

# NEWSPAPER INFLUENCES ON VOTERS IN THE BREXIT REFERENDUM



Bachelor Thesis

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## **Abstract**

The United Kingdom voted on 23th of June, 2016 to leave the European Union in the so called Brexit referendum. This referendum was accompanied by exhaustive media campaigns that tried to convince their audiences to vote either “leave” or “remain”. The influences of news media on voters in the context of referendums were investigated. The content of the campaigns of four different newspapers was analysed and their focuses and positions were compared to their readership, which was assessed via an online survey. The data was used to see in how far agenda setting theory and framing effects are applicable on voters that are subject to newspaper campaigns in a referendum. In the comparison between what newspapers and their readers mentioned as important a significant difference was found. At the same time, it was possible to observe framing effects as the position of the newspapers towards the referendum was able to predict the voting behaviour of readers. These findings suggest that news media are able to influence the public in referendums via framing, but they did not seem to be able to affect the readers’ salient topics.

## **1. Introduction**

On the 23th of June, 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) held a referendum to leave the European Union (EU). This referendum was colloquially called the Brexit referendum, formed from the words “British” and “exit”. It is debated in how far citizens are competent enough to vote on such far reaching political issues (Curtice, 2013). In Ireland voters voted twice on the Lisbon treaty, once voting “no” and the other time voting “yes” even though the content of issue had not changed (Quinlan, 2012). It can therefore be questioned if it is wise to let individual voters decide at all on complex political issues such as EU membership referendums. However, in a democratic system which relies on the participation of its citizens in important political questions, instead of preventing participation, it can be attempted to inform the public as well as possible about the implications of their vote. Among the mass media, newspapers play a key role in informing their readers on political issues (De Vreese, 2004). However, the way and the attitude in which media report can have adverse effects on their readership. Modern media have influence over the public opinion with their agenda setting (McCombs, 2002) and framing effects can affect the attitudes towards European integration (De Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2011). To what extend do media then influence votes in national referendums? It has been shown that campaign intensity can improve voter competence (Hobolt, 2005) in referendum votes. Furthermore, the tone and bias of a campaign can affect attitudes towards European integration (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; De Vreese et al., 2011). Still, research on media campaign effects on referendums exists only scarcely (Wirth et al., 2010) and focuses were not set on the outcome of the referendum but for instance on the effects referendum campaigns had on the evaluation of the incumbent politicians (De Vreese, 2004). Therefore, in order to better understand the effects media has on citizens during a referendum campaign, more insights into the “pictures in [their] heads” would be valuable (McCombs, 2002). These “pictures” that are created by the mass media are quite understood for elections, so a step forward in understanding the role of media in referendums would be to investigate in how far these models are applicable to referendums (Wirth et al., 2010). This thesis will attempt to apply the theoretical models that explain the influences of media in elections on a referendum. In particular the applicability of the agenda setting and framing for referendums will be put to the test. As such, insight into how far newspapers can direct voters’ awareness of issues related to contemporary referendums will be gained, along with further understating into how mass media can influence voters.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Theories**

#### **2.1.1 Agenda Setting**

The main theory of this thesis is the Agenda-Setting theory. Agenda-Setting effects were first described by McCombs & Shaw (1972) in their Chapel Hill study. In this study, a comparison was drawn for voters in the 1968 presidential election between what they said were key issues in the presidential campaign and the actual content the mass media reported. The study showed that there is a correlation between the news and the voters on what the key issues in the presidential election were (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). These results were replicated for the 1976 presidential election as well (Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981). What these studies showed is that citizens that were exposed to news would align their key issues and arguments for a certain course of action with what the news reported. The reason for that is that the media is the primary source for “pictures in our head” (McCombs, 2002) and it connects the public with things that are usually outside of the public’s reach or sight. Therefore, the priorities that the media set on what they choose to report on will affect the facts (be they true or false) a citizen knows about the “outside” world, that is, the world that exists outside of the direct interaction of the individual citizen. Therefore, an issue that the media report on will become an issue in the mind of the citizen. Depending on what the news want to tell the public, they can shape these “pictures in our head” by weighting the coverage of different issues. For example, if an editor of news media believes that migration is a more important issue than the economy, he or she can choose to report very often on migration and very little on the economy. This will cause the public also to think more about migration. This weighting for space in the media of different topics is the “agenda”. Agenda setting therefore describes that the public will think only about topics that are out of their direct sphere when the news inform them about it, which they do based on their current agenda. Almost all research regarding the agenda setting theory was conducted on elections. Wirth et al. (2010) investigated in how far agenda setting theory works on referendums on the basis of a 2006 referendum on asylum policy in Switzerland. However, they had mixed results in their study. While they were able to show a correlation between the arguments of the media and the arguments of people with high media reliance that belonged to the pro-camp, this relationship could not be found for people with lower media reliance or for people on the contra-camp (Wirth et al., 2010). Furthermore, they argued that in this particular referendum the arguments of the pro-camp preceded the arguments of the media, and not the other way around which is what agenda setting theory would suggest.

### **2.1.2 Priming**

Priming theory is a part of the Agenda Setting theory. While agenda setting focuses on the cognitive aspects of media agendas, priming focuses on the affective influence (McCombs, 2002). This means that, while agenda setting is describing how the weighting of issues will be reflected in the public's mind, priming is concerned with what the public does with the pictures in their head. In its classical sense it states that people evaluate political leaders based on their performance on issues that are on the mind of the people and also that new information on the political leader can change the perception of the people (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In a series of experiments Iyengar and Kinder (1987) showed that the evaluation of the incumbent president was dependent on the issues the media reported on. During the Gulf War in 1991, president Bush Sr. was evaluated based on warfare abilities. A year later the focus of the news shifted towards the state of the American economy and Bush Sr's approval was then evaluated based on his economic abilities. News media therefore make up "a key source of information and cues to citizens" (De Vreese, 2004) and as such, "citizens rely upon the agenda of salient objects and attributes in their minds, the agenda that is shaped to a considerable degree by the mass media" (McCombs, 2002). This means that people evaluate political choices based on what the media tells about them. As citizens cannot pay attention to all existing information, they use the bits of information they get and then use their intuition to make choices in a vote (McCombs, 2002). The sources of these bits of information are media channels. As such, the media can control which information they want to broadcast and therefore what information citizens use for their decision making. "By calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are judged" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Put differently, people evaluate candidates based on the criteria that the news decides to focus on. The effect of media priming is dependent on the recency and intensity of the event (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Klinger, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007). Priming effects fade over time and the effect is also weaker if news reports on a topic only happen occasionally. Most research on priming effects focuses on the way citizens evaluate violence in the media or the effects of political scandals like the Clinton affair or the Iran-Contra affair (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007). However, De Vreese (2004) showed on the basis of the 2000 Danish referendum on joining the Eurozone that media priming also occurs in referendum votes (De Vreese, 2004). In this case approval ratings of the incumbent government who were on the "YES" camp in that referendum decreased as media reports about the "NO" campaign intensified.

### **2.1.3 Framing**

Positive reporting on topics can be the result of *framing* effects, where media report news from a certain point of view to follow an agenda or a certain narrative (De Vreese et al., 2011). Framing occurs when information is communicated in a way that promotes a certain interpretation or course of action. A series of experiments undertaken by Tversky & Kahneman in 1985 showed that depending on the formulation of a problem, people would change their behaviour from a risk-averse strategy towards a risk-taking strategy. Embedded in a scenario of an outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, Participants were asked what they would prefer between the options of program A, in which 200 people are saved, or program B, in which there is a 1/3 probability that 600 people are saved and a 2/3 probability that no people will be saved. In another question they were then asked to decide between program C in which 400 people will die and program D, in which there is a 1/3 chance that nobody will die and a 2/3 chance that 600 people will die. While in the first decision between programs A and B most participants choose the risk-averse strategy of A, in the second decision between programs C and D the majority took the risk-taking strategy of D. (Tversky & Kahneman, 1985). This showed that, despite both scenarios being very similar, the different wording would change the behaviour of the participants. This was extended to the media in an experiment where two groups of people were shown different news stories about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The first story revolved around a free-speech frame in which it was stressed that KKK members should be able to gather and hold rallies as part of their rights, the second story was set around a public-order frame in which the focus lied on potential disorder and violence through the rallies (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Afterwards the groups of participants were asked on their perception of the KKK and members of the free-speech frame expressed a somewhat more positive feeling towards the KKK than the members of the public-order frame. This shows that media can affect the way people think about addressed topics by their choice of formulations and words. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993). For the Brexit referendum, this means that the way newspapers report about each of the possible options of choice for the voters - “leave” and “remain” – may affect their readers in their voting choice. As such, it can to some extent be expected that newspapers that report more positively on European integration will influence readers to also be more positive towards European integration, which will then cause them to vote in that spirit to stay in the Union, while newspapers that report negatively on European integration in turn will cause readers to vote in favor of leaving the Union. A precedent for that exists in a study by De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006). In their study about changes in the public opinion towards the

enlargement of the EU, citizens that were subject to information with a positive tone expressed subsequently more positivity towards a European enlargement (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006).

#### **2.1.4 Voter Competence**

Voter competence deals with the effects of information on the voting behavior of voters. In referendums, voter competence is defined as the ability of voters to vote for the alternative that is closest to their own preferences (Hobolt, 2007). At the example of the Brexit referendum, this means that a voter that is intrinsically in favor of leaving the EU will also vote “leave” and will not vote “remain”. The reason why a person would vote “remain” even though they are actually in favor of leaving is a lack of information. It is possible that they do not know their own true position if they are not well informed about the referendum at hand. Instead, they will take “cues” to determine their vote. There are a number of cues that were identified by Hobolt (2007) on the basis of the Norwegian referendum on joining the EU in 1994. The largest cues in that referendum were partisanship of the national parties and the voters’ attitude towards the EU. This means that voters would determine their vote either on the basis of their own knowledge, but if they lacked that they would infer their choice either by looking at the endorsements of their party or by drawing onto their general attitude towards the EU (Hobolt, 2007). Therefore, voter competence is an important factor when trying to understand how voters make their choices. Furthermore, it can even be argued that a high voter competence is good for the democratic process because voters are making a choice that reflects their true position is more democratic. It is thus necessary to find out which factors raise or lower the competence of voters. One aspect of that is the news coverage. “News coverage of the referendum issue is a good indicator of the information available to the citizens” (Hobolt, 2005). This ties into the issue of the Brexit at hand as it might be possible to connect and reinforce this relationship between the competence of the voters and the intensity of the campaign.

#### **2.2 Hypotheses**

Based on the aforementioned theories, three hypotheses are formulated. The first hypothesis is based on the agenda setting theory and attempts to replicate the findings by McCombs and Shaw (1972) and others. It has to be noted that the research that led to the formulation of the agenda setting theory was conducted on elections, not on referendums. This thesis therefore attempts to expand the scope of the agenda setting theory by applying it on a

referendum. The first hypothesis (H1) states that *“If a newspaper covers an issue related to the Brexit referendum more extensively, their readers will associate the referendum more strongly with this issue.”* If the thesis finds evidence to support this hypothesis, it could be seen as a step towards integrating the agenda setting theory on research on referendums. The second hypothesis is based on the findings of Hobolt (2005, 2007) on voter competence. In her research she noted that an increase in the intensity of the news coverage would also increase the voter competence (Hobolt, 2005). Therefore (H2), *“If a newspaper covers the Brexit referendum more extensively, readers will feel more competent to make their choice in this referendum.”*

The third hypothesis is based on the theory of framing. It states that (H3), *“If a newspaper covers arguments in favour of a Brexit more often, their readers will more often report voting intentions in favour of a Brexit.”* While there is more research on framing in referendums than on agenda setting theory, a positive outcome of this hypothesis would reinforce the findings of De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) and would facilitate more discussion of the role of media framing in referendums.

### **3. Methods**

Two data sources were used and compared to assess the effects of newspapers on the reader. On the one hand, an online survey was handed out to residents of the UK that were eligible to vote in the referendum. The other source was a content analysis of 4 newspapers that reported on the Brexit referendum. The survey was open from the 30<sup>th</sup> of April until the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2016. This method was chosen as it was expected that the referendum was high on the minds with the 7<sup>th</sup> of May being the last date of registration for voters. Furthermore, it offered the possibility to create a survey tailored to the needs of this research, including respondents' voting behaviour in the referendum, their political interest, their reasons for their choice of voting and the newspapers they read. Existing sources did not contain all these features at once. The content analysis of different newspapers was used to look into what and how newspapers reported on the referendum. The newspapers that were investigated were The Daily Mail, The Mirror, The Sun and The Guardian. The Daily Mail, The Mirror and The Sun were chosen as they are among the biggest newspapers in the UK ("Monthly reach of national newspapers and their websites in the United Kingdom (UK) from April 2015 to March 2016) (in 1,000 individuals)," 2016). The Guardian was also added as a large share of the respondents of the survey indicated that they are reading this particular newspaper. The content analysis included all articles of the respective newspapers between the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April and the 6<sup>th</sup> of May that reported on the referendum.

### **3.1 Survey**

The survey was conducted between the 30<sup>th</sup> of April and the 6<sup>th</sup> of May. It contained a total of 10 questions and was constructed on the website surveymonkey.com. The first set of questions asked for the respondents' media behaviour, in particular how much time they spend on informing themselves, which media they use to do that and which newspapers they read. The second set of questions asked for their voting behaviour in the referendum, as well as their partisanship by asking for which party they would vote for if the general election was held next Sunday. The third set of questions asked for the topics the respondents connected with the referendum. The questions "What are the advantages of leaving the European Union?" and "What are the disadvantages of leaving the European Union?" were posed to have respondents reflect on which topics they consider important and if they are pro- or contra leaving the Union. The fourth set was used to assess the political interest by giving statements like "I frequently discuss local politics with my family or friends" and offered answers in a 5 point Likert scale. Lastly miscellaneous questions for age and gender were included. Appendix 2 shows the form in which respondents saw the questionnaire.

The survey was distributed via email, social media and friends, family, and acquaintances of the author. Facebook and reddit were the main channels for social media distribution.

Facebook and reddit are both large social media networks. Reddit, calling itself "the frontpage of the internet", is a massive internet forum for all kinds of subjects. The survey was posted on various boards, sub forums and also sent to individual users. The distribution email can be found in Appendix 8 and was sent to English police departments, the organisation Simultaneous Policy (Simpol), the European Association of Teachers (AEDE) and British Mensa. The author also used all private contacts to people living in the UK and urged them to fill in and share the survey.

### **3.2 Content Analysis**

Content analysis was conducted on four newspapers in the UK. These newspapers are The Daily Mail, The Sun, The Guardian and the Daily Mirror, as they reach between 11 and 18 million individuals per month through both their print and online format each ("Monthly reach of national newspapers and their websites in the United Kingdom (UK) from April 2015 to March 2016) (in 1,000 individuals)," 2016). For each newspaper, 2 weeks' worth of articles that are available in the respective online archives were analysed. A total of 690 articles was analysed this way. As each archive was organized differently, different selection methods

had to be used. The Sun and The Guardian marked their articles according to the topics they dealt with. Therefore, all articles that The Sun marked as dealing with “Brexit” and “EU Referendum” were assessed. Similarly to that, all articles under the rubric “Brexit” were coded for the Guardian. As the Daily Mail and the Daily Mirror did not categorize their articles, their articles were filtered differently. For the Daily Mail, all articles that included either the keyword “Brexit” or a combination of the words “EU” and “Poll” or “Referendum” in the title were examined. For the Daily Mirror all articles that mentioned the word “Brexit” either in the title or in the text were assessed.

The articles themselves were coded under two different aspects. The first aspect was which topics the article addressed with regards to the referendum. This resulted in a nominal list of issues that were addressed by the newspapers that could be compared against the list provided by the survey. This list contained the following general topics: Economy, Education, EU-Negative, EU-Positive, Finance, Future, Healthcare, Influence, Jobs, Migration, Military, Pensions, Rights, Science, Security, Sovereignty, Trade, Travel and Turkey. While some of these issues are somewhat connected, articles often dealt with them individually. The difference between economy and finance here is that articles are coded as “Finance” if they deal with effects on the British Pound or the amount of money the UK is paying to the EU, whereas “Economy” articles are focussed on changes in GDP or wages. A difference between these topics can be illustrated at the example of two articles. The Mirrors’ article “EU referendum doubts have already hurt Britain’s economy warns damning report by the OECD” which was published on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June lays out the OECD article mentioned in the title and explains that their forecast estimates an 8% cut in GDP for the UK until 2030 (Bloom, 2016b). This article, as it dealt primarily with the future of the GDP and the economy of the country, was subsequently coded as an article that laid its focus on “Economy”. On the other hand, “Brexit worries keep sterling pinned down to near 2-week lows” is an article that deals with the finance as its main focus is on the effects of the Brexit referendum on the finance market (“Brexit worries keep sterling pinned down to near 2-week lows,” 2016). The topics EU-Negative and EU-positive were used for articles that focussed on spirits and emotions towards the EU to influence readers. EU-Negative articles often described that the EU lacks accountability, legitimacy and democratic processes. On the other hand, EU-Positive articles appealed to a European spirit and European values that need to be preserved by staying in the Union, as well as mentioning the peace the EU brought. “Future” refers to articles that deal with the consequences of leaving or remaining in the EU for future generations. “Influence” means articles that argue how a decision affects the influence the UK has in the EU and the world and “Sovereignty” describes articles that argue how the EU

influences the UK. The topic “Turkey” refers to articles that look at the possible ascension of Turkey to a EU memberstate.

<b>ECONOMY</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>EU-NEGATIVE</b>	<b>EU-POSITIVE</b>	<b>FINANCE</b>
Effects on overall GDP and businesses.	Impact on Schools or Universities or their funding.	Highlighting of democratic deficits in the EU,	Focus on benefits the EU gives, peace and appeals to European spirit	Effects on the stock markets, financing and national household.
<b>FUTURE</b>	<b>HEALTHCARE</b>	<b>INFLUENCE</b>	<b>JOBS</b>	<b>MIGRATION</b>
Argues how Brexit affects future generations	Articles that deal with the National Health Services (NHS) and their funding	Effects on the influence the UK has on the EU and the world.	Loss and creation of jobs.	How to deal with immigrants, and how to solve the migration crisis.
<b>MILITARY</b>	<b>PENSIONS</b>	<b>RIGHTS</b>	<b>SCIENCE</b>	<b>SOVEREIGNTY</b>
How the Brexit affects UK national military and talks about a EU army.	Effects of Brexit on the funding of the pension funds.	Effects on Human Rights, worker and LGBT rights	Funding for science and participation in European research programs	How the EU and the world influences the UK.
<b>TRADE</b>	<b>TRAVEL</b>	<b>TURKEY</b>		
How the Brexit affects trade deals, relations and contracts.	Freedom of travel and VISA obligations.	On the ascension of Turkey as a EU memberstate		

Table 1: Coding scheme for each of the 18 topics that the news reported on over the analysed period of 2 weeks.

A single article could have multiple topics that it addressed. The Daily Mail reported on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May on the possibility of rising costs for pensioners if the UK were to stay in the EU (Martin, Hyde, & Lythe, 2016). As such, this article deals primarily with pensions. However, the argument made on why the pensions would rise was an economic one, as it was claimed that the loss in pensions would be a result of the economic turmoil that the UK would be facing after a Brexit (Martin et al., 2016). Therefore, this article also deals with the economy. As such it was then coded as dealing with both the economy and the pensions. It has to be noted that due to the lack of a weighting scheme this article contributed equally to the number of articles that mentioned “pensions” as it did to the topic “economy”, even though it primarily dealt with pensions and not the economy. However, this thesis argues that readers would think about both topics when reading this article, as the line of thought followed from the economy to the pensions. On the other hand, an article could deal with the referendum

while not mentioning any distinct topics. Articles that fall under this are for instance ones that primarily deal with party politics and only mention the referendum as a circumstance. A concrete example is an article from the 31<sup>st</sup> of May in which it was criticised that Prime Minister David Cameron would campaign together with London Mayor Sadiq Khan in an event. The criticism was because the two politicians come from different parties, Khan belonging to Labour and Cameron to the Conservatives, and a shadow chancellor claimed that this would hurt the labour party (Mason, 2016).

The second focus lied on the general position the article had with regards to the referendum. Each article was coded either as “remain”, “leave” or “neutral”. This was used to get a general position for each newspaper. Articles were coded as “remain” or “leave” if they would defend the respective campaign positions in their articles with more ore more compelling arguments than the other side. The above mentioned example of the Daily Mail’s article about pension was coded as “leave”, as the focus of the article was on defending the possibility of a Brexit even though it was claimed that it would raise pensions (Martin et al., 2016). As such, much space was given to expert that criticised the assessment of the claim that stated that a Brexit would increase the pensions and the article highlighted instead how pensions could rise even without a Brexit. Another example for an article that was coded as “leave” was an article in the Daily Mail published on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May titled “‘My disallowed mother missed out on SIX bungalows because immigrants jump the council house queue’: Brexit voter reveals why she launched her furious outburst during EU referendum TV debate” which advocated to vote “leave” so migrants would not take away housing from nationals (Robinson, 2016). On the other side, an article coded as “remain” is exemplified in the article “A vote to leave the EU could hurt house prices for years” in the Daily Mirror. This article predicted “years of pain for the property market” based on findings of experts and thus painted a dire picture of the future for the housing market in case of a Brexit (Andrews & Williams, 2016). Neutral articles were articles that either gave equal space to both sides without drafting a conclusion, articles that reported facts without going into an interpretation or articles that dealt with the referendum as context like the previously mentioned example of Cameron and Khan campaigning together or the article that deal with the effect of the Brexit on the sterling (“Brexit worries keep sterling pinned down to near 2-week lows,” 2016; Mason, 2016).

## **4. Results & Discussion**

### **4.1 Survey**

A total of 37 people responded to the survey. 53% of respondents were female, 47% male and the average age was 46 years, with the youngest respondent being 18 and the oldest

69. The most popular newspaper was The Guardian with 19 readers, followed by the Daily Mail with 5 readers. The least popular newspapers were The Sun with 3 readers and The Daily Mirror with 2 readers. 3 people did not read any newspapers and the remaining read other newspapers that were not covered by the content analysis like The Times or Metro. Regarding the topics mentioned by the readers, each reader named on average 3,3 topics, reaching from at least 1 to a maximum of 10. Political interest averaged 3,3 on a 5 point scale, reaching from 2 to 4,125. Of the respondents, 15 people stated they would vote for the Labour party, 8 for the Conservative party and 7 for the Liberal party. In the referendum voting behaviour was lopsided towards “remain” with 31 people indicating they would choose this option. Four people indicated they would vote “leave” and two people did not know at the time of the survey.

All in all the data acquired through the survey has to be used with caution as the sample is vastly unrepresentative. A representative sample with a 5% margin of error would require a size of almost 400 respondents which is not at all achieved with the response rate.

Furthermore, the distribution of the prospected voting behaviour in the referendum and their readership is also not representative of what would have been expected. Of the four newspapers that were investigated, The Guardian was by far the one with the lowest circulation, yet it is the highest read newspaper among the respondents. Furthermore, 31 of the respondents indicated that they would be voting “remain” which is highly disproportional and not in line with other surveys or the eventual outcome of the referendum.

Reasons for this could be that most respondents were either young or well educated, both demographics being high among “remain” voters ("The area and demographics where the Brexit vote was won," 2016). The reason these people were reached could be the demographics of the social media sites that were used to distribute the survey. The main demographic of reddit for instance is 18 to 27 year olds (Duggan & Smith, 2013).

Furthermore, many of the authors' contacts were well educated.

## **4.2 Content Analysis**

The content analysis was used to determine how intensive the coverage of the referendum was, which topics were covered by the newspapers and which position the newspapers assumed. To identify the intensity of the coverage for each day the number of articles dealing with the EU referendum were counted. This provided the intensity of the news coverage on the referendum on that day.

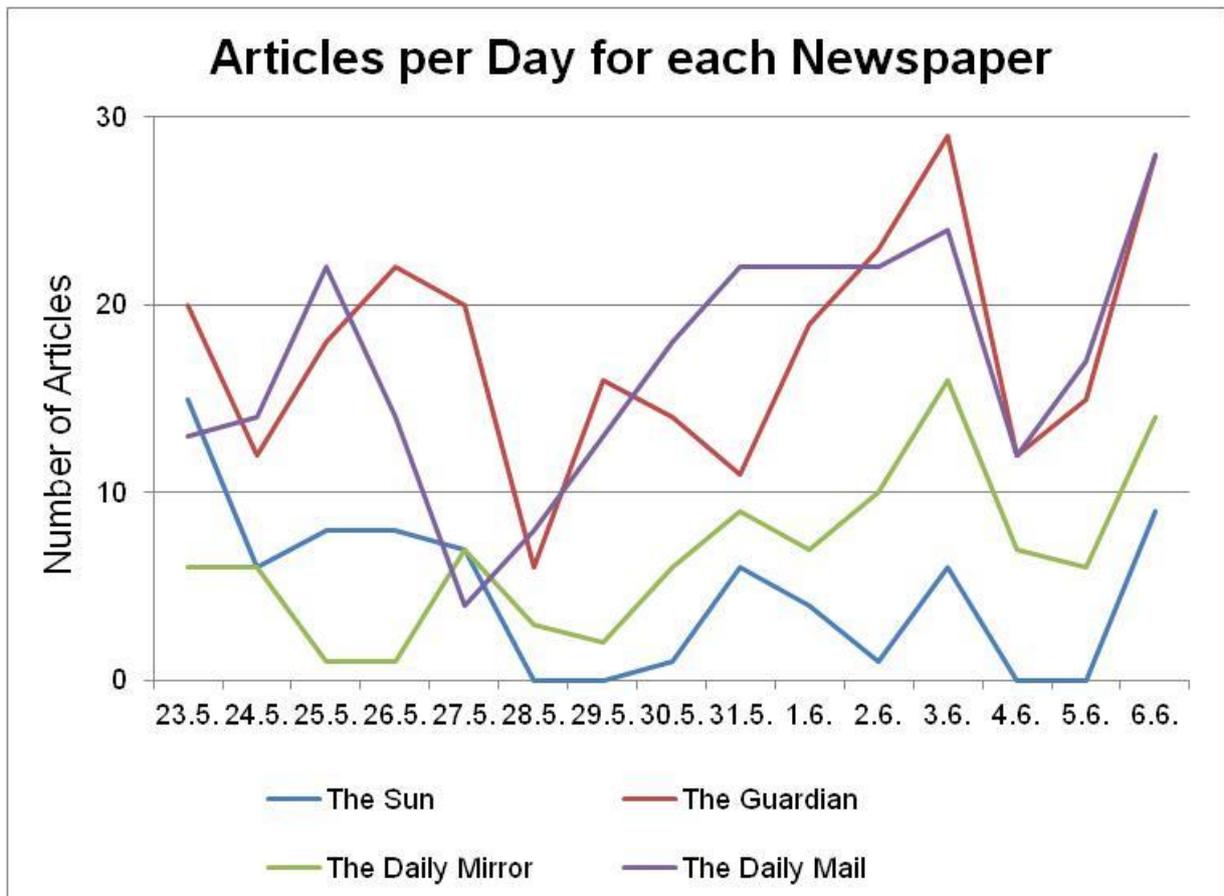


Figure 1: Number of articles per day for the four newspapers analysed.

Figure 1 shows how articles each newspaper published per day. It can be seen that the Guardian and the Daily Mail published the most articles. The Guardian had 254 articles and the Daily Mail 231. This is followed by the Daily Mirror with 92 articles. The least amount of 65 articles was published by The Sun. A reason for The Sun publishing the least amount of articles is that they did not publish any articles over the weekend. A total amount of 690 articles were examined over the entire duration. A noticeable trend is that all newspapers published very few articles over the weekends, which can be seen in the dips on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May and the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> June. Instead, the amount of articles was highest on Mondays, which are the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of May and the 6<sup>th</sup> of June. A reason for this trend could be that scientific and expert reports were mostly published under the week which reduced the newsworthy events on weekends. Furthermore, weekend editions of the newspapers might have different focuses than editions during the week and editors decide to focus less on heavy topics such as politics on the days off. Alternatively this trend could be completely incidental for these weeks. The overall number of articles increased in the second week from 30<sup>th</sup> of May to 5<sup>th</sup> of June for all newspapers except for the Sun.

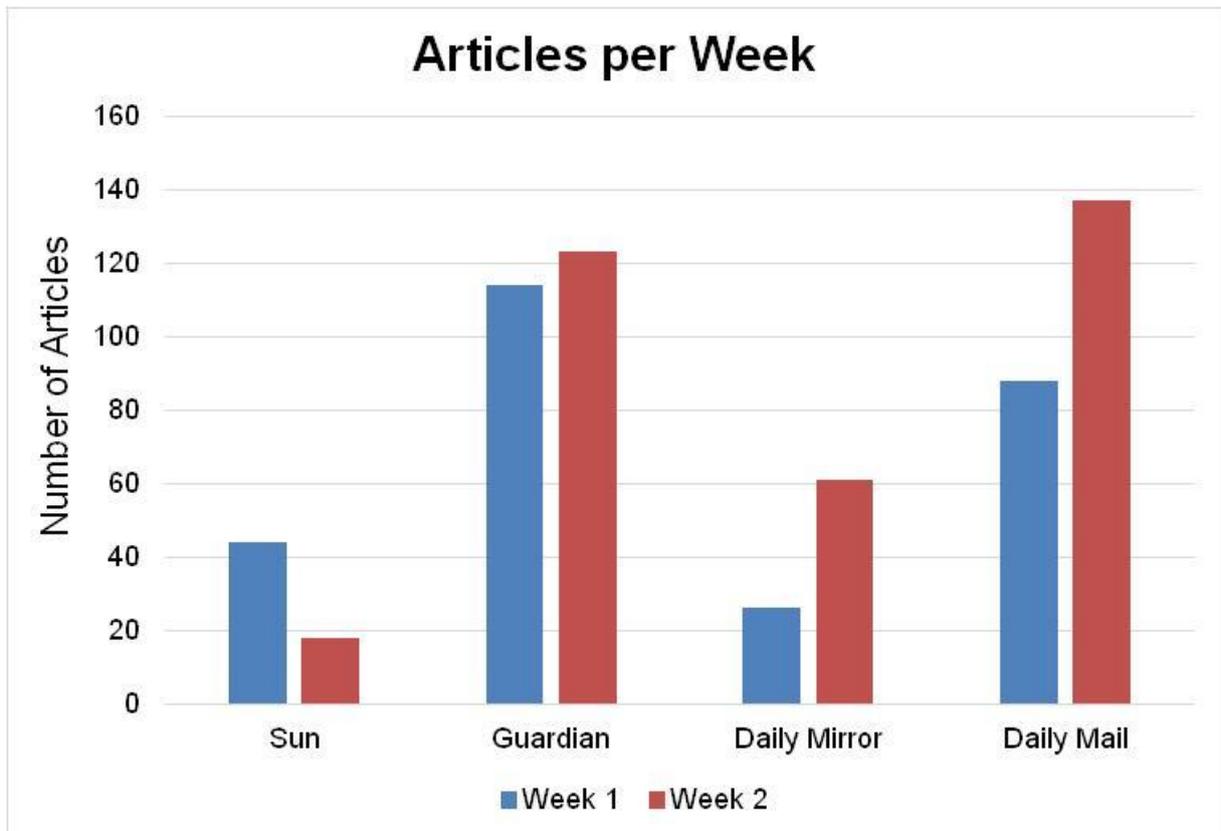
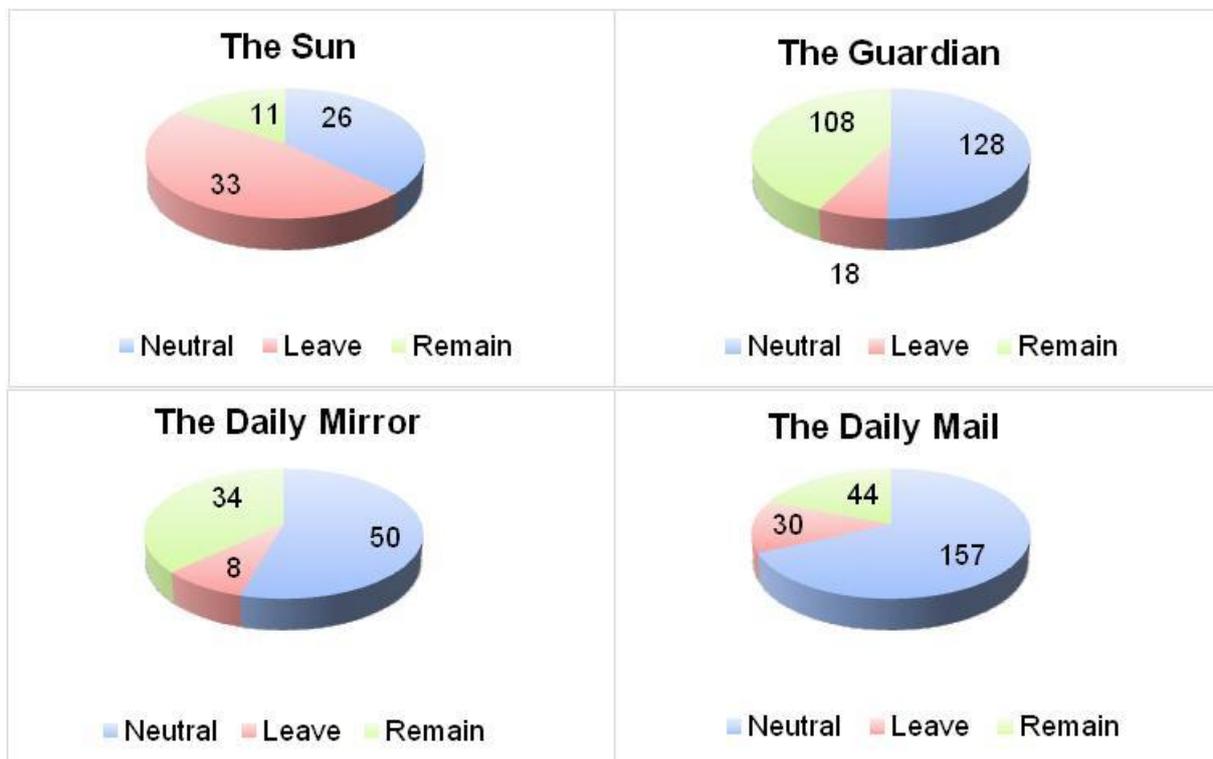


Figure 2: The amount of articles per week for each newspaper. Week 1 covers the week from Monday the 23<sup>th</sup> of May to Sunday the 29<sup>th</sup> of May. Week 2 covers the week from Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> of May to Sunday the 5<sup>th</sup> of June. The data for Monday the 6<sup>th</sup> of June was not used in this figure.

This can be seen more clearly in figure 2. While the Daily Mirror and the Daily Mail see a substantial increase in articles between the two weeks, the Guardian only sees a slight increase while the Sun sees a large decrease. This increase in the number of articles was also observed in other studies (Hobolt, 2005). The reason for this is that, the closer the referendum draws, the more newsworthy it becomes. It is thus expected that, if the content analysis were to be continued for a longer period of time, that the number of articles would also increase until the referendum was held. Figures 3 to 6 show the position of each of the newspapers.



Figures 3-6: The distribution of articles and their positions for each newspaper in the Brexit referendum. The colour green shows the articles that were in favour of “remain”, red shows the articles that were in favour of “leave” and blue shows the articles that were neutral.

It can be seen that the newspaper most in favour of staying in the EU was The Guardian. In general The Guardian featured many articles and editorials that highlighted positive aspects of the EU, at the same time criticising the overall media behaviour towards the campaigns and often featuring ironic or sarcastic articles to poke fun at positions of the leave campaign. They also featured a series “What has the EU ever done for ...?” which highlighted how the EU subsidized radio or television. The Mirror was also very positive about the EU. However, the Mirror used less space on articles that portrait a good picture of the EU but instead often argued that the EU protects workers’ rights and also stressed the advantages of free travel. The Daily Mail was the most neutral of the newspapers, often giving both sides of an argument in many articles. They also reported a lot on polls on the referendum as well as connecting these polls to stock market changes of the pound which netted them a large amount of articles coded as “neutral” as they did not really take any position but merely presented the data and brought it in context with previous polls. The Sun was the newspaper that was most in favour of leaving the EU. As mentioned before, many articles and editorials dealt with the democratic process of the EU and argued against the accountability and legitimacy of the EU. They also used dismissive tones when talking about arguments provided by the “remain” site often using votes such as “allegedly” or immediately adding

comments of Brexit campaigners when presenting them.

While similar studies have not yet been published, the findings of this content analysis seem to be close to similar analysis. According to interim findings of a study conducted by the Reuters institute for the Study of Journalism on the position of newspapers, The Guardian and The Daily Mirror were among the pro-remain newspapers, while The Sun and The Daily Mail were among the pro-leave newspapers ("Study shows that majority of press coverage in EU referendum campaign was heavily skewed in favour of Brexit in first two months of campaign," 2016). This is to some extent in line with the findings of this thesis, as the positions for The Sun, The Daily Mirror and The Guardian are the same. The Daily Mail however seemed to be more neutral in the methodology of this analysis.

### **4.3 Hypotheses testing**

In the following, the hypotheses that were mentioned previously will be discussed. Each hypothesis will be looked at individually.

#### **4.3.1 Hypothesis 1**

**“If a newspaper covers an issue related to the Brexit referendum more extensively, their readers will associate the referendum more strongly with this issue.”**

To test the first hypothesis, “If a newspaper covers an issue related to the Brexit referendum more extensively, their readers will associate the referendum more strongly with this issue”, it is important to see which topics the newspapers reported on.

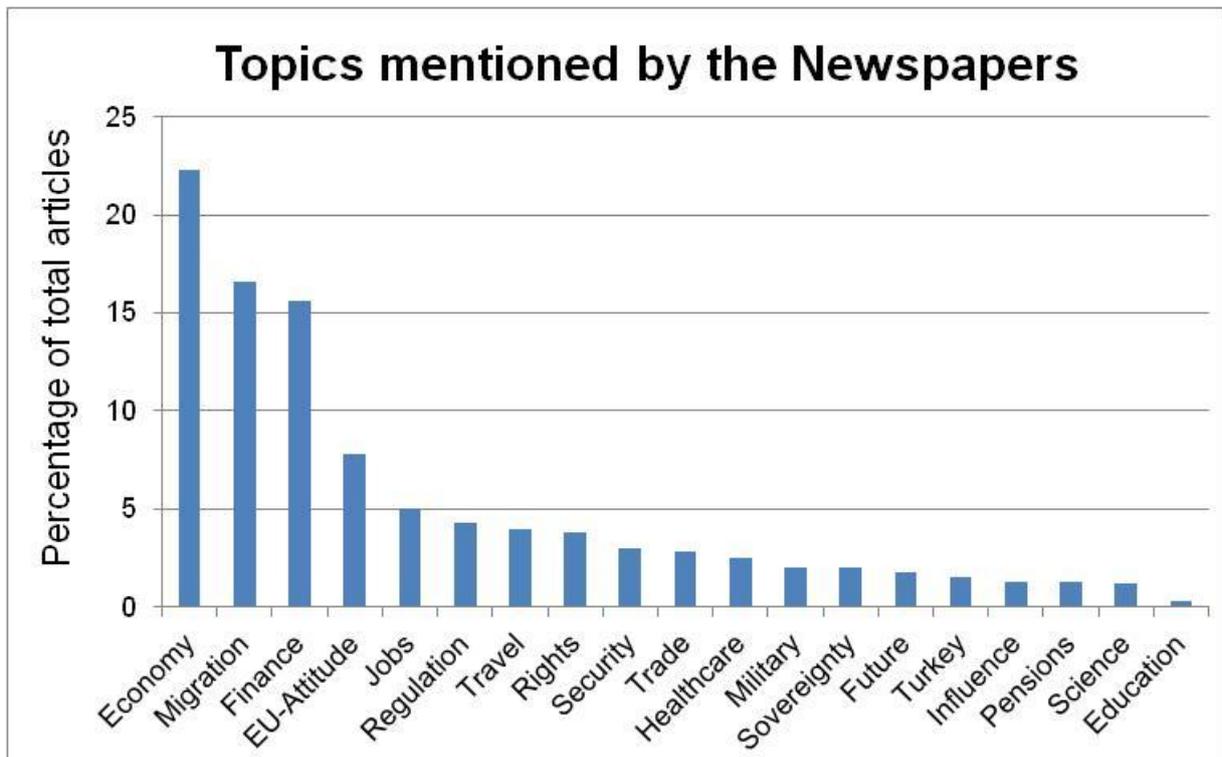


Figure 7: The percentage of all topics that the four analysed newspapers reported on in the time from the 23<sup>th</sup> of May to the 6<sup>th</sup> of April.

Figure 7 shows that the most prevalent topics for the newspapers were the Economy, Migration and Finance. These topics were featured in more than 15% of all articles on the referendum each, accounting for a total of 55% of all articles. They were followed by arguments based on the attitude towards the EU and Jobs which accounted for 7,5% and 5% of articles respectively. All other topics were mentioned in less than 5% of articles individually. It is important to determine if there was a difference between the newspapers in what they reported on. If the issues mentioned by the newspapers are homogenous the total percentage of what the newspapers reported on could be compared to the total percentage of what the readers deemed important and a differentiation based on newspapers would not be necessary. However, if there was a difference in what the newspapers report on then it would be necessary to compare each newspaper with its readers separately.

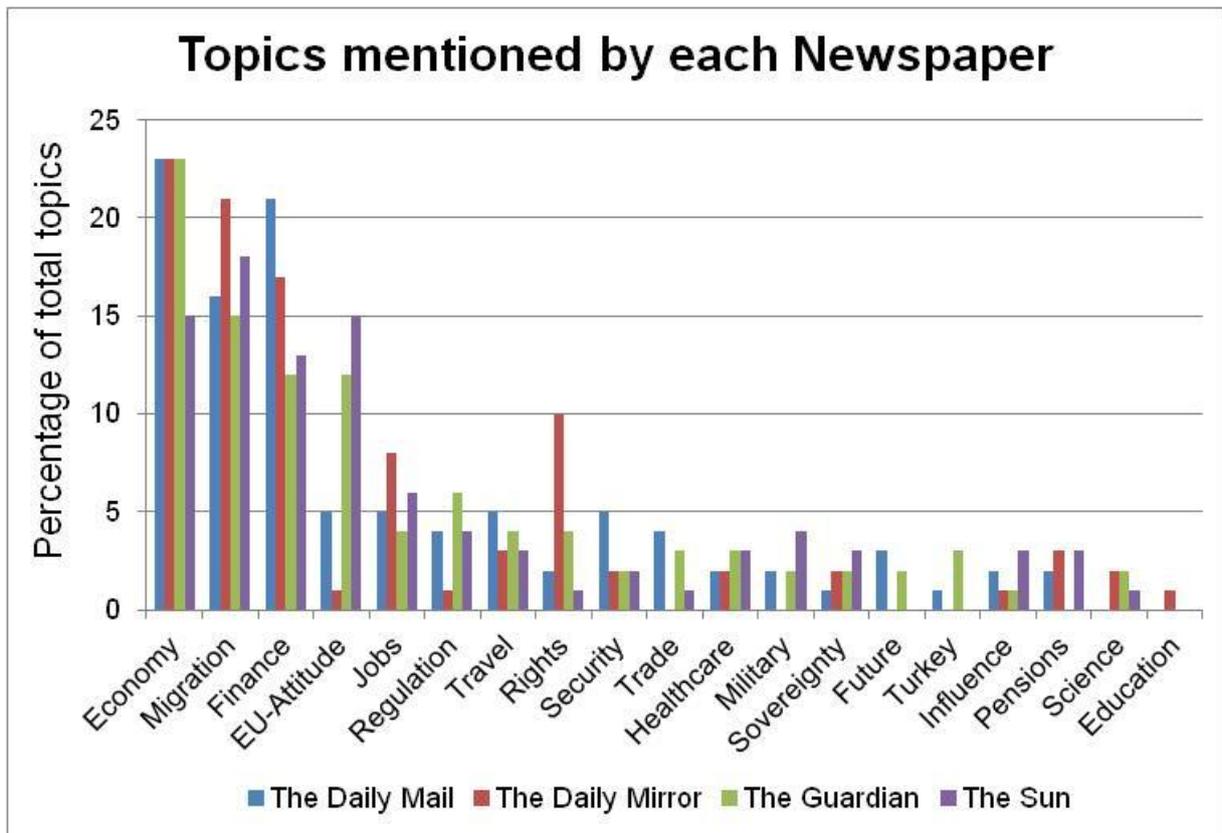


Figure 8: The topics the different newspapers reported most often on. The topics are given as a percentage of the total topics for each newspaper individually for better comparison. Therefore all topics of for instance The Daily Mail add up to 100%.

Figure 8 shows the percentage of total topics for each newspaper. It can be seen that except for the Daily Mirror, the newspapers spend roughly equal amounts of articles on most of the topics. The most important topics for all 4 newspapers were the Economy, Migration and Finance. The biggest outliers are the topics of EU-Attitude and Rights. The Sun and The Guardian both argued more often on the basis of their EU-Attitude than the other 2 newspapers and The Daily Mirror reported more on Rights and far less on EU-Attitude than the other newspapers. Most of the topics that were rarely reported on also feature a similar number of reports for each newspaper as they all focussed somewhat equally on topics like Healthcare, Sovereignty and Influence. In order to test if there is a statistical difference between the newspapers a chi-square test for homogeneity was used.

	<b>X<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Assumptions met*</b>	8,9	9	0,44
<b>Assumptions not met**</b>	31,89	27	0,23
<b>Assumptions not met corrected for Yates</b>	22,1	27	0,73

*Table 2: Results of the Chi-squared tests of homogeneity between the topics addressed by the newspapers and the newspapers themselves. The test was carried out twice to address the issue that many of the topics that were rarely reported on featured expected values below 5 and sometimes below 1. This means that the first test where all assumptions of the chi-square test were met only included very few topics. The second test also includes Yates' correction for continuity.*

*\*(Only cases selected where the expected values are always greater than 5)*

*\*\* (Including cases where the expected value is lower than 5)*

Table 2 shows that the newspapers did not substantially differentiate in their choice of topics as all p values are nowhere near a critical level of 0,05. It is therefore possible to compare the total share of topics of the newspapers with the total share of topics of the readers. The reason for the similarity of topics is most likely the fact that all newspapers covered the same happenings. As an example, the earlier mentioned case of the criticism towards David Cameron for campaigning together with London Major Sadiq Khan was covered by multiple newspapers (Mason, 2016). This event was also covered by The Daily Mail (Sculthorpe, 2016) and The Daily Mirror (Smith, 2016).

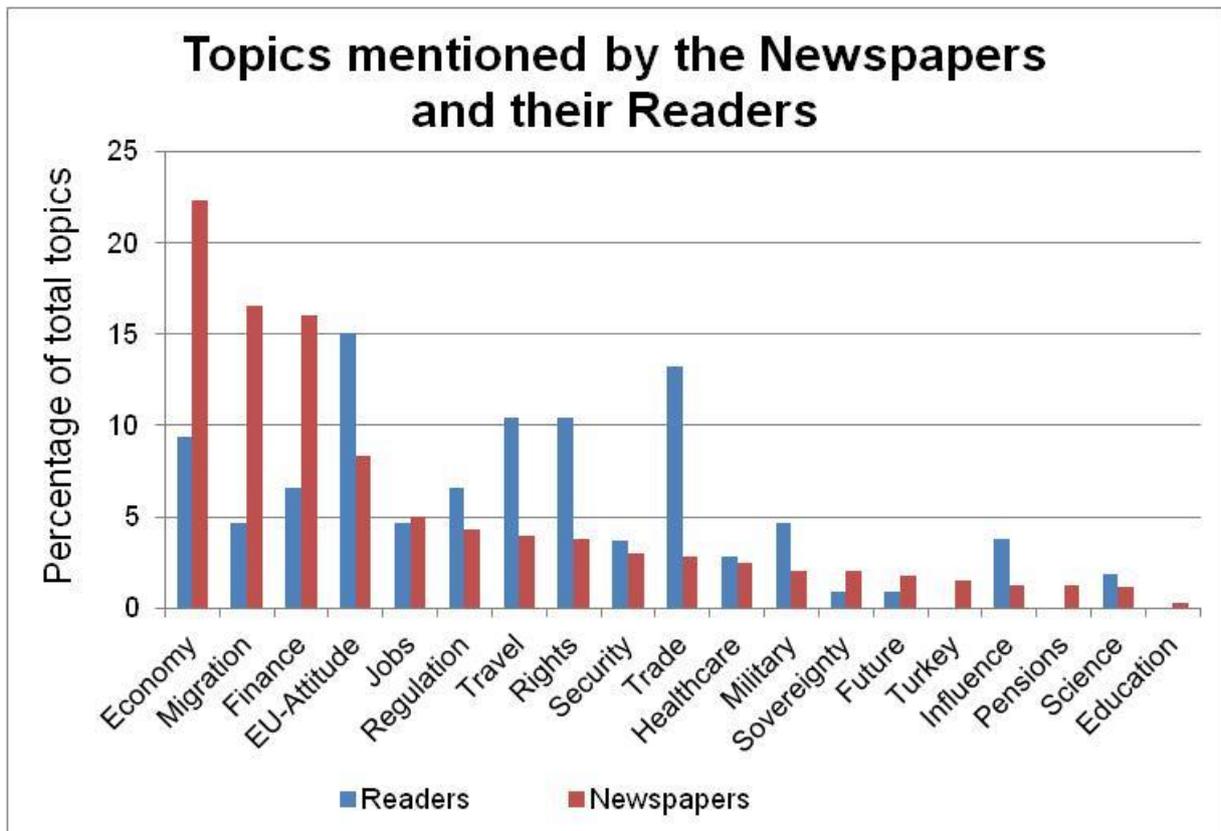


Figure 9: Comparison of topics mentioned between the readers and the newspapers. The amount of topics mentioned is given as a percentage of the total amount of topics for each population separately for better comparison.

Figure 9 displays this by comparing the topics mentioned by the newspapers in the content analysis with the topics mentioned by the readers in the survey. In contrast to figure 8 where the newspapers reported on similar issues, the readers seemed to focus on different aspects than the newspapers. Readers often cited their attitude towards the EU, Travel and Trade as important aspects of the referendum, unlike the newspapers that focussed on the Economy, Finance and Migration. A chi-square test for homogeneity confirms the apparent difference between the two groups ( $\chi^2 = 70$ ;  $df = 9$ ;  $p < 0,0005$ ). This leads to the conclusion that readers and newspapers have different issues that they associate with the Brexit referendum. On the basis of this, the first hypothesis has to be rejected.

These findings are not consistent with previous experiments that followed a similar scheme such as McCombs and Shaw (1972), who found in their study on the US presidential election in 1968 that voters indeed echoed the issues the news media reported. There are some possible reasons for why this hypothesis has to be rejected against the theoretical framework. The first possible reason is that the agenda setting theory is not applicable in its entirety to referendums, as it deals primarily with individual politicians (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007). It is possible that there is a difference in how voters react to news reports about referendums,

and an election. A second possible reason is the nature of this particular referendum. Both media campaigns made much use of emotional arguments to the point where both sides were accused of scaremongering. Both campaigns constantly accused each other of lies and untruthfulness. For instance, when “leave” campaigners Boris Johnson and Michael Gove wrote a letter to the Prime Minister stating that “remain” would leave the country exposed to handing away money, their concerns were dismissed as “reckless nonsense” on the basis of the prediction of economic experts, whose position in turn were branded as “indefensible” and “bogus” by Boris Johnson (“David Cameron warns of mortgage hikes if UK votes for Brexit,” 2016). The “remain” campaign was even called “Project Fear” (Tapsfield & Dathan, 2016) due to their predictions of total economic crash and even a world war (“Brexit could trigger World War Three, warns David Cameron,” 2016). This left the public confused about the political debates as they had difficulties separating the facts from fiction (Jones, 2016). This could have caused a large group of (well educated) voters taking part in this survey to turn away from the vastly exaggerated campaign arguments covered by the media and to draw their vote based on both their personal attitude towards the EU as well as things that they perceived as affecting them directly, which would explain why many respondents reported EU-attitude and Travel as their issues connected to the referendum. This would explain the lack of congruence between the key issues of the newspapers and the key issues of the voters.

#### **4.3.2 Hypothesis 2**

**“If a newspaper covers the Brexit referendum more extensively, readers will feel more competent to make their choice in this referendum.”**

The second hypothesis states that “if a newspaper covers the Brexit referendum more extensively, readers will feel more competent to make their choice in this referendum.” Figure 10 shows total number of articles for each of the analysed newspapers in 100 compared to the average feeling of the newspaper’s readers on a 0 to 4 scale. The scale was constructed through the statement “I feel well informed about the Brexit referendum” and respondents were given the possible answers of “Fully disagree” (0), “Disagree” (1), “Neither disagree nor agree” (2), “Agree” (3) and “Fully agree” (4). The figure shows that, except for The Daily Mirror, people felt better informed the more articles a newspaper published on the Brexit. In order to test this statistically, a simple linear regression analysis was calculated to see in how far the number of articles predict the feeling of how well a reader is informed. A significant regression was found ( $F(1,25) = 6,78$ ,  $p = 0,015$ ) with an  $R^2$  of 0,213. Voter’s predicted feeling of being informed about the referendum on a 5 point scale is equal to  $0,53 \pm 0,0082$

times the number of articles the newspaper reported on the referendum. This means that a newspaper would need to publish 121 articles to increase the predicted level of how well their readers feel informed about the referendum on a 5 point scale by 1. Therefore, based on this analysis the second hypothesis cannot be rejected. The number of articles that deals with the referendum influences how well the readers of that newspaper feel that they are being informed. This is in line with the findings of Hobolt (2005). It shows that newspapers can act as an informant for the general public and that the intensity of their coverage can have positive effects on the knowledge voters have in a referendum.

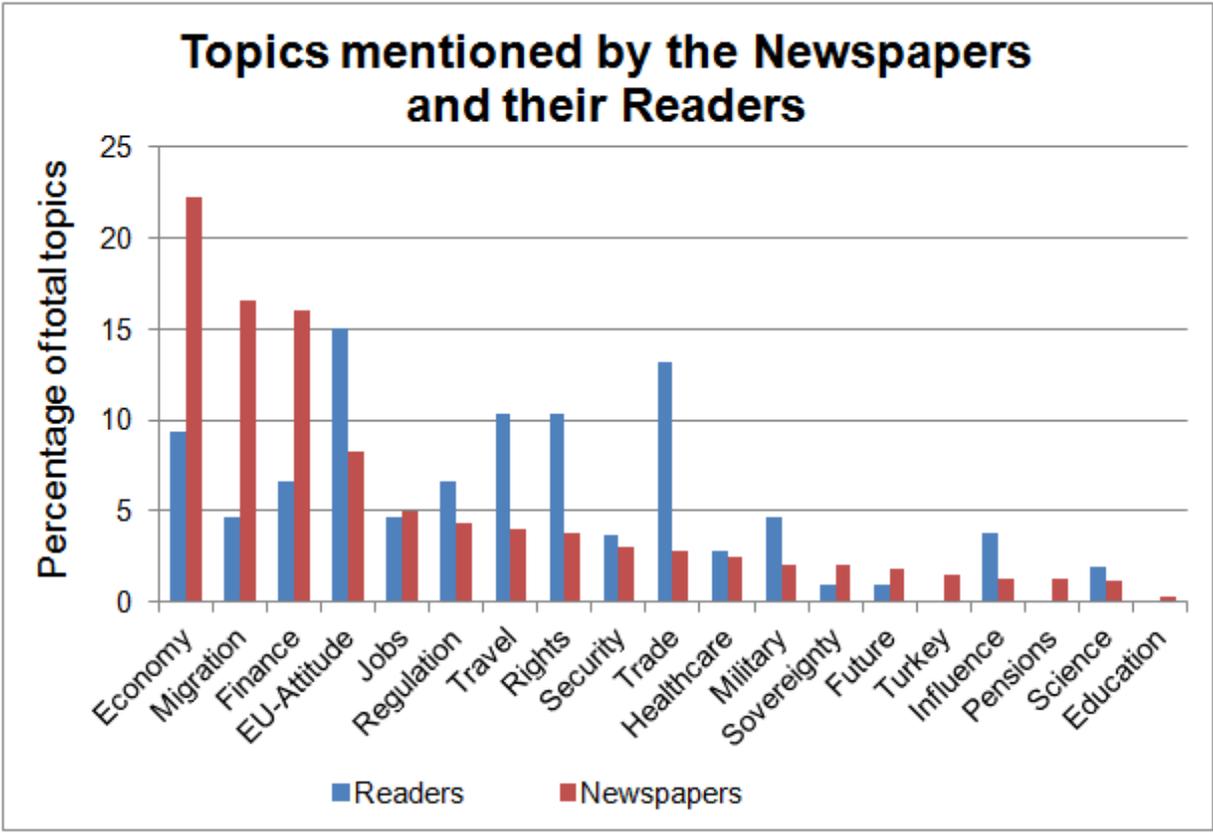


Figure 10: How well people feel informed about the Brexit referendum versus the number of articles the newspaper they were reading published about the Brexit referendum. The number of articles is scaled down and divided by 100 for better visualisation. The average of the self-reported feeling of how well the readers are informed is given on a 5 point scale reaching from 0 to 4.

**4.3.3 Hypothesis 3**

**“If a newspaper covers arguments in favour of a Brexit more often, their readers will more often report voting intentions in favour of a Brexit.”**

The third hypothesis states that if a newspaper covers arguments in favour of a Brexit more often, their readers will more often report voting intentions in favour of the Brexit. The basis

for this hypothesis is that newspapers frame their stories in a certain way. For this to be true it is required that the newspapers reported on the same things and then added their own insight. As shown under hypothesis 1, the distribution of topics was similar between the newspapers, but did they also report on the same topics? The content analysis brought to light that this is very much the case. One earlier mentioned example is the case of Labour politician John McDonnell criticising London Mayor Sadiq Khan for campaigning together with Conservative leader and Prime Minister David Cameron for “remain”. This event was covered by The Daily Mail, The Daily Mirror and The Guardian (Mason, 2016; Sculthorpe, 2016; Smith, 2016). While this story was generally neutral as it focussed on Labour party politics, even here a difference in reporting could be seen as The Daily Mirror highlighted the defence of Sadiq Khan while The Daily Mail reported more on the attack of John McDonnell. A better example for the priming effects between different newspapers were The Daily Mail’s and The Daily Mirror’s assessment of a discussion on the Value Added Tax (VAT) on energy bills. The event in question was a claim by Brexit campaigners on the 31<sup>th</sup> of May to scrap the VAT on energy bills. The difference in reporting is strikingly obvious even when looking at how the articles were titled: The Daily Mail headlined their article “Brexit means cheaper energy bills for the poor claims Boris Johnson as he slams ‘unfair and damaging’ rules on VAT” (Dathan, 2016), while The Daily Mirror went with “Brexit campaigners tried to DOUBLE VAT on energy bills – so would they really scrap it?” (Bloom, 2016a). As it can be expected, the articles then also followed different agendas, with The Daily Mail highlighting how a Brexit could reduce energy bills by removing the VAT on them, whereas The Daily Mirror called out on the hypocrisy of the Brexit campaigners instead (Bloom, 2016a; Dathan, 2016). These examples highlight how the different newspapers not only reported on the exact same events, but also spun their own stories around them and embedded them in a context that would fit their overall narrative. Therefore, in order to test the above mentioned third hypothesis of whether the intended voting behaviour of the readers in the referendum were affected by the newspaper position, the voting behaviour was compared to the positions of the newspaper they were reading. As it can be seen at the example above, as well as figures 3 to 6, the newspapers were split on their position, with The Guardian and The Daily Mirror being more positive about remaining in the European Union, and, conversely, The Sun being against that.

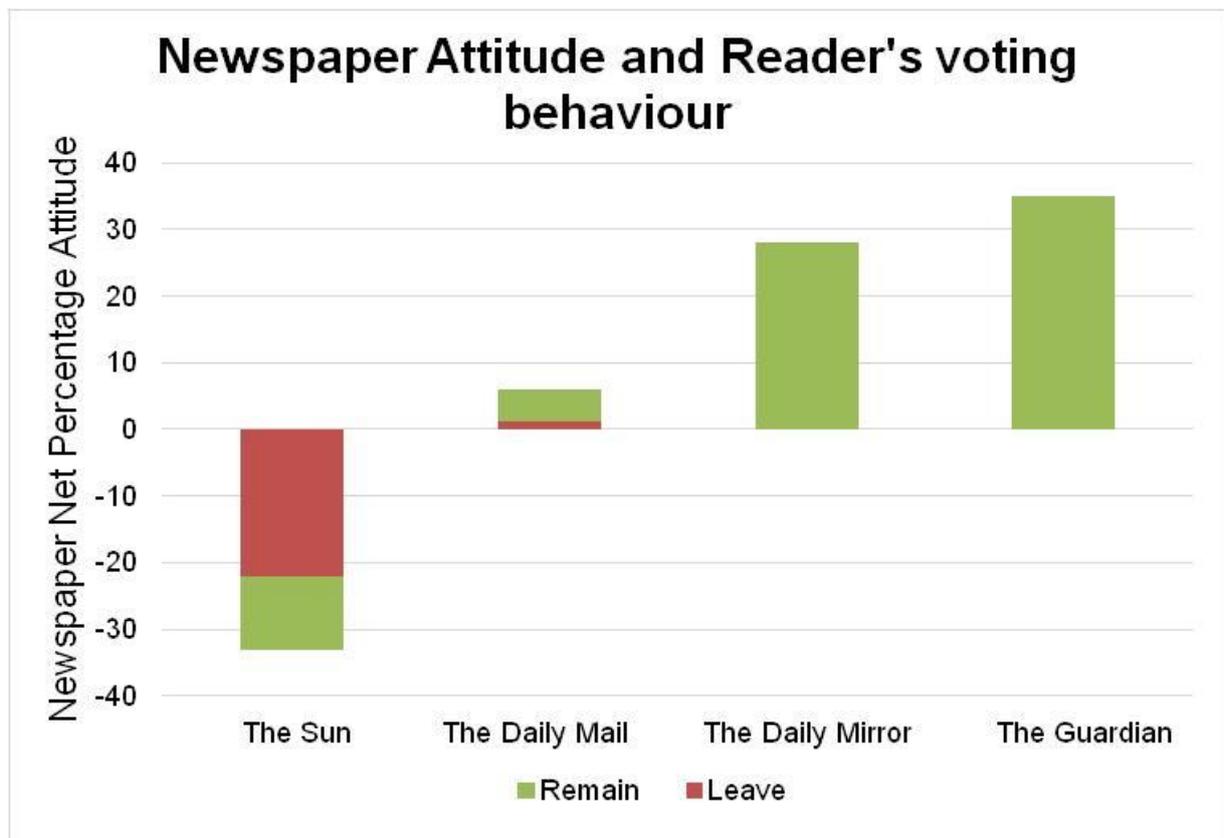


Figure 11: The newspaper net percentage attitude on the Y axis is calculated by subtracting the percentage of “leave” articles from the percentage of “remain” articles for each newspaper which are shown on the X axis. The colour coding within the bars gives the distribution of the readers intentions. About 66% of The Sun’s readers stated they would vote “leave” and 33% would vote “remain”. For The Daily Mirror and The Guardian 100% of readers intended to vote “remain”.

Figure 11 shows both the position as well as the share of readers and their voting behaviour for each newspaper. On the Y axis the newspaper net percentage attitude is shown. This score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of “leave” articles of a newspaper from the percentage of “remain” articles. For instance for The Sun, 50% of articles were advocating “leave”, 17% were for “remain” and 33% were neutral. Therefore The Sun places at  $(17 - 50) = -33$  on the newspaper net percentage attitude. This was also done for the 3 other newspapers who scored at 6 for The Daily Mail, 28 for The Daily Mirror and 35 for The Guardian. The colour scheme displays the share of the readers’ voting intention. For The Sun, 66% of voters intended to vote “leave” and 33% remain and for The Daily Mail 20% intended to vote “leave” and 80% “remain. Readers of The Guardian and The Daily Mirror were uniform in voting for “remain”. Figure 11 shows that there is a light trend in that newspapers that score lower on the newspaper net percentage attitude tend to have a higher share of readers that intended to vote “leave”. This would be in line with the assumption that newspapers that report more arguments in favour of leaving the EU and thus score lower on

the newspaper net percentage attitude would influence their readers to vote “leave”. In order to test this, a logistic regression analysis was conducted to see in how far the newspaper net percentage attitude predicts the voting behaviour.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	1,46	0,703	0,038
<b>Newspaper net percentage attitude</b>	0,048	0,024	0,046

*Table 3: Table for the logistic regression analysis. The analysis was coded in that 1 means “remain” and 0 means “leave”.*

Table 3 shows the result of the logistic regression analysis with 1 being coded as “remain” and 0 being coded as “leave”. The model was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 4,35$ ,  $p = 0,037$  with  $df = 1$ ), but the relationship is not strong with Nagelkerke’s  $R^2$  at 0,302. The prediction success of 63,3% was also relatively low, with 33,3% for “leave” and 91,3% for “remain”. The reason for this is that there are only few cases of readers actually reporting that they intend to vote “leave”. The independent variable is a statistically significant predictor for the voting behaviour with  $p = 0,046$ . With the intercept at 1,46 a newspaper that is perfectly neutral and scores 0 on the newspaper attitude would predict all its readers to vote “remain” as the intercept exceeds 1. A newspaper that reports more in favour of leaving the Union would influence its readers by 0,048 points towards voting “leave” for each percentage point that it reports more in favour of “leave” than it reports on “remain”. This means that to reach a point where half of its readers are predicted to vote “leave” and half are predicted to vote “remain”, a newspaper would have to net a difference of -21 points. In order to predict that all readers of a newspaper would vote “leave” a newspaper would have to achieve a net difference of -30 points. This shows that there is a correlation between the position of the newspaper and the voting behaviour of their readers. The direction of the hypothesis states that the position of the newspaper affects the voting behaviour. However, it is possible that this relationship is reversed. People that intend to vote “remain” might also choose a newspaper that agrees with their intention. These readers would look for a newspaper that reinforces their already formed opinion. A convincing argument against this is that people do not change their newspapers on a regular basis depending on the topics they agree with. People may still select their newspaper based on the reinforcements of their opinion, but they will then stick to the initially selected newspaper for a long period of time. A second possible problem for this relationship is the threat of a third variable. This third variable is partisanship. It is possible that citizens choose both their newspaper and their voting choice in the referendum based on their party affiliation. Hobolt (2007) showed that low-informed voters use their parties’ stance

on a referendum as a cue for their own voting behaviour. Therefore, if partisanship can both explain the voting behaviour in the referendum and the choice of the newspaper, the relationship tested here would be considerably weakened. Figure 12 shows which parties the “leave” and the “remain” voters would vote for if a general election was held on the next day.

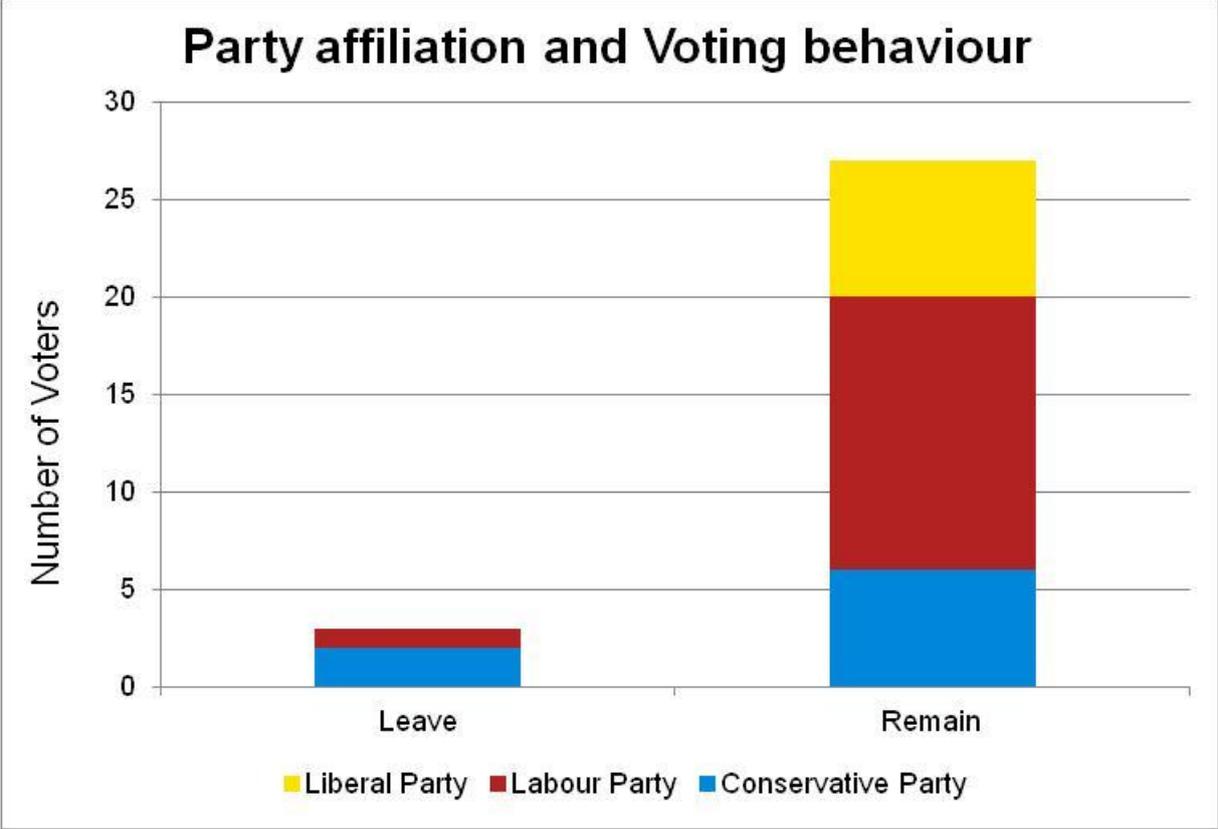


Figure 12: The party affiliation of the leave and remain voters.

It can be seen that both the “leave” and the “remain” camps were split in labour and conservative voters. Respondents that stated they would vote the liberal party however all also intended to vote “remain”. Due to missing cases, the number of “leave” voters is extremely small and barely representative. An analysis conducted after the referendum stated that the Conservative Party was split the most with 42% in favour of “remain” and 58% in favour of “leave”, while both the Labour Party and the Liberal Party were somewhat more unified with 70% in favour of “remain” for the Liberals and 63% for Labour ("How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday... and why," 2016). This result was not replicated in this thesis’ survey. Nevertheless, in the Brexit referendum partisanship did not seem to be a valid predictor for the voting behaviour in the referendum. A logistic regression analysis for the data at hand was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 0,048, p=0,826$  with  $df=1$ ).

The relationship between the partisanship and the newspapers is visualized in figure 13.

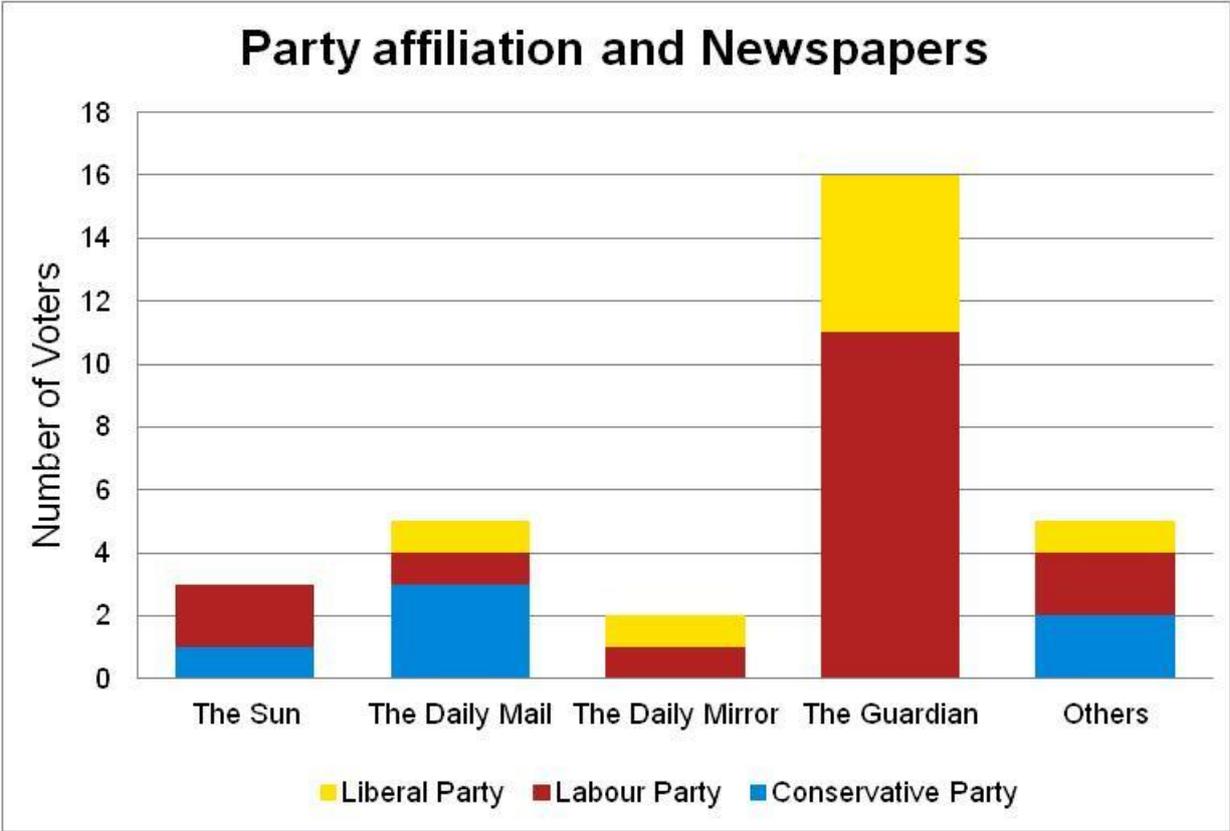


Figure 13: The party affiliation of the readers of the different newspapers. "Others" includes newspapers that were not analyzed in the content analysis, like The Metro or The Times.

It shows that voters of the Labour Party were the most diverse in their choice of newspapers. Similarly, supporters of the Liberal party also read many different newspapers. Still, most of their voters read The Guardian. On the other hand, voters of the Conservative party held mostly on to The Sun and The Daily Mail. Considering the positions of the newspapers explained previously and in figure 11, it seems to be the case that conservative voters were more prone to reading newspapers that advocated a "leave" position, while Labour and Liberal voters appeared to prefer newspapers that were more on the "remain" side. Nevertheless, the threat of partisanship as a confounding variable does not seem to be valid as it is not a predictor for the voting behaviour. The post-referendum data seems to support this on face value ("How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday... and why," 2016). Instead, the citizens' political position on a left-right scale seems to be a more viable explanation, as citizens that are more left-leaning will vote read left-wing newspapers and vote leftist parties. As such, a connection between party affiliation and newspaper choice might exist, but there are no reasons to assume that there is a causal relationship.

Therefore, based on this statistical analysis of the existing data, the hypothesis cannot be rejected. For the given sample the position of the newspaper affects the voting behaviour of the voters.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis investigated the influence newspapers have on voters in referendums. The Brexit referendum in the UK was used as basis for this research. Based on the Agenda-Setting theory three possible effects of newspapers on their readers were proposed. Newspapers were assumed to be able to affect *what* people think about, *how* they think about and how well they *feel informed* about the referendum. Concerning *what* people think about, it was expected that readers would echo the topics that newspaper associate with the referendum when reporting on it. It was found out that, at large, all 4 newspapers reported on the same issues. While there were small differences between them, the most important issues in the investigated timeframe for the newspapers were the economy, finance and migration. As such, these topics were expected to also be on the minds of readers when asked which topics they associated with the referendum. However, it was found out that this does not seem to be the case for this particular referendum on the basis of this thesis' data, which to reiterate suffered from a small sample size. Readers reported that they considered matters of trade, travel and their own attitude towards the EU far more often than what the newspapers reported on. This result is not in line with the agenda setting theory. While most of the research done on agenda setting revolves around elections and not referendums, it was shown that citizen's key issues tend to be very close to what the news report on (McCombs, 2002; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Weaver et al., 1981). The fact that this could not be replicated in this study offers multiple interpretations. First of all, it is possible that Agenda Setting theory is not applicable on referendums. In a similar study to this one, Wirth et al. (2010) also had troubles finding evidence for Agenda Setting theory in referendums. On the basis of a 2006 referendum on asylum law in Switzerland they conducted an exhaustive panel study on which arguments the pro-camp, the contra-camp, the citizens and the media mentioned. Then they compared in how far the arguments mentioned by the public and the news matched up. While they were able to match the arguments of the news with the arguments of members of the pro-camp that had a high reliance on media, they were unable to find this relationship for members of the contra-camp or people with low media reliance (Wirth et al., 2010). However, they also mention an effect of reverse causality, where they observed that arguments were first mentioned by the pro-camp and the media only picked them up at a later time. Furthermore, they pose that a reason for the weak match on the contra-side is that the contra-camp was unable to reach out their arguments (Wirth et al.,

2010). Therefore, it seems that the Agenda Setting theory cannot be transferred easily onto referendums. It is possible that the success the theory has on explaining the media effects in a referendum depends on the nature of the campaigns. In the Swiss referendum both sides were fairly convinced that the pro-side would win the referendum (Wirth et al., 2010). In the Brexit referendum however, the outcome was unclear up until the very end. Furthermore, the campaigns were very emotional on both sides. The “remain” campaign was accused of “scaremongering” (Tapsfield & Sculthorpe, 2016) and even called “Project Fear” due to the pictures of poverty and war that David Cameron painted (Tapsfield & Dathan, 2016). At the same time the “leave” campaign was caught over exaggerating multiple times in how they described how much money the EU would cost the UK each week (“The Guardian view on the Leave campaign: show some respect for truth,” 2016) or how well the economy would be doing in the case of a Brexit. For instance, when debating how a Brexit would affect pensions, “remain” campaigner George Osborne claimed that it would cost every pensioner up to 32,000 pounds, only to get immediately criticised by experts that claimed that the EU would drive down pension rates and that therefore leaving the union would be equally viable (Martin et al., 2016). In the end, “leave” campaigner Michael Gove even exclaimed that the people would be “sick of experts” since both sides were very fast to dismiss the claims of the other side (Tapsfield & Sculthorpe, 2016). This “arms race of ever-more-lurid claims and counter-claims” between the two sides of the campaigns left voters confused about what a Brexit really meant for the UK (Jones, 2016).

On the other hand, it was possible to connect how well people *feel informed* about the referendum with the number of articles their newspaper published on the referendum. When tested, the number of articles served as a predictor for how well people feel informed about the referendum on a 5-point scale based on self-reports. Therefore newspapers that intend to act as an informer for the public could potential improve their impact by publishing more articles. In other words, the intensity of the news coverage seems to affect the competence of the readers. Albeit there are limits in the measurement of the competence when asking for a self-report, the results found indicate evidence for the proposal by Hobolt (2005) that campaign intensity affects voter competence. However, this fact can also be used to pursue an agenda.

The third connection investigated, *how* people thought about the referendum, showed that the position newspapers took towards the referendum – advocating “leave” or “remain” – correlated with the intended voting behaviour of their readers. People that read newspapers that ran a “leave” campaign like The Sun were more likely to vote “leave” than readers of newspapers that ran a “remain” campaign like The Guardian, whose readers were more likely to vote “remain”. Therefore, even though both newspapers reported on largely the

same issues as shown at the example of the VAT bills on electricity (Bloom, 2016a; Dathan, 2016) and the criticism towards Sadiq Khan for campaigning together with Prime Minister David Cameron (Mason, 2016; Sculthorpe, 2016; Smith, 2016), the way the issues were framed had an observable impact on their readers. The discussion on the strength of this relationship and its vulnerability to a third confounding variable revealed that a possible connection to partisanship exists, but that this relationship is unlikely to be causal. Instead, a voters' political orientation might explain the suggested connection between the partisanship and the choice of newspapers, as a relationship between the partisanship and the voting behaviour in the referendum could not be found. This shows that the newspapers have substantial power in affecting the public depending on the way they frame their stories, what they report about and how much they report about it even in referendums. So even though this thesis could not find evidence to extend the Agenda Setting theory on European referendums, framing effects could be applied and observed in the case of the Brexit. This is also in line with what De Vreese and Boomgarden (2006) found in their research on the attitude towards the enlargement of the EU.

Despite the small sample size of this studies' survey, the analysis of this thesis managed to fit in and contribute to the small existing literature about the effects news media have on referendums. While there seems to be reasons to believe that framing theory is well applicable on referendums, the place of Agenda Setting still needs to be determined. Additional research into how the news can affect the issues that are on the publics' mind would be very valuable to help understanding the effects of media on referendums. On the one hand, clarifying the effects of partisanship and political affiliation on the voting behaviour in referendums and newspaper choice could strengthen the findings on framing effects found in this thesis. Secondly, further examining the applicability of the agenda setting theory on media campaigns in referendums could lead to an increased understanding of voting behaviour in those. An opportunity for such a research could be the upcoming Hungarian referendum on the migrant quota which will be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, 2016. As the topic at hand is similar to many arguments of the Brexit's "leave" campaign, further insights could be gathered by examining what arguments the news bring up, which arguments the public identifies and how well these arguments match. Furthermore it could be wise to include an indicator for the nature of the arguments to see how rational or emotional they are conducted. If this referendum and this measure could be compared to either the Brexit referendum or another upcoming referendum in 2017, it could be possible to determine the effects of the nature of the arguments for the effects of media campaigns on referendums.

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## 7. Appendix

This appendix contains all original data that was generated for this thesis, as well as additional information on how the data was gathered.

Appendix 1: A table that shows the topics mentioned by each newspaper, both as a number count and a percentage. This table was used to create figures 7, 8 and 9 and contains a large part of the results of the content analysis. The positions of the newspapers were counted additionally and displayed in figures 3-6. The data for them can be found in Appendix 4, Appendix 5, Appendix 6 and Appendix 7.

	The Daily Mail		The Daily Mirror		The Guardian		The Sun		Total	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Economy	46	23	20	23	58	23	10	15	134	22,26
Migration	31	16	18	21	39	15	12	18	100	16,61
Finance	42	21	15	17	30	12	9	13	96	15,95
EU-Attitude	9	5	1	1	30	12	10	15	50	8,31
Jobs	10	5	7	8	9	4	4	6	30	4,98
Regulation	7	4	1	1	15	6	3	4	26	4,32
Travel	10	5	3	3	9	4	2	3	24	3,99
Rights	3	2	9	10	10	4	1	1	23	3,82
Security	9	5	2	2	5	2	2	3	18	2,99
Trade	8	4	0	0	8	3	1	1	17	2,82
Healthcare	3	2	2	2	8	3	2	3	15	2,49
Military	3	2	0	0	6	2	3	4	12	1,99
Sovereignty	2	1	2	2	5	2	3	4	12	1,99
Future	6	3	0	0	5	2	0	0	11	1,83
Turkey	1	1	0	0	8	3	0	0	9	1,50
Influence	3	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	8	1,33
Pensions	3	2	3	3	0	0	2	3	8	1,33
Science	0	0	2	2	4	2	1	1	7	1,16
Education	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	0,33
<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>602</b>	<b>100</b>

Appendix 2: The online questionnaire that respondents filled in. The website used to create the survey was surveymonkey.com. The direct link to the survey is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XLYVVSZ8>. Each subject had its own page. This means that between questions 3 and 4, questions 5 and 6, and questions 7 and 8 respondents were required to get to the next page.

## Newspapers and Media

\* 1. How often do you inform yourself about the news via each of the following channels?

	Every Day	A few times per week	Once per week	A few times per month	Seldom or never
Television	<input type="radio"/>				
Newspaper	<input type="radio"/>				
Radio	<input type="radio"/>				
Internet	<input type="radio"/>				

\* 2. How much time do you spend following the news per day?

	Less than 5 minutes	5 to 15 minutes	15 to 30 minutes	30 to 60 minutes	More than 60 minutes
Time	<input type="radio"/>				

\* 3. Which Newspaper(s) do you read most often?

1

2

3

\* 4. If the Brexit referendum was held tomorrow, how would you vote?

- Remain
- Leave
- Don't Know
- I would abstain from voting

\* 5. If the general election was held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?

- Conservative Party
- Labour Party
- Scottish National Party
- Democratic Unionist Party
- Liberal Democrats
- Sinn Féin
- Plaid Cymru
- Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)
- Ulster Unionist Party
- UK Independence
- Green Party of England and Wales
- Other

\* 6. In your opinion, what are the advantages of remaining in the EU?

\* 7. In your opinion, what are the advantages of leaving the EU?

\* 8. Please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:

	Fully Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Fully Agree
I am interested in politics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The political system allows people to influence politics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy to take part in politics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Politicians care about what people think.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I frequently discuss local politics with my friends and relatives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I frequently discuss national politics with my friends and relatives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I frequently discuss European politics with my friends and relatives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow the news about the Brexit referendum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel well informed about the Brexit referendum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. What is your gender?

- Male  
 Female

10. How old are you?

Prev

Done

**Appendix 3:** The coded results of the survey. Answers for the ordinal questions that can be seen in the survey in A1 were coded in ascending order, with 1 representing the lowest values like “less than 5 minutes” in question 2 or “fully disagree” in question 8, and 5 representing the highest values. The answers for questions 6 and 7 that were written in text form were also transformed into the same topics that the newspaper used under [Appendix 1](#).

ID	Q1 TV	Q2 Newspaper	Q1 Radio	Q1 Internet	Q2 Time spend	Q3 Which Newspaper	Q4 Vote in Ref
1	1	4	4	1	2	Sun	Leave
2	4	5	4	4	2	None	Remain
3	2	5	2	2	3	None	Remain
4	2	1	2	2	4	Other	Leave
5	2	5	5	1	3	Daily Mail	Remain
6	2	4	1	1	2	Guardian	Remain
7	2	5	2	1	5	Guardian	Remain
8	3	4	4	1	2	Mirror, Guardian	Remain
9	1	1	1	4	2	Other	Don't Know
10	1	1	5		2	Other	Remain
11	2	5	5	1	3	Guardian	Remain
12	5	1	1	1	4	Guardian	Remain
13	1	1	1	1	2	Other	Remain
14	3	5	1	1	2	Daily Mail	Remain
15	4	5	5	1	1	Sun, Daily Mail	Leave
16	2	4	5	1	1	Guardian	
17	2	2	1	1	4	Mirror, Sun	Remain
18	5	5	5	1	2	Daily Mail	Remain
19	5	4	5	5	1	None	Leave
20	2	5	1	2	4	Guardian	Remain
21	2	5	2	1	3	Other	Remain
22	1	2	1	1	4	Guardian	Remain
23	1	1	1	1	3	Guardian	Remain
24	1	3	5	2	4	Other	Remain
25	5	2	1	1	3	Guardian	Remain
26	2	5	1	2	2	Guardian	Remain
27	5	3	1	2	3	Other	Remain
28	5	2	1	2	3	Guardian	Remain
29	3	2	1	2	3	Guardian	Remain
30	4	3	1	4	3	Guardian	Remain
31	1	1	2	1	4	Guardian	Remain
32	1	3	1	1	2	Daily Mail	Remain
33	2	3	2	1	4	Guardian	Remain
34	5	3	1	2	4	Guardian	Remain
35	5	4	4	5	1	None	Don't Know
36	1	3	4	1	3	Guardian	Remain
37	2	2	1	1	3	Guardian	Remain

ID	Q5 Party	Q4/5 Number of Topics	Q6 Pro-remain
1	Conservative	2	Travel
2	Conservative		
3	Conservative	2	Trade, Travel
4	Conservative	2	Travel
5	Liberal	4	Travel, Trade
6	Liberal	5	Economy, Science, Jobs, Travel, Rights
7	Labour	8	Rights, Travel, Trade, Econ
8	Liberal	5	Jobs, Trade, EU-Positive
9	Ulster Unionist Party	2	Influence
10	Liberal	3	EU-Positive, Security
11	Green	3	Economy, Rights
12	Labour	3	Rights, Regulations, EU-Positive
13	Conservative	2	Economy, Travel
14	Conservative	1	Security
15	Labour	1	Trade
16			
17	Labour	3	Trade, Economy
18	Conservative	1	Travel
19	UKIP	2	None
20	Liberal	6	Trade, Regulations, EU-Positive
21	Labour		
22	Labour	10	Economy, EU-Positive, Military, Jobs, Migration, Rights
23	Liberal	4	Travel, Science, Rights
24	Don't Know	3	Economy, Security
25	Labour	5	Rights, Regulations, Trade, Migration, EU-Positive
26	Green	4	Eu-Positive, Rights, Regulations
27	Labour	4	Regulations, Security
28	Labour	3	Rights, EU-Positive
29	Labour	2	EU-Positive
30	Labour	3	Rights, EU-Positive
31	Liberal	5	Trade, Security, Travel, EU-Positive, Influence
32	Conservative	3	Security, Trade
33	Labour	3	Travel, Influence
34	Labour	6	Economy, Eu-Positive, Travel, Influence
35	Don't Know	1	Economy
36	Labour	4	Trade, Travel, Security, Influence
37	Labour	4	Economy, Rights, EU-Positive

ID	Q7 Pro-leave	Q8 Interest in politics	Q8 Influence	Q8 Citizens can partake in politics
1	Finance	4	3	2
2				
3	None	3	4	3
4	Regulations	4	4	5
5	Trade, Regulations	3	3	2
6	None	4	4	3
7	Travel, Regulation, Healthcare, EU-Negative			
8	Sovereignty, Finance	2	2	2
9	Migration	3	3	4
10	Sovereignty	3	4	4
11	Regulations	4	3	3
12	None	5	4	5
13	None	5	4	4
14	None	3	3	2
15	None	2	4	4
16				
17	Finance	4	2	3
18	None	3	3	4
19	Economy, Sovereignty	4	3	4
20	Finance, Economy EU-Negative	5	4	4
21				
22	Migration, Jobs, Healthcare, Sovereignty	5	4	4
23	Finance	4	2	1
24	Regulations	3	4	3
25	None	5	4	4
26	Healthcare	4	3	3
27	EU-Negative, Finance	4	3	4
28	EU-Negative	5	3	2
29	Sovereignty	4	3	3
30	Migration	4	3	3
31	None	5	4	4
32	Migration	3	2	4
33	Sovereignty	4		4
34	Economy, Future	4	4	3
35	None	3	2	2
36	None	4	3	3
37	EU-Negative	4	3	3

ID	Q8 Politians care	Q8 Local politics	Q8 National politics	Q8 EU politics
1	1	2	2	2
2				
3	2	2	2	2
4	4	3	4	3
5	3	2	2	3
6	4	5	4	4
7				
8	1	2	2	4
9	3	3	3	3
10	2	3	4	4
11	2	2	2	2
12	4	3	3	3
13	4	4	4	4
14	2	1	1	1
15	1	2	2	1
16				
17	2	5	5	5
18	2	4	4	2
19	2	5	5	5
20	4	1	3	3
21				
22	2	5	5	5
23	2	2	4	2
24	2	4	4	3
25	3	3	4	4
26	3	2	3	2
27	3	4	5	4
28	3	4	4	4
29	3	2	4	3
30	4	4	5	5
31	4	3	3	2
32	2	3	3	3
33	4	1	4	3
34	3	2	5	4
35	2	3	3	3
36	4	4	4	4
37	3	2	4	3

ID	Q8 Follow News	Q8 Informed on Ref.	Q9 Gender	Q10 Age	Week	Political Interest Scale (Q8)
1	2	1	m		1	2,25
2					1	0
3	3	2	m		1	2,625
4	4	2	m		1	3,875
5	3	2	f		1	2,625
6	5	4	f		1	4,125
7					1	0
8	4	3	f		1	2,375
9	2	2	f		1	3
10	4	2	m		1	3,5
11	5	5	m		1	2,875
12	5	5	m		1	4
13	4	3	f	69	2	4,125
14	3	3	m	22	2	2
15	1	1	m	18	2	2,125
16					2	0
17	4	3	f	24	2	3,75
18	4	4	f	21	2	3,25
19	2	4	f	22	2	3,75
20	5	5	m	49	2	3,625
21					2	0
22	5	5	f	59	2	4,375
23	4	4	m	38	2	2,625
24	4	4	f	66	2	3,375
25	4	3	f	50	2	3,875
26	3	2	f	35	2	2,875
27	4	2	f	56	2	3,875
28	3	2	m	63	2	3,5
29	5	4	m	66	2	3,375
30	4	4	f	62	2	4
31	5	4	m	35	2	3,75
32	4	3	m	69	2	3
33	1	3	m	40	2	2,625
34	4	2	f	57	2	3,625
35	2	2	f	51	2	2,5
36	5	5	f	47	2	3,875
37	4	2	f		2	3,25

Appendix 4: The number of articles, the position and their raw topics of The Daily Mail.

**The Daily Mail**

Date	Referendum Related	Leave	Stay	Neutral	Topics
23.5.	13	2	2	9	3x Trade Barriers, 6x Economy, Military, 2x Political Influence, 4x Finance, Regulations, 5x Jobs, 2x Travel
24.5.	14	2	2	10	6x Economy, Military, 2x Finance, Travel
25.5.	22	3	4	15	Pensions, Migration, 4x Finance, Trade Barriers, Military, 3x Future, Security, Regulations, Economy
26.5.	14	2	3	9	Jobs, 8x Migration, Influence, Pensions, Future, 2x Economy, Finance
27.5.	4	1	1	2	Influence, Future Generation, Pensions
28.5.	8	1	1	6	4x Economy, Trade, Pro-EU, Finance,
29.5.	13	3	3	7	2x Sovereignty, Travel, Security, Economy, 5x Migration, Trade
30.5.	18	3	3	12	Regulation, 4x economy, security, migration, 2x rights, finance
31.5.	22	2	2	18	10x Fin, 4x mig, turkey, 2x reg, 2x econ, travel, influ
1.6.	22	0	5	17	6x Econ, 2x Job, health, 2travel, EU-, 3mig, fin4, influ
2.6.	22	6	1	15	2jobs, eu-, 4x mig, 2fin, 4econ, jobs
3.6.	24	2	7	15	5x Econ, 3xJobs, security, 5xfinac, 2xEU pos, 2xtravel, 2x eu neg, future
4.6.	12	1	4	7	2xTrade, 2x Econ, 2xtravel, Jobs, regu, fin
5.6.	17	0	3	14	4xmig, 2xsecurity, 3xecon, 2xfin, eu+, healthcare, trade
6.6.	28	4	5	19	9x fin, EU+, 6 econ, 3sec, travel 2xtrade, 2x regulation, health, mig, rights, mil
Sum	231	30	44	157	
Percentage		12,99	19	67,965	

Appendix 5: The number of articles, the position and their raw topics of The Sun.

**The Sun**

Date	Referendum Related	Leave	Stay	Neutral	Topics
23.5.	15	5	4	6	3x Economy, 5x EU Scepticism, Healthcare, Security, Finance, 2x Migration, Travel
24.5.	6	1	1	4	Migration, 2x economy, travel, jobs
25.5.	8	5	1	2	2x EU scepticism, 2x Economy, 2x Migration, Pensions
26.5.	8	5	2	1	Jobs, Military, 2x Influence, Migration, Finance
27.5.	7	2	1	4	2x Finance, Pensions, Jobs, Migration, Military, Economy
28.5.	0	0	0	0	Weekend
29.5.	0	0	0	0	Weekend
30.5.	1	1	0	0	Regulation
31.5.	6	2	1	3	2x Fin, sovereignty, science
1.6.	4	1	0	3	migration
2.6.	1	1	0	0	Mig, sover, rights
3.6.	6	5	0	1	Healthcare, 3xmigration, security, jobs EU-
4.6.	0	0	0	0	Weekend
5.6.	0	0	0	0	Weekend
6.6.	9	6	1	2	Military, sovereignty, 2xEconomy, 2x regulation, 3x finance, migration, 2xeu-, trade
Sum	65	33	11	26	
Percentage		50,77	16,9	32,308	

Appendix 6: The number of articles, their position and the rat topics of The Daily Mirror.

**The Daily  
Mirror**

Date	Referendum Related	Leave	Stay	Neutral	Topics
23.5.	6	0	5	1	2x Finance, 3x Economy, Jobs
24.5.	6	0	1	5	Finance, Economy, Jobs, Finance
25.5.	1	0	0	1	Economy, Finance
26.5.	1	0	1	0	Pensions
27.5.	7	0	2	5	Pensions, 4x Finance, Economy, Jobs, 2x Migration, LGBT Rights
28.5.	3	0	2	1	2x Healthcare, Education, Pensions, Travel
29.5.	2	0	1	1	Science, Migration
30.5.	6	0	0	6	Regulations, Migration, Sovereignty, Influence
31.5.	9	0	3	6	Travel, Science, 4x Finance, Economics, Rights, Migration
1.6.	7	0	5	2	Jobs, 5x Economy, Finance, Travel
2.6.	10	1	7	2	3x Rights, 2x Migration, Economy
3.6.	16	3	4	9	2x migration, 2x economy, finance, 2x Rights
4.6.	7	2	1	4	4x migration, 2x Jobs
5.6.	6	1	1	4	2x Security, 4x Migration. Economy, Rights
6.6.	14	1	4	9	Migration, 4x Economy, Sovereignty, Pro-EU, Jobs, Rights
Sum	92	8	34	50	
Percentage		8,696	37	54,348	

Appendix 7: The number of articles, their position and the rat topics of The Guardian.

<b><u>The Guardian</u></b>					
Date	Referendum Related	Leave	Stay	Neutral	Topics
23.5.	20	0	10	10	4x fin, 2xscience, 6x econ, healthcare, turkey, 2migration, 4xEU+, 2x travel, jobs
24.5.	12	0	4	8	2EU+, Fin, Healthcare, Rights, travel, jobs, 2xecon
25.5.	18	2	4	12	3xmig,3x econ, sover, 2xturkey, 2military, 3xregulations, fin, infl. , EU-
26.5.	22	5	6	11	5mig,4 econ, health, 2xeu+, 2travel, fin, jobs
27.5.	20	0	12	8	science, sov, 3econ, regulations, health, 2rights, 2fin, future, mig, rights, jobs, mil, jobs
28.5.	6	0	5	1	3 Econ, 1finance, 2EU+, mig, sovereignty
29.5.	16	0	7	9	2xtravel, EU-, finance, 2mig, 3xeu+, rights, mil, 2sec, econ, health
30.5.	14	1	4	9	Travel, 3mig, 2econ, sec, rights, 2xturkey, EU+, regulation, sovereignty
31.5.	11	0	4	7	Trade, 4xEcon, mig,2 fin
1.6.	19	1	8	10	Trade, 6xmig, 6xecon,2x regu, econ, 3xfin, rights, 2xEU+
2.6.	23	4	7	12	EU +, military, 4x migration, healthcare, jobs, travek, 6x economy, regu, turkey, finance
3.6.	29	3	12	14	Education, 2x Turkey, 3Jobs, Security, 4 migration, EU positive, EU negative, finance, 7x Economy, military, security future, 2x regulations, 2Trade sovereignty
4.6.	12	0	6	6	Rights, 3x Economy, 4x Migration, 2x Finance, Jobs, Future, EU – , 2x EU positive
5.6.	15	2	7	6	Econ, 3x EU-, Eu+ 2x fin, health, influ, 2x mig, 2x trade, 2x mig
6.6.	28	0	16	12	2x Economy, 3x Regulations, Healthcare, 2x Future, Trade, 5xFinance, Rights
Sum	254	18	108	128	
Percentage		7,087	42,5	50,394	

Appendix 8: Email send to various organizations, such as the European teachers' association (AEDE), Simpol, the British police departments or MENSA in Britain.

Dear Sir or Madam,

my name is Thomas Brüggemann and I am a student of the Universiteit Twente in the Netherlands for European Public Administration. I am writing my bachelor thesis on how media and especially newspapers influence the results of referendums on European integration. For this purpose I look for people that are eligible to vote in the upcoming referendum in the United Kingdom.

The upcoming referendum offers a prime opportunity for this kind of research. Research on referendums on European integration is very limited and there is no focus on newspapers. The results will be made public by the Universiteit Twente.

Therefore I would like to ask you for your support by participating in a short anonymous survey. The survey will not take longer than 5 minutes.

I would really appreciate your assistance.

Please, use the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DBJR27Z>

Thanks alot,

Tom

Appendix 9: The European Union flag missing a star used in the title page.



("European Union EU flag missing star Brexit," 2016)