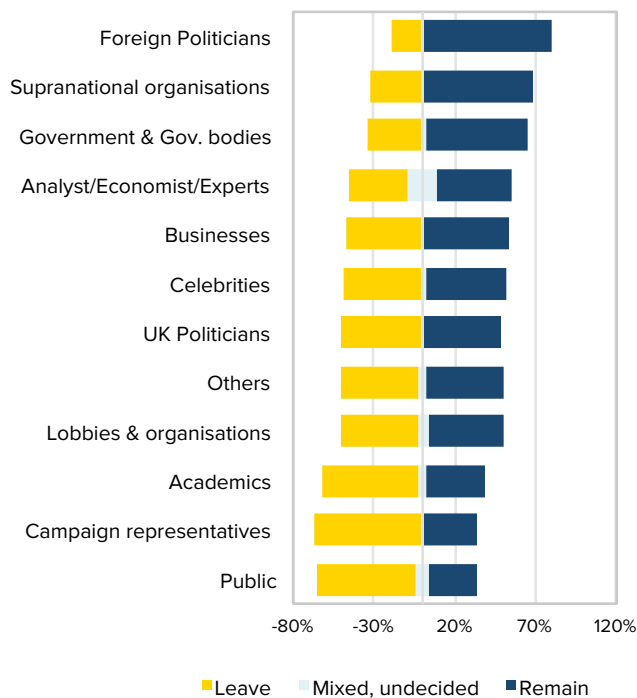
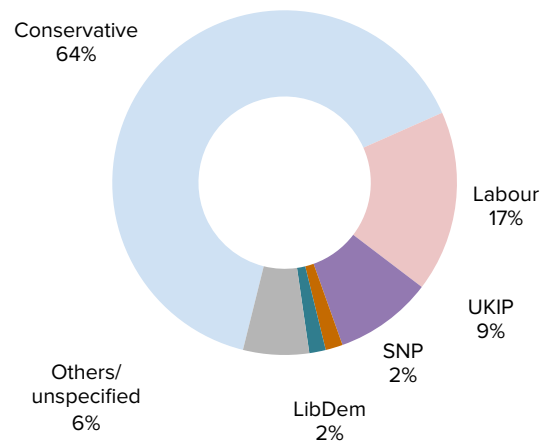


Figure 6.3, which breaks down the 34% (1,117) of articles quoting UK politicians, shows the extent to which coverage was dominated by Conservative Party voices. The Tories were quoted in 64% of the messages by UK politicians. This compares to Labour spokespeople being cited in 17% of this news, UKIP in 9%. The rest of the British political voices, including SNP, LibDem, and instances where the journalist made no reference to the identity of the politician quoted, merely accounted for 6%.

Given the fact that the leading figures of both Remain and Leave campaigns were from the Conservative Party, it is not surprising to see the prominence of Conservative Party members in the EU referendum articles. Yet our findings also showed that among the 15% of articles quoting campaign representatives, pro Leave campaigners were much more likely to be quoted.<sup>25</sup> One analysis of the press releases of the two campaigns suggests that Leave’s dominance may in part be explained by a more effective campaign, with well-timed and targeted press releases. Leave also had an extremely effective spokesman in Matthew Elliott who made himself very available to the press (Keaveney, 2016).

**FIGURE 6.3: UK POLITICIANS QUOTED IN ARTICLES**



**FIGURE 6.4: CAMPAIGN REPRESENTATIVE QUOTED IN ARTICLES**



Additionally, our data allowed us to look at the stance of the arguments used by British politicians– something particularly interesting due to the fact that the Conservative Party was effectively split over the referendum.

<sup>21</sup> The classification was based on the affiliation specified within each article; when no job title or affiliation were present in the coverage, we researched the spokesperson’s profile and used their most prominent position as a guide to classify them.

<sup>22</sup> The category ‘analysts, economists, and experts’ included analysts and economists from banks, as well as ‘market experts’ such as investment or fund managers, polling companies, rating agencies, military or security experts. Consultancies, bookmakers, statistics agencies were also included within this group. On the other hand, the category of ‘academics’ comprises academics whose position in a university was given as their primary affiliation.

<sup>23</sup> See Henry Mance, *FT*, 3 June 2016. <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c.html#axzz4Fjhzmz3P8>>

<sup>24</sup> See the *Observer* poll of over 600 economists showing that 82% thought Brexit would be bad for household incomes over the next five years. <<https://www.politicshome.com/news/europe/eu-policy-agenda/brexit/news/75538/boost-remain-90-economists-say-brexit-would-harm-uk>> See also the warning issued on 19 June by ten Nobel-prize winning economists.

<sup>25</sup> Of the 482 articles citing campaign representatives that were analysed, 410 (74%) cited pro Leave and 145 (26%) cited pro Remain representatives; only 73 articles cited both camps.

**FIGURE 6.5: POSITION OF THE POLITICIANS QUOTED**

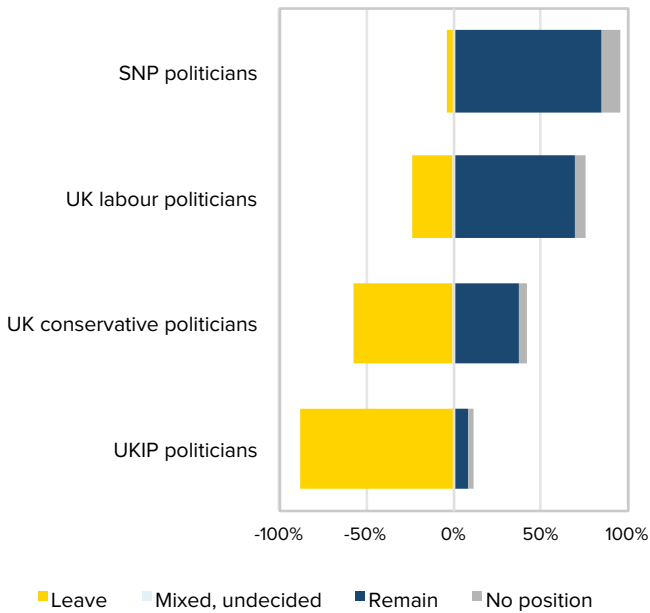


Figure 6.5 shows how the Tories, overall, were more vocal in favour of Brexit (58% pro Leave vs. only 36% pro Remain), despite the Prime Minister’s leading role in the ‘In’ campaign.

### 6.3 THE MOST QUOTED GROUPS

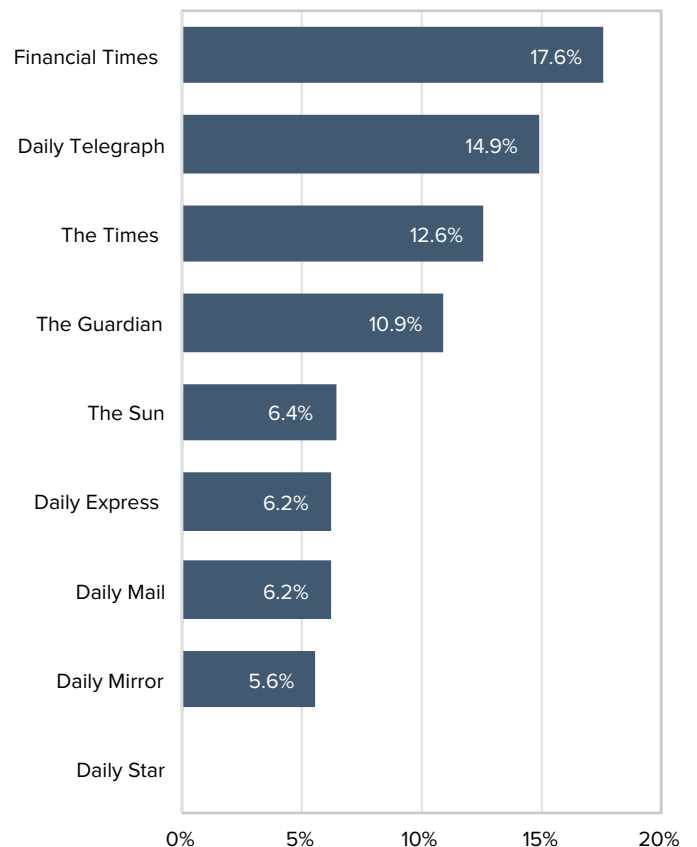
The study also considers to what extent each category of spokesperson was quoted by each newspaper.

It is not surprising that the largest amount of articles quoting experts were in the broadsheet newspapers. Experts were quoted in 18% of all *Financial Times* EU referendum articles, followed by the *Daily Telegraph* (15%), *The Times* (13%), and the *Guardian* (11%). The tabloids in contrast only rarely quoted experts and they were almost entirely side-lined in the *Daily Star’s* coverage.

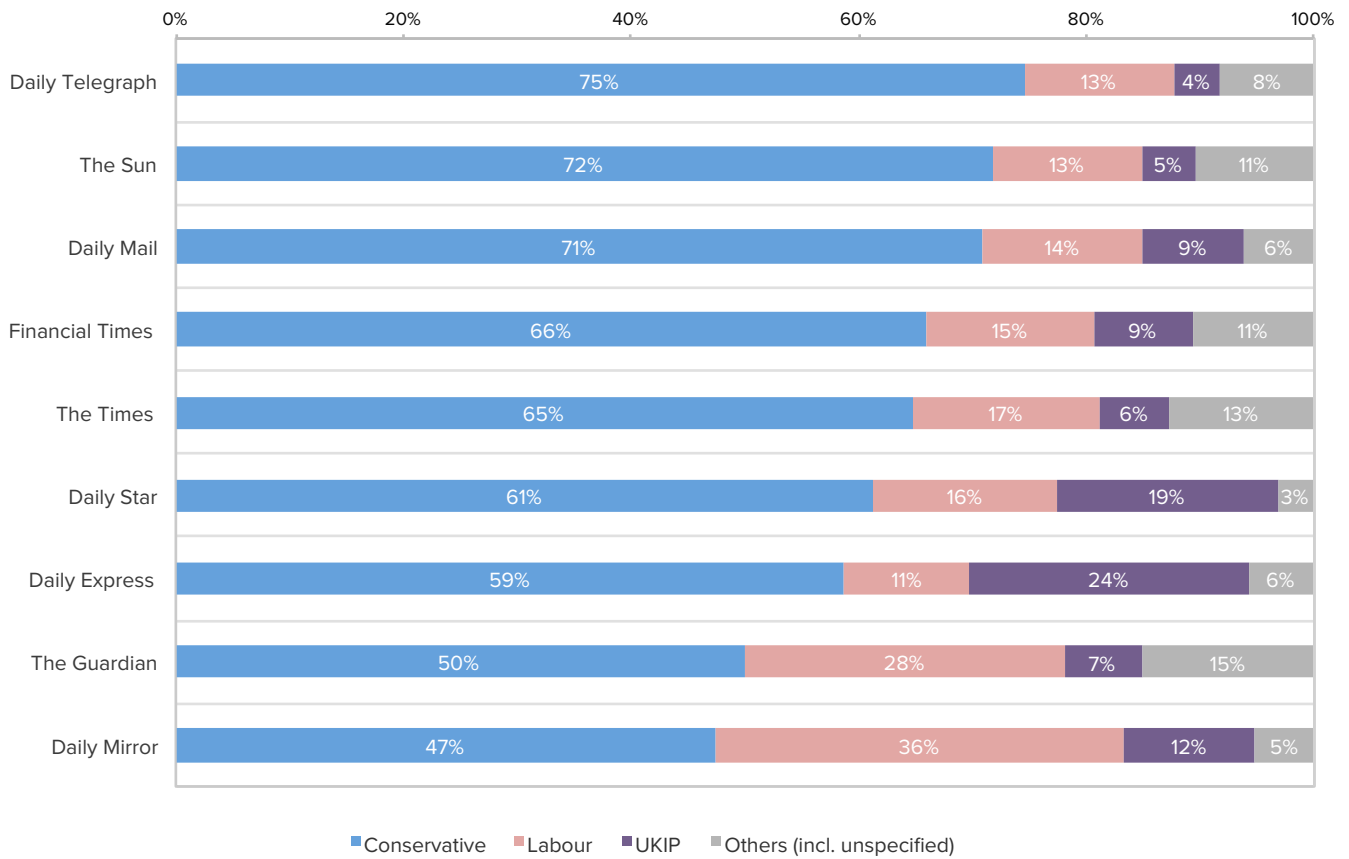
Conservative Party dominance can also be identified in each newspaper almost regardless of its political position. This was partly due to the fact that, in a very personalised campaign, several key political figures were Tories. The dominance of Conservative politicians could be seen in most newspapers: the *Telegraph*, where 75% of the political spokespeople were Tories, the *Sun* (72%), *Daily Mail* (71%), *Financial Times* (66%), and *Daily Star* (61%). It is particularly striking that even in the left-wing press such as the *Daily Mirror*, Conservative politicians were quoted more (47%) than their Labour counterparts (35%). Similarly, the *Guardian* quoted the Conservatives in 50% of its EU referendum articles. This finding might at least in part be explained because of a more low-key campaign run by top Labour politicians.

UKIP was mostly quoted in the pages of the *Daily Express*: in 24% of all *Express* articles quoting politicians, while Labour was only quoted in 11%, the lowest percentage registered for Jeremy Corbyn’s party.

**FIGURE 6.6: SHARE OF EXPERT QUOTES BY NEWSPAPERS**



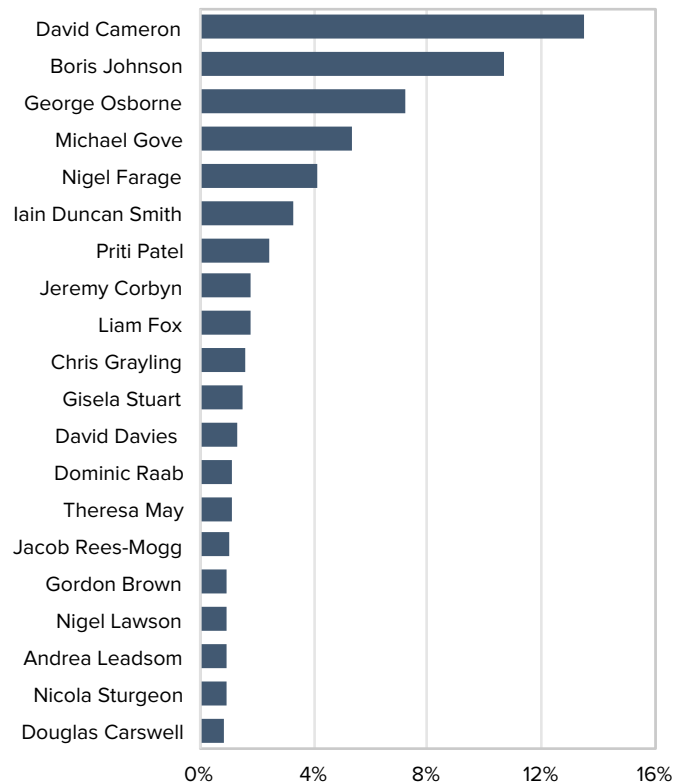
**FIGURE 6.7: THE SHARE OF POLITICIANS' QUOTES BY NEWSPAPER**



## 6.4 MOST QUOTED POLITICIANS IN THE EU REFERENDUM FOCUSED ARTICLES

We also analysed which politicians were quoted the most during the campaign period. Of all the spokespeople in the EU referendum news, David Cameron received the most attention, with approximately 14% of articles quoting him, followed by Boris Johnson (10%), George Osborne (6%), and Michael Gove (5%). Jeremy Corbyn (3%) was the eighth most quoted politician. His name appeared after Brexit campaigners such as Nigel Farage, Iain Duncan Smith, and Priti Patel.

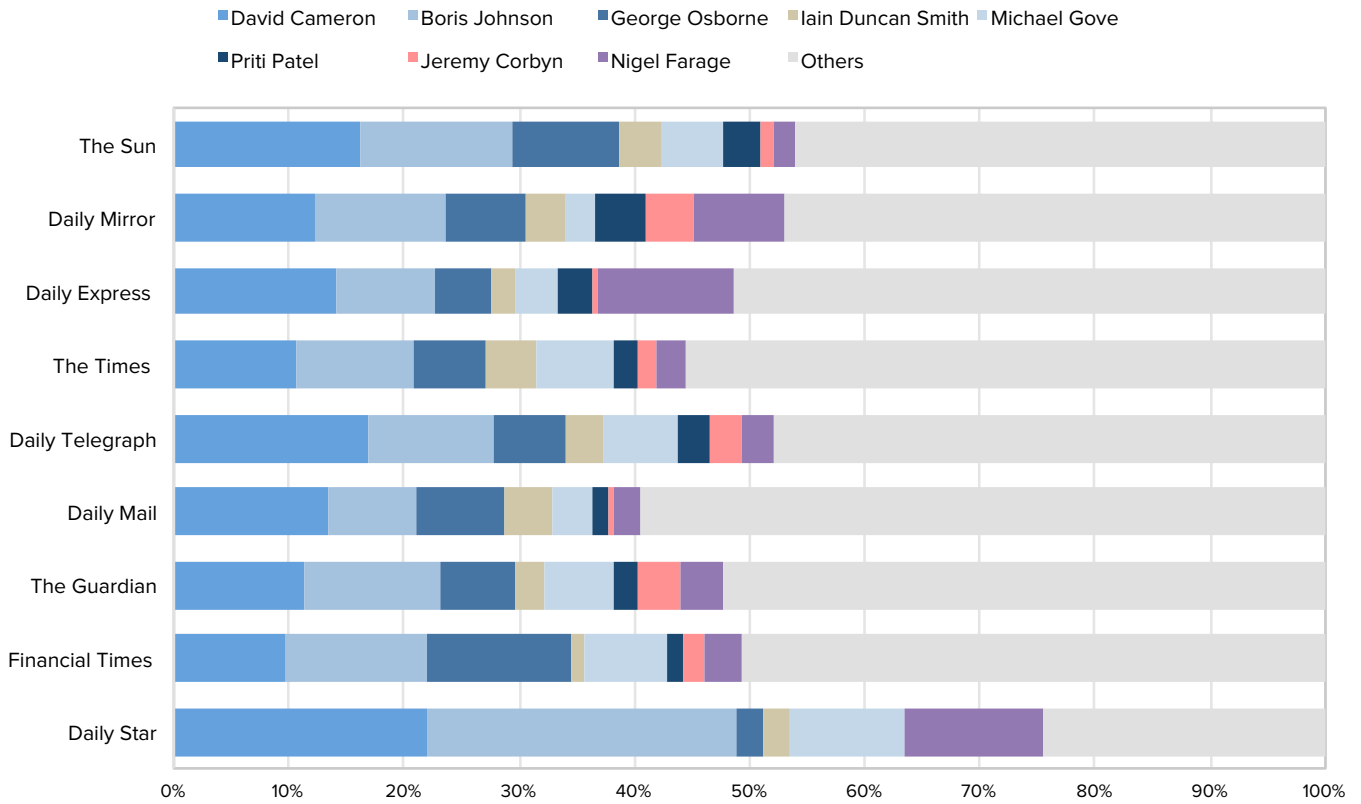
**FIGURE 6.8: TOP 20 MOST QUOTED UK POLITICIANS IN THE EU REFERENDUM FOCUSED ARTICLES**



Our results also show that, particularly in the right-wing papers such as the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, and the *Sun*, Corbyn was side-lined. In most of the newspapers, David Cameron was quoted slightly more than Johnson and turned

out to be the most quoted politician except in the *Daily Star*, *Financial Times*, and the *Guardian*, in which Boris Johnson's quotes slightly exceeded those of David Cameron.

**FIGURE 6.9: POLITICIANS' QUOTES BY NEWSPAPER**

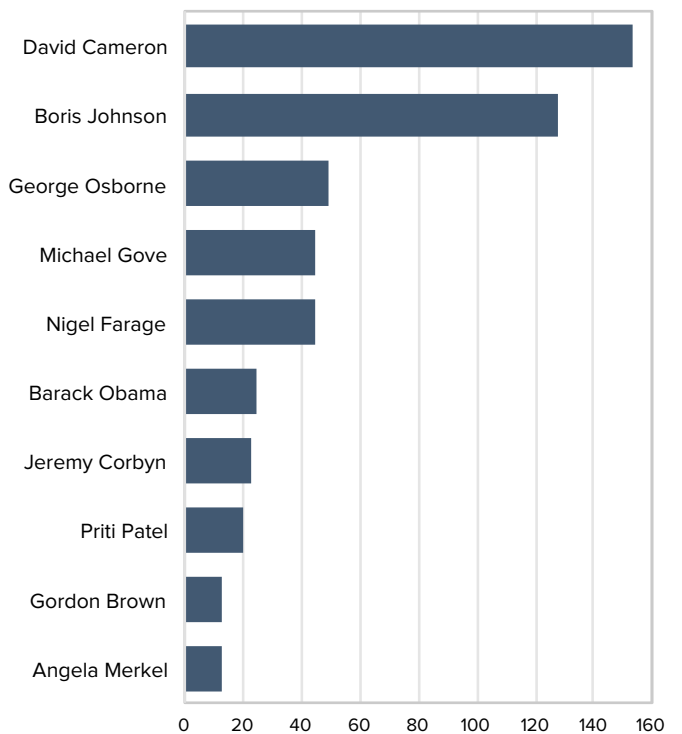


In order to complement article-level analysis, we also conducted headline and image analyses to identify which politicians dominated the most prominent part of the EU referendum news.

An examination of the images used in the EU referendum articles also showed that a high proportion of images focused on David Cameron. Of the total of 1,148 images analysed, 153 depicted Cameron while 128 focused on Boris Johnson. Thereafter in descending order, were George Osborne, Michael Gove, and Nigel Farage. Barack Obama was the only international politician to rank high in the image list. He was portrayed in 25 images, compared to just 23 images for Corbyn.

Analysing the most quoted spokespeople within the headlines also revealed interesting findings. Our data indicate the dominance of Leave campaigner Boris Johnson and Remain campaigner George Osborne in the headlines. Of the 2,033 headlines, Johnson was quoted in 35, Osborne in 28, followed by Cameron with 26. Obama was the most quoted international politician in the headline list too. His quotes appeared in 13 headlines.

**FIGURE 6.10: MOST PORTRAYED POLITICIANS IN IMAGES**



# 7. EU REFERENDUM NEWS IN THE LAST FOUR DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD

The four-month long EU referendum campaign reached a climax in its final four days. Most British newspapers declared their position in the final week and politicians made their last pitches for the vote. We also witnessed the killing of Jo Cox MP, just a week before the referendum. In this section, we explore if these changed circumstances affected press coverage. Below we identify four significant shifts that occurred in the press coverage during the last week.

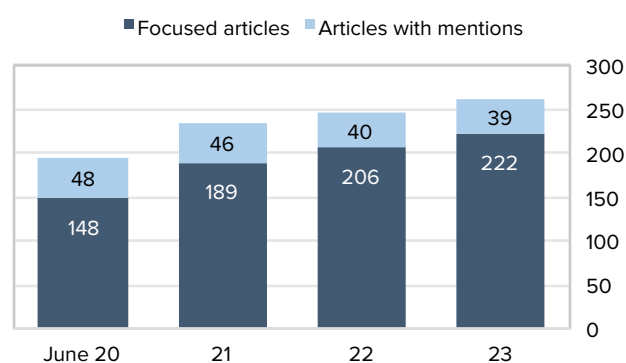
## 7.1 SUMMARY

- In the last four days of the campaign the number of articles increased dramatically.
- The *Financial Times*, *Daily Mirror*, and the *Guardian* became more partisan in this final period, perhaps because of the closeness of the polls. Generally all newspapers tended to be less inclined to publish articles opposed to their stated position. *The Times* was an exception, with a majority of pro Leave articles in the last four days, even after they had come out for Remain.
- The economy still dominated among issues discussed but with a significant increase in articles focused on sovereignty and a minor increase in those discussing migration.
- The newspaper front pages on referendum day reflected the very polarised nature of their coverage.

## 7.2 VISIBILITY OF EU REFERENDUM NEWS IN THE LAST FOUR DAYS

When we analysed the variation in the press coverage over the last four days, the degree of media attention on the referendum became apparent.<sup>26</sup> There was a steady rise in the number of EU referendum articles, with the record number of 222 referendum focused articles on the day of the referendum itself.

**FIGURE 7.1: NUMBER OF ARTICLES BY DAY**



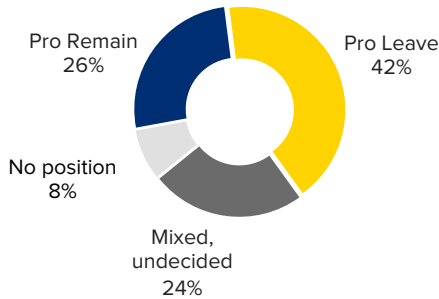
## 7.3 POSITION OF ARTICLES

Interestingly, we observed an increase in the number of mixed or undecided articles. This seems surprising at a time when their newspapers had declared a position but might conceivably reflect a slightly less strident approach to reporting in the wake of the killing of Jo Cox MP.

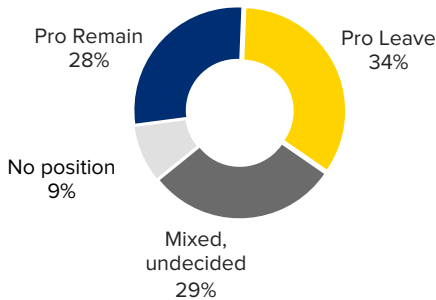
<sup>26</sup> These four days had an average of 234 articles per day, of which 191 were focused on the referendum, an increase on the average measured over the entire four-month period (including Tuesday 21 June) of 95 and 66 respectively.

**FIGURE 7.2: DEGREE OF PARTISANSHIP IN LAST FOUR DAYS COMPARED TO FOUR-MONTH PERIOD**

FEB 20 TO JUNE 18



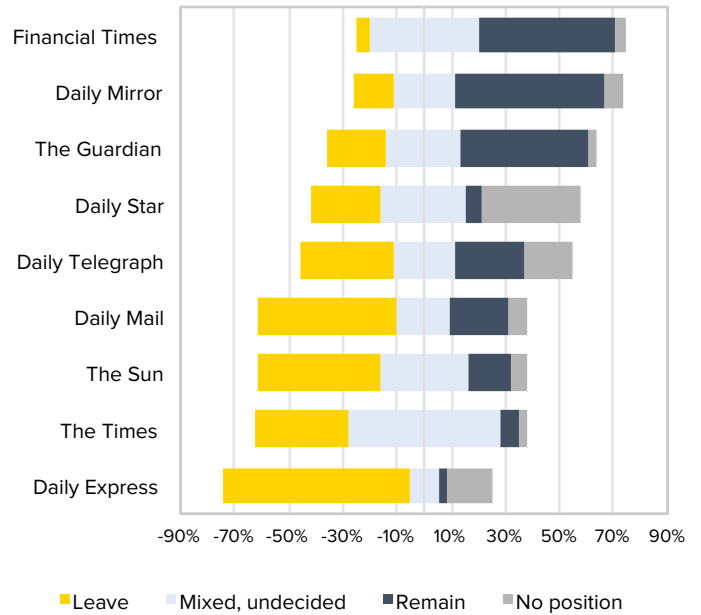
LAST WEEK



## 7.4 ARTICLES' CAMPAIGN POSITION BY NEWSPAPER

Our figures show that the *Financial Times*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Guardian* became more partisan in their reporting of the EU referendum in this last week. Strangely, *The Times* still published more pro Leave than pro Remain articles in this period in spite of having advocated a vote for Remain.

**FIGURE 7.3: ARTICLE POSITION BY NEWSPAPER (LAST REFERENDUM WEEK)**



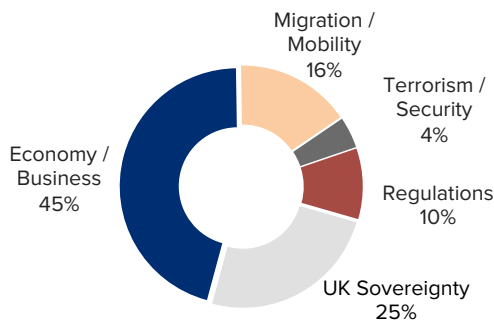
## 7.5 ARGUMENTS ADVANCED BY THE PRESS

The issue of the economy was also widely cited during the last four days of the campaign period. However, most striking was the growing number of articles focused on the

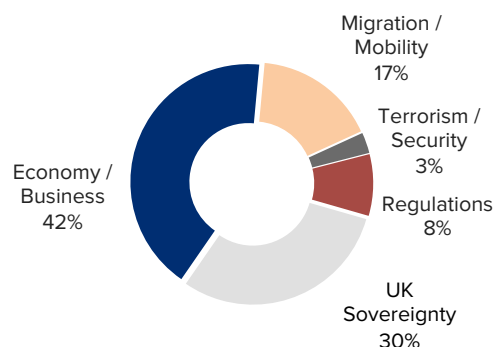
issue of sovereignty in the last week. During the four months monitored from 20 February to 18 June 24% of the arguments centred around the issue of UK sovereignty, but this proportion rose to 30% in the last four days. It was the right-leaning press in particular that advanced arguments around the issue of UK sovereignty over the final week. There was also a very slight increase in the focus on migration and mobility in this period compared to the previous four months.

**FIGURE 7.4: ARGUMENTS IN THE LAST FOUR DAYS COMPARED TO PRECEDING FOUR MONTHS**

ARGUMENTS FROM FEB 20 TO JUNE 18



ARGUMENTS IN THE LAST FOUR DAYS





## 7.6 COVERAGE ON THE DAY OF THE REFERENDUM 23 JUNE

The contrasts between the front pages of the nine newspapers on the day of the referendum summed up some of the differences identified in the analysis presented so far.

This graphic illustration of their headlines gives a good sense of how they differed in their last front-page messages to their readers.

**FIGURE 7.5: REMAIN AND LEAVE NEWSPAPER HEADLINES ON REFERENDUM DAY**

**the guardian**

Who Do We Want to Be?  
Last Ditch Push to Stay in Europe

**DAILY  
Mirror**

Don't Take a Leap into the Dark  
... Vote REMAIN Today

**FT** FINANCIAL  
TIMES

Tension Mounts in City Ahead of  
Historic Vote on EU Membership

**THE**  **TIMES**

Final Polls Leave Britain's Future  
on a Knife Edge

**Daily**  **Mail**

Nailed: Four Big EU Lies

**THE  
Sun**

Independence Day

**DAILY**  **EXPRESS**  
THE WORLD'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER

Your Country Needs You:  
Vote Leave Today

**DAILY  
STAR**

Your Country, Your Vote:  
Grab Your Future by the Ballots

**The Daily Telegraph**

The Time Has Come

# 8. CONCLUSION

## 8.1 KEY FINDINGS

The picture that emerges from this detailed, largely quantitative study of the press coverage during the four months of the referendum campaign is fairly clear and can be summarised as follows.

- a. In terms of the volume and visibility of referendum-related news the coverage was heavily skewed towards the Leave camp. After taking into account the relative circulation of each paper and the number of articles and their visibility, the ratio of pro Leave to Remain articles increases from 41%:27% to 48%:22% (the remaining articles having no position or undecided). Just looking at pro Leave versus pro Remain articles gives a ratio of 61:39 unweighted, or 68:32 after weighting.
- b. The coverage was highly politicised, with around half the spokespeople cited coming from political parties or the two campaigns. Very little space was accorded to other groups, such as experts, academics, foreign politicians, business leaders, etc. The result was a narrow range of voices in the campaign and a tendency for much of the coverage to focus on political figures and to use a 'game frame' approach about campaign developments and who was up or down, etc. Those non-politicians who were cited were generally those with an agenda who made themselves very readily available.
- c. Of the politicians cited, Conservatives dominated (64%) and exceeded all other political groups including Labour (17%). Similarly, among the campaign spokespeople those from the pro Leave camp hugely exceeded those from Remain (74:26).
- d. Issues polarised between the different camps and newspapers, with broadsheets and the Remain camp most focused on the economy and the pro Leave newspapers and the Leave camp more generally interested in the economy but much more focused on the combined issues of migration, sovereignty, and terrorism.
- e. There were major differences in the tone of each camp. This was a campaign where Remain largely focused on a single issue, the economy, with a generally very negative tone and led by a few individuals, notably David Cameron and George Osborne. The Leave camp were

better at balancing overt criticism of the status quo with more positive messages about hope on issues such as sovereignty in a post-Brexit future. The Remain camp were far more negative than the Leave one, especially about the future, and even seemed reluctant to use much positive language about Britain's current position within the EU, which they were advocating. Judging by tone the Remain camp were more preoccupied with fear. While the Leave camp also played to fears, notably about migration and sovereignty, its future-oriented messages were more optimistic in tone.

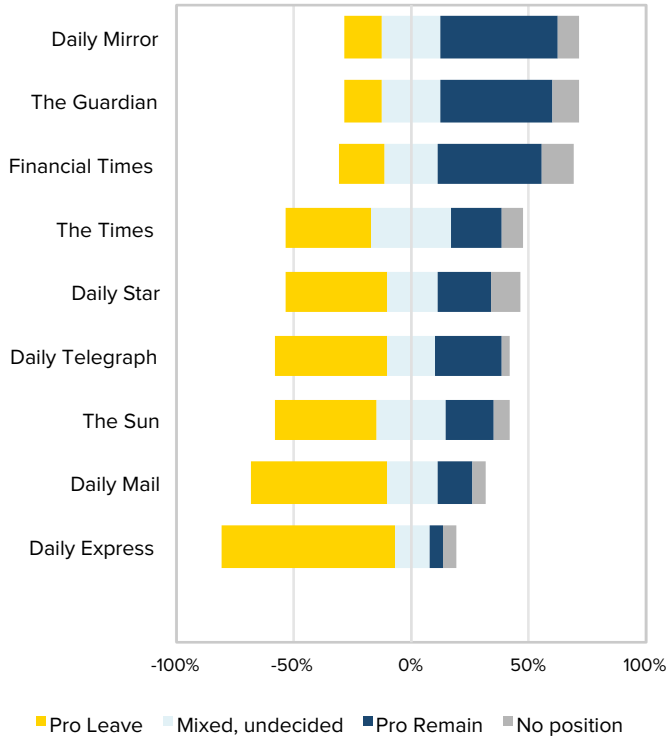
## 8.2 IMPLICATIONS

- a. The UK's membership of the European Union is a highly complex issue. In covering the issue in the lead-up to the referendum, the press's response was to focus heavily on the politicians and campaign representatives. This may have been a way of simplifying the issues but it also ended skewing the coverage to the political game and away from serious debate of the topic. It made the press heavily dependent on the material fed to them by each campaign and by the politicians. Some of the press were willing participants in this trade, but the impact extended more widely. One early study of the press releases of each campaign suggests that the Leave campaign was much more effective than the Remain one (Keaveney, 2016). Keaveney notes that: 'Press releases cannot win or lose an election. What they can do however is increase or shape media coverage and therefore public perceptions' (2016: 75). This seems to have been reflected in the disproportionately large amount of attention accorded to the Leave campaign.
- b. The limited visibility of Labour in the coverage was in large part self-inflicted because of their lack of high-level engagement in the campaign, certainly before Jeremy Corbyn's intervention on 10 May. As noted above, Labour only featured in 17% of the articles citing politicians, but Jeremy Corbyn featured in far fewer. Even in the *Daily Mirror* or the *Guardian* he was only cited in 3–4% of articles, about a third as many times as either David Cameron or Boris Johnson.



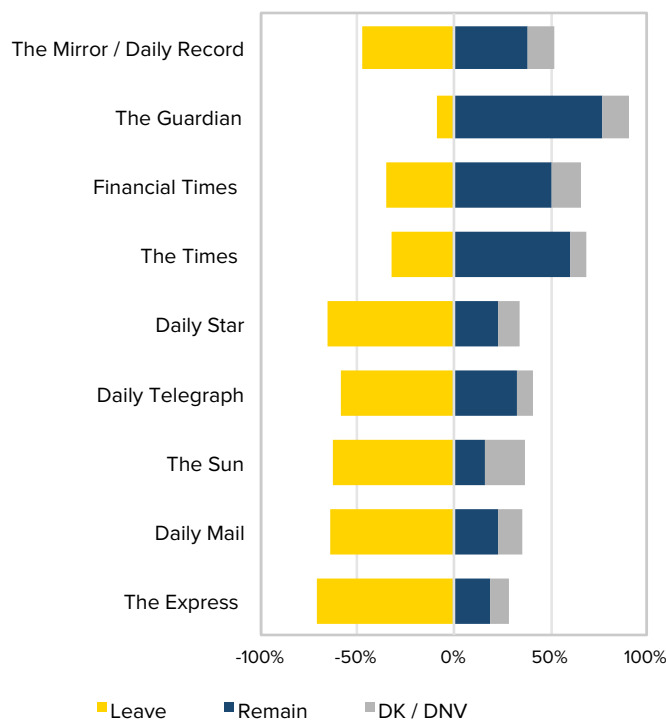
**FIGURE 8.4: NEWSPAPER ARTICLES CLASSIFIED BY LEAVE/REMAIN VS. VOTE BY NEWSPAPER READERSHIP ACCORDING TO YOUNG EXIT POLL**

**POSITION OF NEWSPAPERS LEAVE/REMAIN**



Base: 2,378 articles focused on the referendum

**YOUNG EXIT POLL**



g. We can draw four somewhat tentative conclusions from this, given the largely quantitative focus of our analysis. The first is that the press skewed far more heavily to Leave than Remain and to a far greater extent than the country, as reflected in the final result of 52:48. The second is that in general the partisan treatment of the issues at stake by the press was a fairly faithful reflection of the preoccupations of their chosen political camp. The third is that this, combined with the strong focus on the campaign as a game or contest, and the key political and campaign players, may have worked well for those with already established strong views on the referendum. But fourth, this highly partisan treatment, and the marginalisation of voices outside the world of politics or the campaign groups, may have left the desire of undecided readers for more information unmet.

The relatively narrow range of information sources and voices, when combined with a highly partisan approach, did little to respond to the need of those seeking more high-quality information to make up their minds.

Political campaigns operate at multiple levels, in this case an issue-based level, an emotional one, and a game-based level. In the referendum the press seems to have operated better at the second and third than on the first.

# APPENDIX A.

## METHODOLOGY IN DETAIL

PRIME Research systematically analysed media content by utilising a combination of qualitative and quantitative media

content analysis. The articles were analysed in a two-step process.

### FIGURE A.1: TWO-STEP ANALYSIS

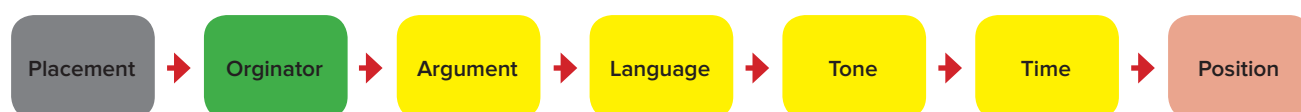
#### CODING MASK STRUCTURE

Article level: metadata & formal criteria



#### MESSAGE LEVEL: CONTENT UNIT

Compulsory



Optional



## A.1 ARTICLE LEVEL ANALYSIS

The first set of data collected for each article included automatically coded metadata, such as publication name, date, page number, as well as human-coded information such as size and prominence of the article, portion of the article discussing the referendum, section of the newspaper, and style of the article. Details such as page number, prominence, and size (measured in column millimetres and weighted based on the portion of coverage focused on the referendum) were used to establish the impact of the content analysed, and were also fed into the PRIME Research reach model to establish the opportunity to see each article. The style of coverage information was utilised to differentiate between news stories, opinion pieces (editorials by newspaper staff, guest pieces), and other types of features, such as cartoons or interviews. PRIME Research also tracked the presence of images and whether colour was used in each article to establish how eye-catching it was.

## A.2 MESSAGE LEVEL ANALYSIS

In the second stage of the analysis, all the articles were subdivided into content units. A content unit represents a single thematic unit, ranging in size between a single sentence or image and a paragraph. Each message within the article was therefore assessed separately. This method was crucial in

order to ensure that all issues covered within an article were analysed systematically to provide a granular level of insight into the press' coverage of the EU referendum. In total 22,329 messages were analysed across the total of 3,403 articles, with 19,285 of them in the 2,378 articles focused specifically on the referendum.

In the example, PRIME Research's analysts analysed 17 separate content units, or messages.

When analysing articles at a message level, the analysts collected information such as the placement or position of the content unit within the article, whether spokespeople, or originators, were quoted or not, and if so their name and affiliation. The placement coding included options such as, for example, headline, lead, text, image, caption. This allowed for analyses targeting only highly prominent parts of articles, such as headlines and images.

The originator variable allowed us to measure how often the different spokespeople groups, such as politicians, academics, experts, or business leaders were cited. As the spokespeople codes were message-specific, and logged each single spokesperson quoted in the coverage, the analysis was able to combine each originator of content with the rest of the message level variables: topic, tone, time, position.

**FIGURE A.2: AN ARTICLE DIVIDED INTO CONTENT UNITS.**



The topic field helped us capture what exactly each content unit was discussing: the Reuters Institute and PRIME worked together to identify a list of specific categories of issues and topics, such as: economy and business, sovereignty, migration and mobility, regulation, terrorism and security, as well as

more general themes, such as discussion about the vote and the vote's political implications, the campaigns' strategies, personalities taking sides. These macro-categories were then further developed to include a list of 99 sub-issues, available to perform analysis at a more granular level.

**FIGURE A.3: CODEBOOK**

<p><b>Sovereignty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UK sovereignty in general</li> <li>• UK Independence from the EU</li> <li>• UK Influence</li> <li>• Britain stronger in Europe</li> <li>• Britain stronger on its own</li> <li>• Commonwealth as an alternative</li> <li>• Britishness, British traditions, values, patriotism</li> <li>• Attitude towards EU institutions</li> <li>• Democracy of EU institutions</li> <li>• Global Europe / EU as global actor</li> <li>• EU enlargement</li> <li>• EU break-up</li> <li>• Greek crisis</li> <li>• North-South divide</li> <li>• European Citizens Initiative</li> <li>• EU Priorities 2020</li> </ul> <p><b>Economy / Business</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy / business in general</li> <li>• Jobs, employment</li> <li>• Prices (incl. inflation)</li> <li>• GDP</li> <li>• Exchange rate, currencies</li> <li>• Single market benefits</li> <li>• Export &amp; Import, trade</li> <li>• Stock markets</li> <li>• Risk of market shocks</li> <li>• Capital flight</li> <li>• Real estate &amp; Housing</li> <li>• NHS, health service</li> <li>• Financial industry</li> <li>• Transport, aviation</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Science, innovation</li> <li>• Other industries</li> <li>• UK contributions to the EU budget</li> <li>• Investment from the EU benefitting UK</li> <li>• EU growth, recovery</li> <li>• Global economic impact, impact on other EU states</li> </ul> <p><b>Migration / Mobility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration / mobility in general</li> <li>• Immigration in general benefits the UK</li> <li>• Immigration in general creates issues for the UK</li> <li>• Need of more control over immigration</li> <li>• Economic migration</li> <li>• Education-related migration</li> <li>• Migration and demographics</li> <li>• Calais border debate</li> <li>• Gibraltar/Spain border</li> <li>• Immigrant crisis, Asylum seekers</li> <li>• Free movement, Schengen</li> <li>• Ease of mobility for British people</li> <li>• Culture and languages</li> </ul>	<p><b>Terrorism and Security</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrorism / security in general</li> <li>• Brussels attacks</li> <li>• Paris attacks</li> <li>• Islamic State terrorism</li> <li>• Security to decrease with Brexit</li> <li>• Security won't change in case of Brexit</li> <li>• Security to increase with Brexit</li> <li>• Conflicts</li> </ul> <p><b>Regulations, policies and standards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulations, policies and standards in general</li> <li>• Economic regulations</li> <li>• Environment, climate</li> <li>• Labour rights</li> <li>• Women's rights</li> <li>• Tax system, fiscal regimes</li> <li>• SMEs</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Justice, rights</li> <li>• Science, innovation</li> <li>• Raw materials</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion around the vote / the campaign</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forecasts</li> <li>• Horse-race</li> <li>• Public debates</li> <li>• Political implications</li> <li>• Implications for the conservative party</li> <li>• Implications for Scotland</li> <li>• Government impartiality</li> <li>• Media impartiality</li> <li>• Legal implications</li> <li>• Follow-up vote / 2<sup>nd</sup> referendum</li> <li>• Reactions from abroad</li> <li>• Protests, demonstrations</li> <li>• Public interest</li> <li>• Legal cases</li> <li>• Studies/dossiers about Brexit</li> <li>• Campaign organisation</li> <li>• Remain campaign strategies &amp; communication</li> <li>• Leave campaign strategies &amp; communication</li> <li>• Project Fear</li> <li>• Project Fact</li> <li>• Project Fantasy</li> <li>• Hope vs. Fear</li> <li>• Discussion around the vote/campaign in general</li> </ul> <p><b>Personalities / public figures taking sides</b></p> <p><b>General codes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brexit in general</li> <li>• Pro-Europeism in general</li> <li>• Euroscepticism in general</li> </ul>
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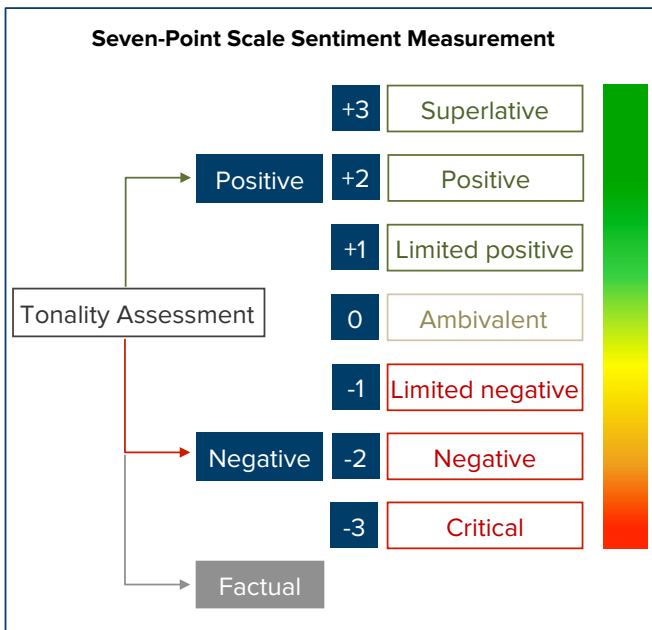
Additionally, PRIME Research's media analysts also logged any mention of David Cameron's EU deal, and how this was evaluated, and coded each mention of a selected group of key figures (e.g. the top UK politicians involved in the campaign, key institutions) whenever the coverage discussed them in reference to the EU referendum.

### A.3 TONE OF COVERAGE

The tone and time coding established the way in which the topics were used, distinguishing for example between negative economic forecasts, positive assessments of EU regulations in the present (i.e. during the campaign), and so forth.

The tone was measured according to a seven-point scale, with options ranging from very positive to very negative.

**FIGURE A.4: APPROACH TO MEASURING SENTIMENT**



Finally, the position variable allowed us to analyse whether each view, topic, or argument was used to promote one or the other of the two possible referendum outcomes. Once the stance in each message was analysed at the content unit level, the overall position of each article was determined by summing up and comparing the number of pro Leave and pro Remain arguments; an article was classified as in favour of Leave if pro Leave messages exceeded 60% of the total.

### A.4 NOTE ON HOW THE DATA ANALYSIS WAS CARRIED OUT

Article level analysis is used throughout most of this report, as the researchers felt that referring to the number of articles was more intuitive. However, when it came to detailed examination of the topics covered and the sentiment attributed to those, the researchers found message level analysis to be more robust, as it allowed us to capture the full range of issues tackled within each article, rather than just the main issue contained therein. We also did some focus only on the most prominent parts of the articles, such as headlines and images, as we attempted to establish what issues and positions were central to the UK press’s coverage of the referendum.

### A.5 REACH ANALYSIS

The ways in which reach and prominence have been calculated are listed in Chapter 4.

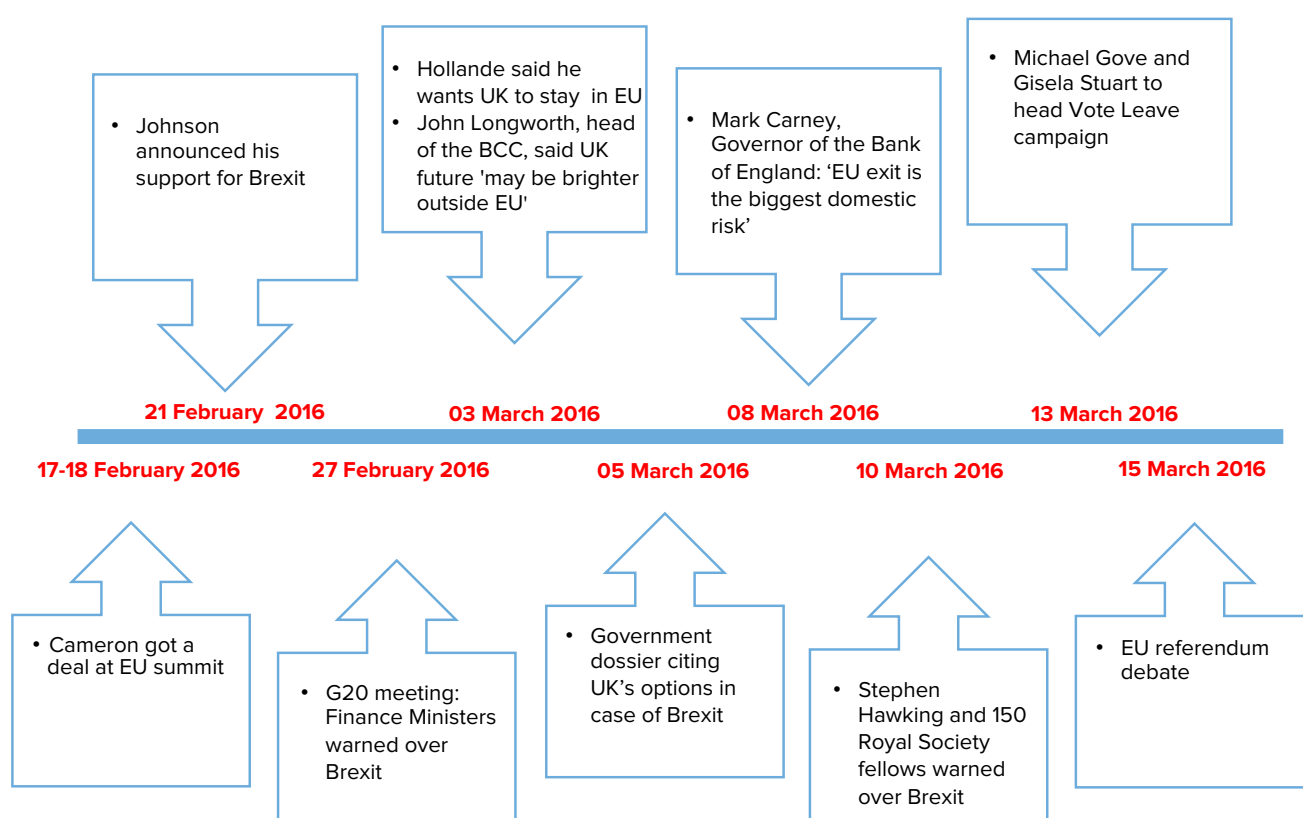
For completeness the figures used for the reach of each newspaper are as follows:

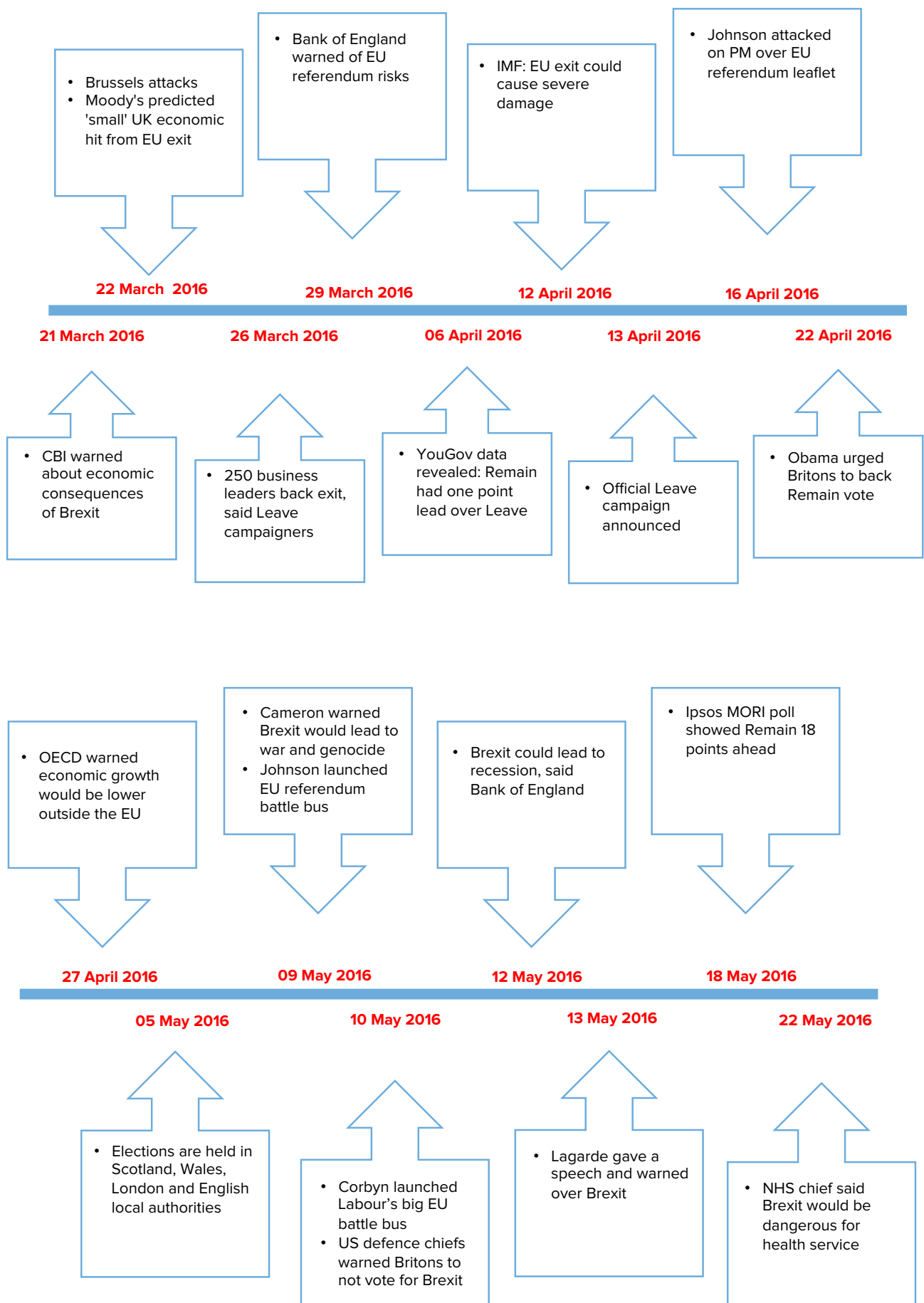
Title	Reach
Guardian	793,000
Daily Telegraph	1,150,000
Financial Times	296,000
The Times	1,014,000
Daily Mirror	1,953,000
Sun	4,664,000
Daily Star	838,000
Daily Mail	3,605,000
Daily Express	845,000

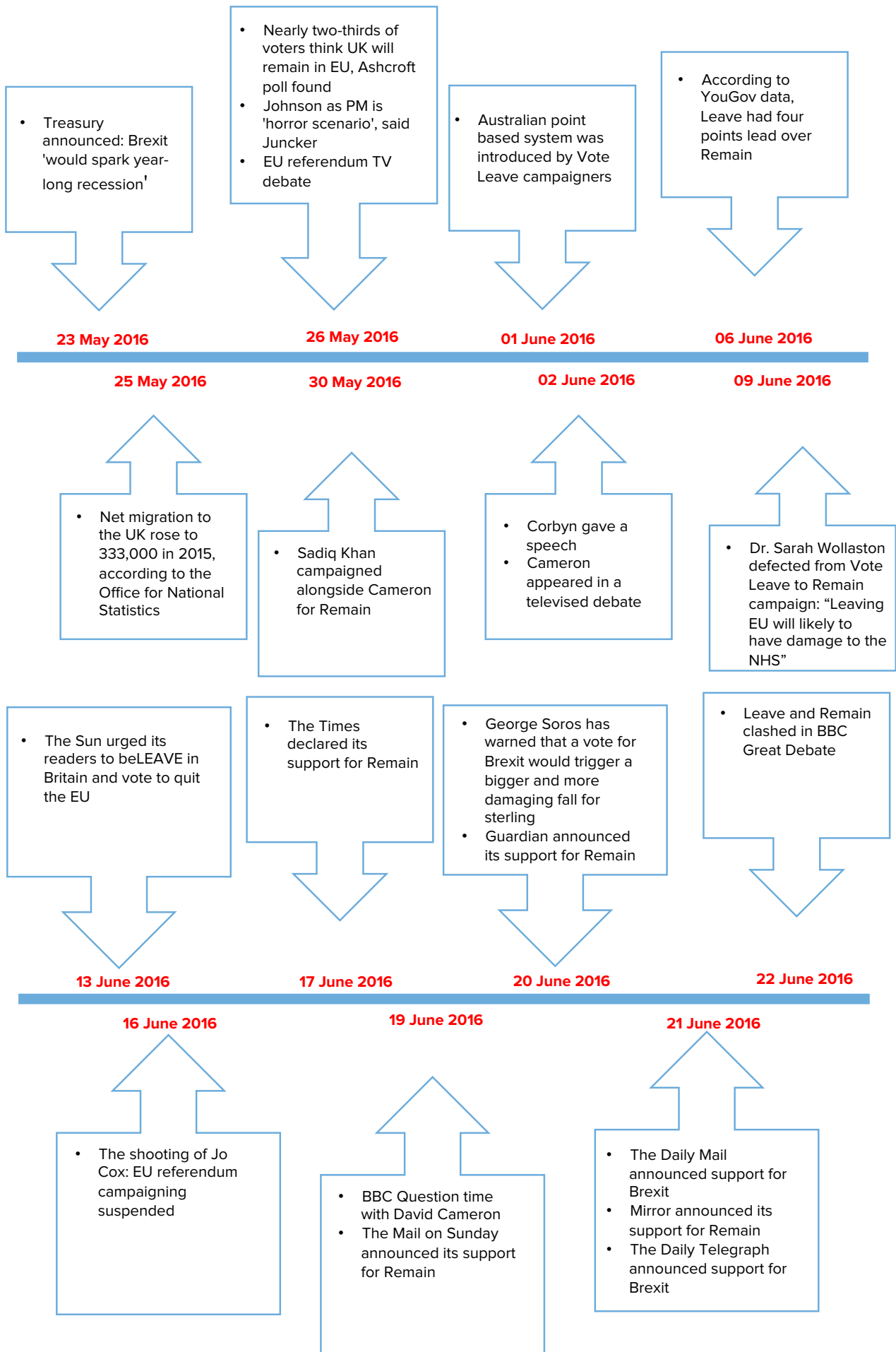


# APPENDIX B.

## TIMELINE







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David Levy, August 2016

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# RISJ PUBLICATIONS

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Digital Age*  
John Lloyd and Laura Toogood

*Reporting the EU: News, Media and the European Institutions*  
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