

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

How did the British press cover the EU-referendum?

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Masteroppgave
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UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

05/2022

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2022

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Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Summary

Britain shook the world when they in 2016 voted to leave the European Union. Since then, the effects are still with us and many Britons feel as if they have made a terrible choice. Many of these Britons got their referendum news from the newspapers and in Britain the newspapers are not the objective pillars of democracy we want them to be. Some researchers even go as far to say that the British news media have now taken a vigorously partisan turn when covering European affairs.

To best understand how the British news media covered the referendum I have conducted a quantitative content analysis of five of the most popular newspapers in Britain. I have looked at emotional tone and political bias to best understand the news content the British public consumes.

“The only way to understand the press is to remember that they pander to their readers prejudices...

...The Daily Mirror is read by the people who think they run the country. The Guardian is read by the people who think they ought to run the country. The Times is read by the people who actually do run the country. Daily Mail is read by the wives of the people who run the country. Financial Times is read by the people who own the country. The Morning Star is read by the people who think the country is ought to be run by another country. The Daily Telegraph is read by the people who think it is...

...The Sun readers don't care who runs the country as long she's got big tits.”

Forward

I started on my master thesis late 2019, which seems like an entire lifetime ago. I sent off my first thesis suggestion in December that year and didn't pick it up again before March 2020. Luckily, nothing out of the ordinary happened that month which could have thrown my mental health and wellbeing of the hinges for the years to come, nor force me to postpone my thesis by two semesters. How lucky indeed.

Brexit became something of a forgotten subject during this time. But the topic of media coverage became an ongoing discussion, which in some ways made my thesis relevant anew. Not that it gave me any more motivation for that matter.

I would like to thank some of the people who have been with me during the last three years and made them tolerable. Firstly, the five or six other people who were allowed to physically attend university during this time who I could share my frustrations with. My friends who have tolerated me and my mood swings. And of course, my girlfriend who have had to live with me and my mood swings, and who has motivated me to finish. Not because it's important to finish what one has started, but to ensure one always has bragging-rights over others.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude for MARINA and her Tumblr-girl music. It's the only thing that that has kept me from breaking down in tears.

Lasse Styve Andersen

California, 31st of May 2022

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1 Introduction

Britain left the world speechless in June 2016 when 51.89% of its proud Britons voted to take back control of their homeland from what they described as a bureaucratic nightmare, namely the European Union. But after the initial vote, backlash soon followed, and too this day Britons still feel the effect off the Brexit-vote, and many have changed their minds. A few scholars have pointed to that many Britons get their opinions on the EU from their chosen news outlet.

Therefore, the focus of this thesis is to investigate how the British news media covered the EU-referendum of 2016. By using a quantitative content analysis, I have analyzed over 200 news articles that were published during two separate time periods, one in May and one in June. The goal is to answer the following research question, has the British press, considering political bias and tendencies of negative focus, covered the EU-referendum?

1.1 Case

Britain's relationship with mainland Europe has always been an interesting one. From the Roman invasion laying the groundwork for modern British society, to the Reformation which ensured an independent English Church and a stronger British identity, to the world wars where Britain marked itself as an important player on the new world stage. Britain has undoubtedly been influenced by several different forces from mainland Europe (Black, 2019; Spiering, 2015).

In more recent years, after WWII, Britain found itself in what can be described as an identity crisis. With the British empire slowly dissolving due to several states claiming independence, and several European countries forming a stronger relationship, Britain's greatness was becoming a thing for the history-books.

What we know as the EU today started out as the ECSC, the European Coal and Steel Community, in 1951. A community that, which did not include Britain, would grow into the EEC, the European Economic Community, and later the European Union. While Britain was

not a member, that was not entirely their fault, as there were strong forces within Britain that lobbied heavily to become a member state. The voice against the EEC was loud, yet Britain attempted to join in 1963 and again in 1967 but were vetoed by the president of France. Once he resigned, Britain applied again, and were accepted. Leading to their inclusion in 1973.

Britain's long fight for EEC membership is important to understand when discussing Britain's later decision to leave. Their initial inclusion happened, not as a result of a referendum, but with a vote in Parliament. Yet, Euroscepticism was brewing within the ruling Labour Party, and in 1975 they organized a referendum hoping to renegotiate what they believed to be an unfavourable deal. The result was staggering, with 67,2 % voting to remain in the EEC.

The political scene in the 70s and 80s looked quite different than during the referendum in 2016. Back then it was the Labour Party who were known to be the Eurosceptic party, while the Conservative Party was known to be more Europhile. But during the 80s, Labour changed their euro-strategy and became more favourable to the European project. On the other side of the political landscape, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and the Conservatives, were becoming more Eurosceptic.

The world then tries to move on from the Cold War, Margaret Thatcher resigned, and the EEC became the EU after the Maastricht treaty. The political landscape started to look more like it did in 2016 and with the inclusion of former soviet nations into the EU during the 90s and 00s, Euroscepticism grew at a steady rate.

The term "Euroscepticism" can be traced back to the press in the mid-80, when it was used to describe one smaller part of the Conservative Party. These were inspired by Margaret Thatcher's increasingly Eurosceptic rhetoric. (Tournier-Sol, 2015, p. 2). While Euroscepticism is not found only in the UK, it is the country with the most prominent Eurosceptic press (Usherwood & Startin, 2013, p. 12).

The infamous "Up yours Delors" headline from The Sun is often used to describe the Euroscepticism of the British press (Startin, 2015, p. 316), where the tabloids in particular, would more often take a hard stance against Europe. The press' role in spreading Euroscepticism is commonly agreed upon to have started during the inclusion to the EEC in 1973, where the press went from "permissive consensus to destructive dissent" (Startin 2015, p. 316). Daddow (2012) even goes as far to say that the British news media have now taken a

vigorously partisan turn when covering European affairs. According to a paper published by NatCen, who has been tracking Britons' overall attitudes towards the EU since the early 90s, suggests that anti-Europe sentiment has been around since at least the late 90s. The Eurosceptic attitudes were stable and minor up until the late 2000s and rose steadily leading up to the referendum in 2016 (Swales, 2016). With British newspapers having a clear stance in the public debate, and with Euroscepticism being prominent in both the public and in politics, the news have an important role to play.

1.2 Research question

This thesis' main purpose was to investigate how British news media, in the form of online newspapers, covered Brexit and the EU leading up to the EU referendum in June 2016. The goal was to find a way to accurately measure negativity in said coverage. The British press is known to be either partisan or at least favourable of one particular political party, it felt only natural to then choose news outlets that represented the political landscape. In addition, the selection is a mixture of both broadsheet and tabloid to best cover the broad variety of news options in Britain.

The press is to function as the 4th estate, one of the pillars of democracy. That entails informing the public so that they can make informed and educated decisions when participating in society and voting during elections. But, when the news media is blatantly partisan and changes in income and advertising revenue is in decline, its main function becomes increasingly difficult to practise. Therefore, my main research questions is as follows:

RQ: How has the British press, considering political bias and tendencies of negative focus, covered the EU-referendum?

In order to best answer the research question, I have chosen to score articles published during the referendum campaign by certain news outlets. I have scored them primarily based on certain criteria to identify negative tone and level of confrontation most accurately. To help

answer the overall research question I have decided to divide it into three separate research question:

RQ1: What topics has the media focused on when discussing potential EU-membership or covering EU- and referendum related news? Is there a correlation between topic and emotional tone?

RQ2: Has the right-leaning news media been more negative and less confrontational in their coverage?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between level and emotional tone? Has articles on a national level been more negative and articles on an international level been less negative?

Going further I have differentiated between the three research questions and have referred to them as RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. The main research question has been referred to as simply RQ.

With RQ1 I wanted to identify which topics were discussed in each article. By topic I mean talking points like immigration and the economy to the debate itself. One can consider these topics to be news frames, which has been elaborated on further in the following chapter. By choosing to identify topics I were able to understand how different topics were covered differently, and that some controversial topics like immigration and sovereignty were discussed more frequently than others.

RQ2 was added because it was important for me to find variations between news outlets that has distinct political alignments. Right-wing rhetoric has a tendency of being more vocal and negative, often creating an “us vs. them” narrative. By answering this research question, it became possible to find distinctions between the two political sides, this would suggest how readers with different political ideologies are presented the news.

When covering EU related news, British press has often covered it as national news instead of as international, as other countries would normally do. The reason behind RQ3 was to see if there were any significant differences in tone when discussing a topic on a national level and international. The reason being that news on a national level is often easier to relate to and be affected by.

1.3 Limitations

British coverage of EU news can be, and has been, researched in numerous ways. Looking at negativity in the British press is by no means a revolutionary idea, but by doing so manually and with different criteria, this thesis can contribute to a vast research field on both British press and negativity in the news media. The British press is, compared to other European countries, enormous. To make it possible, and for it to be reasonable, to do research on this particular topic, some limitations had to be made. As mentioned before, in this thesis articles from five different news outlets leaning from left to right has been analysed. There are numerous different news outlets in Britain, but it was necessary to narrow them down to an acceptable number for it to be possible to go through every article manually, while also ensure a large enough selection that would be satisfactory. This thesis does not however compare EU related news to regular news regarding politics or current affairs, but only EU and referendum related news articles from different sources. Having done so could have enabled me to identify possible irregularities in EU news compared to regular news, but the thesis focuses instead exclusively on EU related news during different time periods.

Neither has there been conducted a content analysis of the collected material. For this thesis only certain elements have been identified, such as topic, level, and tone, which has been used in a quantitative analysis. I am neither going further into rhetoric and dramaturgy used in the news, but the criteria for marking an article as for instance either negative or positive is based on elements related to rhetoric, dramaturgical tools, and emotionally loaded words and phrases. The latter is also why the selection has been limited to this extent. Due to the analysis having been done manually, I had more control over how to score certain words and phrases and I could see them in context and make a judgment accordingly.

The goal of this thesis is to give an accurate overview of how the British press covered the EU and the referendum during the run up for the 26th of June 2016. Due to how the British press differs from traditional American ideals of journalism, looking at them as one homogenous group is perhaps not the best alternative. For that reason, comparing news outlets with each other, is a good starting point for understanding the varied coverage of the EU, the referendum, and Brexit.

1.4 Structure

This thesis consists of six chapters, some with their own subchapters. In chapter 1 I have presented the study in its entirety, the case which this thesis revolves around, research questions, and its limitations. Chapter 2 is somewhat divided into two sections. I have gone further into the history of British newspapers and given a brief overview of its uniqueness, and how British journalism differs from the more standardised American one. It felt also natural to cover Britain's history with the EU and how British press usually covers EU related matters. Only a brief section has been dedicated to this topic. The second half of this chapter deals with the theoretical perspectives needed to answer the thesis' research questions. Media bias, political journalism, and cynicism in the press are all covered here, as well as previous research on similar topics. In chapter 3 I have given an account of the methodical decisions taken, how data has been gathered and analysed, and the quality and validity of the data. In chapter 4 I have presented my findings and given an analysis of the data as it is presented. In chapter 5 I discuss my findings from the previous chapter up against the theory from chapter 2 to help answer RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and the thesis' overall research question. Chapter 6 consists of the conclusion, where I attempt to summarize my findings, as well as account for some of the thesis' shortcomings and limitations.

2 Theory

In this chapter I have gone through previous research on the subject. An explanation of how the EU has been covered in the British press on previous occasions has been given as this helps understand the norm in covering EU related issues. Certain theoretical perspectives are explained in relation to my research question as they have been used to answer RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. This chapter start with how the EU has been covered by the British press and how it differs from other European countries. I continue with an overview of previous research on the EU in the news, on media bias, and on negativity in the news. These three subjects are fundamental for further discussion related to my findings.

2.1 The British Press

In Kevin Williams' (2010, p. 1) book on British newspaper history he starts of by stating the importance of the newspapers in UK-politics, society, and the daily lives of British people. British newspapers are also the bestselling newspapers in the whole of Europe with six newspapers being in the top 10.

During the 1900th century, newspaper publications entered what is considered their “golden age”. The period between the 1860s and early 20th century is heavily influenced by technological advances in printing as well as new communication technology, which gradually professionalised journalism. Simultaneously, newspapers were being bought up by so called Press Barons who were pushing their newspapes in a more political direction, shaping the newspaper environment of Britain to what it is today. It is also during this period that some of today's more known newspapers were launched. The Labour leaning newspaper the Daily Herald was launched, which ceased publication and relaunched as The Sun, perhaps Britain's now most controversial newspaper. The Daily Mail launched in 1896 and targeted the newly literate lower-middle class. These were people who due to the mass education program were now able to read, write and participate in public debate. The Daily Mail catered

to those with little political interest and focused more on entertainment in the form of human-interest stories, serials, features and competitions. This was also the first newspaper to take a more populist stance, sparking controversy during the Second Boer War when it was accused of not reporting on events objectively.

By the time the second world war ended, Britain had approximately 116 daily newspapers. Comparatively, America at the time had three times the population of Britain and had roughly 1763 daily newspapers (Baughman, 2015, p. 165), which might suggest that the British population was less informed of current affairs. But, as Baughman further explains, the British read more than the Americans on a daily basis. An UNESCO report from nearly a decade after the second world war showed the hunger for news in Britain at the time. According to the report Britain had one of the most concentrated newspaper circulations in the entire world, despite a much lower population than many of the larger countries. A total of 611 copies for every 1000 inhabitants in Britain, with a mere 353 copies for every 1000 in America (UNESCO, 1953).

The extent of British newspapers compared to American ones isn't the only interesting comparison. The correlation, or rather the difference, between the British press and the American press is something worth noting. As Baughman (2015, p. 168) continues, he describes how the British press would report on political news, heavily focusing on the phrase “one-sided reporting” using the crisis in Egypt in 1953 as an example. He recounts the words of the late American press critic A. J. Liebling:

“For those in London who read more than one paper ... it was hard to tell, on Wednesday morning after Sir Anthony Eden’s cease-fire announcement, whether the end of the shooting in Egypt represented an acknowledgment of political bankruptcy or the magnanimous conclusion of an episode of triumph unparalleled in British history.”

Interestingly, in America, a change was happening during the 60s and 70s that Britain was unable according to press-critics to follow along with. It is during this time, as Baughman (2015, p. 170) writes, one starts to see how British newspapers would evolve into what they are today. When American newspapers started moving into the field of investigative journalism with numerous political scandals such as the Watergate scandal and the Pentagon papers, British newspapers were unable to compete as they were “too beholden to those in

power”. That is not to say that American journalism is far less politicized than the British, but it shows how British journalism and the British press have for decades been politically biased.

2.2 Covering Europe

How the British press has covered Europe since the last half of the 20th century have been different than other European countries, and for most part complicated. To understand the nature of the British press’ coverage of the Brexit debate and the referendum in the spring of 2016 one has to be familiar with the UKs relationship with the EU, and the press’ history of covering- and being present in Brussels. Especially during the last decades of the European press corps in the 80s and 90s. Due to shifts in political climate both in the UK and throughout Europe and in the media sphere the way news regarding the union reached the public changed.

European citizens across the union rely primarily on the news media for information regarding European affairs, the EU, and on how the EU affects them at home in their own country (de Vreese, 2001, p. 283). While most western Europeans prefer getting their news from TV, some countries, like the UK, only narrowly prefer TV news over online news (Pew Research Center, 2017), the preference for newspapers and their online variants remain high.

As de Vreese (2001, p. 284) explains, news on foreign affairs usually influences public opinion more often and more strongly than its domestic counterpart. This is usually due to citizens being able to see the larger context when reading about domestic affairs than foreign. Norris (2000, p. 206) adds to this by stating that negative EU-related coverage had a causal effect on the public. When analysing EU coverage in Britain, Denmark, and Netherland, de Vreese (2001) found that stories about or regarding the EU were nearly non-existent during regular news cycles. When the EU was in the news it was during particular events, like elections or summits, even then the coverage was minimal. In television news, public broadcasters covered the EU more than their private counterparts, but even they had marginal coverage (p. 298-299).

What is interesting with de Vreese's (2001) research is the events he found were most prominent in the news and how these were covered. The Nice summit in 2000, the introduction of the euro in 1999, and the 1999 parliamentary elections, were all covered in the press but had different amount of coverage. As he explains, the absence of political drama during the introduction of the euro might explain why it was not covered as intensively. The summit in Nice on the other hand was covered quite intensively due to high amount of tension and conflict. Disagreements between nations, hasty negotiations, and demonstrations in the street were some key points explaining the tension brewing during the summit (p. 299). The EU was given coverage during these events, but the press was relying on certain amounts of spectacle to cover it.

Another key finding from de Vreese (2002) was the difference in amount of coverage between nations. Denmark gave the EU most attention during these events and de Vreese points to Denmark's political situation during this time. Denmark was in the process of integrating more with the EU and adopting the common currency (p. 300), a similar pattern can be seen during the 2016 referendum as the British press dedicated more time to the EU and EU-related issues when voting day came closer.

2.3 Media Bias

As stated by Hamborg, Donnay & Gipp (2019, p. 1) news articles are considered to be the primary source of unbiased information. Access to such information, whether it be online or in newspapers, are crucial for individuals to understand current affairs and to form both personal and public opinion. It is commonly known that news articles is the most trusted media format compared to television, radio, blogs, and social media (Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2007; Urban, 1999), but it should be noted that an increasing amount of people, particularly young people, turn more often to social media for news (Walker & Matsa, 2021).

While it might be the most trusted source, there are still elements to consider when reading news articles directly from the news outlet. Hamborg, Donnay & Gipp (2019, p. 1) outlines common factors that might influence the media coverage. As they state, media coverage

often, but not always, exhibit what they refer to as an internal bias, which is reflected in a news outlet's coverage. This might include factors such as ownership and source of income, or a clearer political or ideological stance by the outlet and its journalist or to conform to its audience. This is commonly referred to as media bias (Chiang & Knight, 2011; Raymond & Taylor, 2011).

In Mullainathan and Shleifers (2005) article they discuss two different types of media bias, namely one connected to ideology, and one referred to as spin. The former reflects the newspaper's agenda, where it seeks to affect the readers opinion in a certain way, whilst the latter seeks only to create a memorable story (p. 1032). They have specifically looked at how these two elements factor into the competition between different news outlets, and whether or not they incentivise news outlets to spin news stories in their favour. Where these biases come from are also worth noting. Ideology comes directly from the journalist or the editor of said newspaper where one feels the need to tell a news story from one point of view, whereas spin often comes from the desire to tell a simple story in a way that affects the reader or caters to their readers prejudice (p. 1033).

While ideology is often easier to spot or analyse according to Mullainathan and Shleifers (2005), spin is equally important. They state that when there is fair competition between different news outlets, the “truth” comes out, which they explain as competition undoing the biases from ideology (p. 1042). This means that when a news story has a clear ideological tone, having more news outlets telling the same story but with their own individual ideology, the truth emerges from collective reporting. Yet they quickly follow up with the term “aggressive catering” (p. 1042), which is best explained as news outlets finding themselves in an increasingly competitive market where one has to cater to one's base to survive. This causes a news outlet to further spin stories in their readers direction.

The way a news outlet might spin an event occurs, according to Mullainathan and Shleifers (2005), when they specifically omit certain aspects of it, such as not reporting all the facts surrounding the event or weigh facts differently (p. 1040). They use unemployment rates to visualise their findings and explain that when a news reporter is given a combination of recent unemployment-rates and from previous years, economic indicators and predictions, the reporter can weigh these factors according to their needs. If one reporter wants a positive spin, they can give a recollection of the numbers with a combination of selected phrases from experts in a way that paints a more positive picture of the current situation. But a reporter

wanting a negative spin can do the same (p. 1040-1041). They also include the reader in their assumption. Since the negative version of the story and the positive version uses the same method, the reader can read both and reduce the effect of the spin. If one paper omits the positive aspects and one omits the negative ones, the reader can cross-check both papers and be left with all the facts as if they had read a newspaper which had not spun the story.

2.4 Emotional Tone: Negativity in the News

When researching why Britons voted to leave the EU, most scholars has focused their attention to cultural or socioeconomic explanations (Norris & Ingehardt, 2018). But as Berry, Whal-Jorgensen, Garcia-Blanco, Bennett, and Cable (2021, p. 2082) explains, few researchers have devoted their attention to the role of the media. While referencing Startin (2015), Berry et al. underlines that this is a striking insight as themes covered extensively in the media are often given as explanations as to why Britons voted to leave the union.

What researchers over have been able to show over the past decade, is that journalists and the news media generally cover political news and current affairs more negatively (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2011; Niven, 2001). There are several reasons for this as researchers have been aware of for decades. In 1965, Galtung and Ruge published an article where they had found that Norwegian journalists would more often select negative news stories when covering foreign affairs. They also published another article where they explain that news about foreign affairs would often have a negative focus (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). It has also been understood that readers and consumers of news, and also political ads, often respond more to negativity (Geer, 2006; Trussler & Soroka, 2014). As explained by Baumeister, Bratslavsky and Finkenauer (2001, p. 1089), bad news and bad emotions have more impact than good ones, which in turn makes an individual more thoroughly process bad or negative information.

The term “media cynicism” is often used when discussing the negative tendency of the press. In Cappella and Jamieson’s (1997) book, they explore how public distrust in political parties and democratic institutions is partly the fault of the media and its insistence to cover politics

in a cynical manner (p.209). According to their research, in the last half of the 20th century, two thirds of Americans were under the impression that the news media actively chose sides when presenting political or social issues. They also found that two thirds felt that the media would often emphasise the negative when reporting on a story or event. Interestingly, those who were cynical towards the media and felt the media were often negative, were more likely to be conservative and white (p. 211). Yet, the impression then was that the public has started to view the media as part of the problem, instead of the solution (p. 227).

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) underlines some key points about negativity in the press in the US context worth noting. Throughout the 80s news that was not neutral was more often negative instead of positive. National press was more often negative in their coverage and chose more often negative news stories. They observe that press coverage in the US went from “healthy scepticism to outright cynicism” (p. 32-33). They also underline the key differences between the issue-based reporting which was the norm for quite some time, to the new “who’s behind and who’s ahead” type of reporting, a more strategy kind of coverage. The winning or losing question is a key component, war-like language where the competition between two sides is highlighted, and the use of polls to measure performance and popularity (p. 33). This coverage style was seen as the more dominant form from the 90s and later, as journalists would make the horse-race style the new norm when covering elections (p. 33-34). As they later write, cynicism from the readers side may be a result from the spectatorship that the strategy format enables (p. 36) which might be why news coverage for some time have been more negative in nature as it conforms to the spectacle aspect.

To explain why there is a tendency for negative focus in political news, Trussler and Soroka (2014) challenged the assumption that the news outlet would by its own accord choose to focus on the horse-race and the more conflictual aspects of politics. They argued that while journalistic norms and news values matter in selecting news story and angle, consumer demand also contribute to the negative nature of news (p. 373). What is striking is that in their survey participant would be more open to having more positive news stories, yet when presented with a set of articles negative ones were selected more frequently. Those who showed a greater interest for politics or were politically active would more often select strategic news stories that did not necessarily show any sign of negativity or positivity (p. 168-374). Yet, they do underline that due to an increasingly competitive media environment, making news stories appeal more to those who are not politically interested is a must for news

outlets to keep themselves afloat. Norris (2000, p. 91) notes something similar and point to the American- and European news outlets, where they both experience a rise of tabloidization and sensationalism, which is often related to more negative coverage, as a way of making the news more interesting to their consumers.

The assumption that journalism needs to change in order to meet its consumers' needs is widely spread. In a recent study by Zahay et al (2021) where journalists spoke about low level of trust in their profession, it was apparent that they felt the need to implement different techniques to make their work more appealing and inclusive. This, as Schafer et al. (2022) explains, implies that there is a gap between citizens and the news media. They explain this gap as a result of negative news and a tendency to primarily report on conflict and tragedy (Schafer et al., 2022; Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2011). One way to overcome this gap is for journalists to use restorative narratives. This technique includes making use of solution-based descriptions and focus more on stories about regular people. Some scholars also suggest covering difficult situations with more positive emotions (Schafer et al., 2022, p. 14). What Schafer et al. (2022) found in their research on readers' response to restorative narratives in crisis related news, was that if a news article made use of these narratives the readers were left with a more positive emotion after reading. Their findings were rather small, but it does suggest that a more positive perspective in the news makes people feel better. Interestingly, they also found that in relation to negative emotion, the effect of a restorative narrative was minimal, and dependent on topic. This narrative only caused fewer negative responses compared to using negative narratives. Meaning that a restorative narrative did not change the emotional response of the reader but rather minimised the negative response. They go even further and suggest that if a topic is highly relevant during a longer period of time, simply mentioning it in the news media might elicit negative connotations. This is interesting as it suggests that a reader might be influenced by these connotations in such a way that a restorative narrative, a change in tonality, might not be enough to counter pre-existing emotions. Yet, the researchers did find that news articles with a restorative narrative was rated higher in quality, credibility, trustworthiness, and in objectivity. As they write, this might be an example of what kind of news readers would want to read in times of crisis: "...a constructive form of news coverage that provides positivity, solutions, and coping strategies instead of an entirely negative perspective on a difficult situation" (Schafer et al., 2022, p. 15-16). This is supported by Dahmen et al. (2021) who found, when researching solution-visuals in photojournalism, that solution-oriented reporting, regardless of it being texts or photos,

does lead to positive reactions from the readers. They also showed that using such restorative narratives, and in this case solution-oriented photos, lead to more engagement from the audience (p. 283).

When covering difficult situations, Schafer et al. (2022, p. 17), concludes that while restorative narratives are affective, negative narratives and negative overall tonality are sometimes unavoidable, and might be the only option in some situations. But longer lasting crisis or political events, whether that be pandemic or elections, constructive news reporting seems to be more in line with what the readers want. This is especially important where negative connotations, e.g., regarding the EU, have been brewing in the public for decades. This was also believed to be the case by Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 233) who argued that when reporting on a particular issue in a way that is primarily critical and does not invite a two-sided debate, invites a form of cynical response by the readers. Equally important was finding news frames that would effectively dampen negative reactions from readers, which would instead inform, criticise, and focus more on solutions to a societal problem.

What is typical of research on negative tonality is, as Lengauer et al. (2011, p. 187) explains, a focus on individualized tone towards political candidates or parties. They also point out that when deciding on the level of negativity, one would base it on conflict measurements alone. Based on this they imply that the empirical evidence on the subject of negative tone in news is rather scarce and scattered. They go on further to say that negative tone is often followed by a more pessimistic outlook on political matters. Often, these pessimistic views are what defines political news across countries and media outlets. Conflict is another matter which Lengauer et al. (2011, p. 188) points to being a defining frame for many news media, particularly British news media, when discussing the EU. The conflict-focus is present in many cases throughout European news media and is the preferred focus outweighing consensus news. Interestingly, they note that throughout the 90s and early 2000s evidence suggests that political reports also focused more on unresolved issues and that political incapability were often the subject matter in the European press, rather than their capability. They also point out that there has been a moderate increase in levels of attack by the press and scandals being reported by the press over the past decades. This is particularly the case during elections, but there are tendencies also outside of election season. They conclude that there is, with very few exceptions, enough evidence and research to say that news coverage on political actors and parties are predominantly negative, and that this trend has been evolving for decades (p. 189).

3 Method

Research, in its most basic form, is to give an insight to reality and how we see and understand the world around us. The use of a particular research method helps generate said insight, in the field one is interested in gaining new or additional knowledge. The chosen method dictates how one collects and use empirical data which is then used to answer a hypothesis or a research question (Østbye, Helland, Knapskog, Larsen, & Moe, 2013). As for this thesis, my intention has been to see how different British news outlets has covered the EU, and the possibility of a Brexit during the EU-referendum in 2016. This has been done to further understand the role of the press in society and how different outlets choose to cover political events at this scale.

In this chapter I have given a detailed overview of the thesis' research design and how it has been structured. I have also gone through my choice of method and what empirical data I have focused on in order to answer the thesis' research question.

3.1 Research design

As previously stated, this thesis' main goal is to understand how the EU, a possible Brexit, and EU-membership was covered by the British press, with the following research question:

RQ: How has the British press, considering political bias and tendencies of negative focus, covered the EU-referendum?

With the RQ follows three additional research questions to assist in answering the overall research question:

RQ1: What topics has the media focused on when discussing potential EU-membership or covering EU- and referendum related news? Is there a correlation between topic and emotional tone?

RQ2: Has the right-leaning news media been more negative and less confrontational in their coverage?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between level and emotional tone? Have articles on a national level been more negative and articles on an international level been less negative?

In order to answer these RQs I have used online news articles from five different UK newspapers. These five all differ in regard to political alignment and are a collection of both broadsheet and tabloid. These articles are used as the empirical material. It is, as Østbye et al. (2013, p. 103) explains, important to choose a research method that can best help understand the source material, and which can thoroughly answer the RQs.

For this thesis I have chosen to do a quantitative content analysis of the EU coverage in a varied set of news outlets. These include The Times, The Independent, Daily Mail, The Guardian, and The Daily Mirror. The articles were all published between 02.05.16 - 07.05.16 and 21.06.16 - 23.06.16. These particular time periods were chosen because I wanted to see if there were any differences in the coverage and in the amount of coverage right up to voting day. While I did not compare the amount of EU and referendum related news to the amount of regular news, the analysis still gave an impression of the extent of the coverage. With the quantitative analysis I was also able to form an impression of the overall tone of each article, and of the coverage as a whole, from each news outlet.

To further analyze and understand the data, I have applied a more experimental method proposed by Lengauer, Esser, and Berganza (2011). Their essay has provided a set of different indicators and matrix-based classifications of overall emotional tone which I have used to analyse my data and to measure and categorize the articles intensity and multi-dimensionality. The method yields a so-called quadrinomial matrix with four types of confrontational negativity. I chose this method because it gives a more varied understanding of emotions in the news, since it does not only focus on negativity, but also whether the content of an article is two-sided or one-sided.

3.2 Quantitative content analysis

To best answer the research question, I chose to use a quantitative content analysis. As Berger (2016, p. 271-272) explains, the use of content analysis is widely used in media research as it enables us to analyze the content of something, that being a film, text, or in this context the news. This form of analysis works either as a qualitative or quantitative method. By using a quantitative method for this thesis, I have been able to measure the content of selected news articles systematically and objectively.

There are several benefits to doing content analysis. Some researchers point to its unobtrusiveness and the ability to quantify data, which is ideal to cover current events and topics that are interesting to research in the present-day. By being unobtrusive, the researcher does not risk interfering with the study and thus avoids affecting the outcome. It is also great for current affairs, but needs to be put into context (Berger, p. 280).

Researchers chose content analysis for a number of reasons, but it is always to gather information that can tell us something about the content of a certain topic. To best use the gathered data and have them analyzed, using hypothesis' is often helpful. Researchers often use hypothesis', a way to state the problem they are investigating, to give their research more focus (Berger, 2016, p. 272). For this thesis, RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 functions as my hypothesis', as they are there to help direct my research onto specific factors of the British press.

Another factor to consider when using a content analysis, is that it needs a certain approach to make the research contextualizable. This is done in one of two ways, either with a historical approach, where one would compare findings on the same topic dating for example several years back or using a comparative approach where one's findings are compared to research from other countries for instance. By using the latter, you can place your findings in an international context. By using one of these approaches, you are able to put your data into perspective giving them more meaning (Berger, 2016, p.276). By using two different time periods in the thesis, I am able to say more about the coverage and compare them both in scale and intensity.

For this thesis, coding has been a must. To make sense of the data every article was coded. According to Berger (2016, p. 277) coding is a process where researchers classify their data. This is done by giving each item a number or a symbol that is later used to interpret the data. The reason for why I have chosen to manually code every article, is to better understand the context of each word and phrase. Using an automatic approach for news articles would lose some of the nuances, as determining negativity and positivity with automated coding is often best for personal text and not news or academic text.

It is important to remember that using content analysis, either qualitative or quantitative, only allows us to analyze the content of communication, not the nature of the communicator or potential effects (Berger, 2016, p. 272) that the content might have on readers. There are also several other difficulties regarding sample size, obtaining reliability, and ensuring validity of the findings.

3.3 Selection of Sources

The referendum of 2016 was covered over the entire UK and was also major news in Europe, especially the aftermath of Brexit. The question of a continued EU-membership was brought up at every level of the press, from the international news outlets, the national news outlets, and down to the regional news outlets. In order to limit my selection and the amount of data, I found it necessary to narrow it down to only a handful of different news outlets, and to also leave out some kinds of articles. I have not given any attention to local or regional newspapers, nor have I used any special-interest papers or magazines, or international news outlets. I have chosen to focus only on national newspapers and their online publications, these include The Times, The Independent, Daily Mail, The Guardian, and The Daily Mirror. In 2016 these were on the top ten of most read newspapers in the UK, including both paper format and online, except for the Independent which went online-only in March 2016. According to Statista (2017) the newspaper with the most reach in 2016 was The Sun, with the Daily Mail following in its footsteps, the Daily Mirror on 4th place, The Times on 8th, The Guardian on 9th. These news outlets vary in total circulation and online traffic, with some outlets – i.e. The Guardian and The Independent – having a larger number of articles written

on the subject matter. Partly why these news outlets were selected was due to their availability on the Dow Jones' Factiva database during the data collection period in May 2020.

Since the coverage during the referendum period was extensive, I found it necessary to narrow it down even further. The Factiva database enabled me to narrow down the number of articles using different search criteria. According to a Reuters (2016, p. 12-13) research paper the total number of articles focusing on- and referring to the referendum was well over 2000 during four sample days in May and June. It was therefore necessary to use certain criteria to find a total number of articles that were reasonable to analyze but were still generalizable.

I felt it was only natural to choose news outlets that were varied in both format and political alignment. With format I am referring to whether the outlet is a tabloid or a broadsheet, as these have different criteria for covering news. While broadsheets were historically for the middle class, tabloids were for the working class and focuses primarily on sensational news rather than quality news. Tabloids traditionally have less coverage of heavy political cases and focuses more on short news stories, often easy to sensationalize, while broadsheets have more in-depth analysis of current affairs. Two of the news outlets chosen for this thesis fit the tabloid classification, namely the Daily Mail and the Daily Mirror, and the other three, The Times, The Independent, and The Guardian are considered broadsheets. While I have not compared the amount of Brexit related articles to the overall number of articles, having the different formats represented in the dataset would allow me to see where certain topics were given the most attention. Since tabloids does have a tendency for sensationalize the news, having made this selection would also allow me to identify differences in emotional tone across these two formats.

When selecting British news outlets, one cannot ignore their political alignment, in order to have a selection that is representative of the political landscape in Britain. Historically, the British press has almost always had a political stance, or at least been in favour of either the left or the right. For my selection I made an attempt at reflecting the political landscape while also factoring in tabloids and broadsheet to best represent political bias in both formats. For the tabloids I chose the conservative Daily Mail and the liberal The Daily Mirror, which are also the oldest tabloids in the UK, having been founded in 1896 and 1903 respectively. Both papers took a hard stance during the referendum campaign, where The Daily Mirror was strongly anti-Brexit, and the Daily Mail was heavily in favour of leaving the EU. For the broadsheets I chose The Times, as it is a more right-leaning newspaper, and The Guardian as

it is one of the most left-wing newspapers in the country. These are also considered two of the more reliable news sources in the UK. I made an attempt at finding a more centrist news outlet as well, the closest that was available in Factiva was the Independent. This was intended to be a centrist newspaper but is often considered left-wing with a liberal, pro-market stance on economic issues. With these five news outlets I was confident that I had a varied selection that were both similar in structure and coverage which made them comparable, while still being different enough to give a varied and generalizable dataset.

In addition to political alignment and format, choosing a specific time period was necessary. A potential Brexit was in the news on and off especially after the Conservative party won re-election in 2015, but it picked up speed in February 2016 when the referendum date was announced, and then again in May when referendum-day was a little over a month away. The selected time periods, 02.05.16 - 07.05.16 and 21.06.16 - 23.06.16, was chosen to give an insight in number of articles written before the referendum campaign picked up speed and the number written right near the end. This would also give an insight into differences in topics discussed and whether the tone changed near the end. The specific time periods are later referred to as period one (P1), consisting of articles written between 02.05.16 - 07.05.16, and period two (P2), consisting of articles written between 21.06.16 - 23.06.16. The reason for a shorter time frame for P2 was the extent of articles written on the subject matter and how it dominated the news.

Some additional limitations were made after the articles had been retrieved from Factiva. Many of the chosen newspapers had regional variants, which were filtered out. Only the main publications were taken into account, meaning that articles published to a regional variant, where that were an option – i.e., Wales or Scotland – were excluded in the dataset. Any article that was published in all regional variants, was categorized as duplicates and only the article published in the main outlet was chosen.

There were also some genres that were excluded, including letters sent in by the readers, collections of top stories, weekly summaries, stock market updates, and live updates. Only news articles, features, and op-eds were used in the analysis.

3.4 Search criteria

As previously mentioned, I used the Dow Jones' Factiva database to search for and retrieve articles. Before retrieving the articles from the Factiva database, a set of search terms were developed to retrieve only relevant articles. After some trial and error, I found that using only three keywords were sufficient enough, therefore only "EU", "Brexit", and "referendum" were used. Factiva also has the option to exclude certain sub-categories such as letters and stock market updates. To ensure only relevant articles were collected, articles marked as the following were excluded: "sports", "top stories", "trends", "analysis", and "content types". The remaining selection included articles marked as: "financial/market", "corporate/industrial", "economic", and "political/general". Another exclusion was made regarding articles marked as "republished". This ensured that articles that were republished in regional variants, but also articles in Irish sister-publications, were not included in the final collection.

Having already narrowed the selection down to consist of only relative articles, the search result still produced too many to be analyzed manually, resulting in over thousands of articles. A further reduction was needed and to find a reasonable amount, but which could still produce a representative result. Therefore, the final collection only included articles that mention the keywords "EU", "Brexit", and "referendum" in the headline. After reading through all the retrieved articles, I made some final adjustments to the collection. Some articles that were about the EU were removed from the collection due to not being related to the subject matter – i.e. stories about EU- politicians or countries, celebrities, and also speculations regarding a potential Scottish, and also Catalonian, referendum. Some EU related news was kept in the collection as it directly or indirectly relates to the UK. For example, news coverage on whether Turkey should join the EU was not removed as that particular debate was a central part of UKs prime minister David Cameron's argument for continued EU membership, as it would allow Britain to fight against their inclusion. After finishing a final readthrough the total number of articles were 209. For P1 a total of 84 articles were retrieved, and 125 for P2.

3.5 Variables

Before collecting the articles, I developed a set of variables that would further assist in answering the RQs. These were as follows:

- Date
- Publication
- Genre
- Words
- Frames:
 - Immigration/Borders
 - Trade
 - Economy
 - Sovereignty
 - The EU/ Deal
 - The Campaign
 - Other
- Level
 - International
 - National
 - Both
- Bias

– Emotion

These variables helped analyze the content of each article, while also enabling me to measure political bias and negative tone. The first three variables are rather self-explanatory, Date, Publication, and Genre, referring to exactly that, the date the article was published, in which news outlet it was published, and what kind of article it was, whether it was a regular news article, an op-ed, or a feature article. Note that the Date-variable considers the date the article was published, it does not take into account any updates made to the article at a later date. The variable Words is simply how many words there were in an article according to Factiva's automatic wordcount.

The Frame-category consist of different variables which in this context are considered dichotomous variables, meaning they are either present or not. A dichotomous variable has to values being either zero, as in non-existent, or one, as in existent (SOURCE). These variables helped categorize the articles after what topics were discussed in them. An article is marked with a "1" if it discusses or heavily mentions Immigration/Borders and with a "0" if the topic is not prominent in the article. This is the case for all the variables. The variable Immigration/Borders has been given a "1" only if the article discusses problems or opportunities with closed or open borders. This topic was considered a prominent reason for why many Britons voted leave. The Trade-variable was given a "1" if the article discussed trade or topics related to trade. The economy-variable was given a "1" if it discussed the British economy and how it is- or is not affected by the EU. The Sovereignty-variable was given a "1" if the article discussed Britain's self-rule and its own independence from mainland Europe, as well as its relationship with the EU whether it was considered bad or favorable to Britain's self-rule. The variable The Eu/Deal was given a "1" if the article discussed the EU itself or the deal Britain had with the EU, and the deal they could strike with them in the case of a Brexit. These might seem like to different topics but after going through all the articles they were considered too similar to be separate variables. The variable The Campaign was given a "1" if the article discussed the campaign itself. This included talking about specific parts from both the leave- and remain campaigns, as well as overall discussions about campaign-outcomes. The Other-variable is more open than the rest. This variable includes topics that were not often mentioned, but were still prominent in the coverage, such as the NHS.

The Level-category is simply there to find the focus of the article, whether the topics are discussed on a national level, international level, or both. This is to find out if some topics are more important to the UK itself and to the Britons at home, or if they are regarded as more important for the UK as an international actor and for the UK's relationship with other countries. This category also important in understanding whether articles written with a national focus is more negative or more positive.

The last two variables are considered continuous as these can be measured. The Bias-category is there to measure political bias in the article and the Emotion-category is for measuring overall tone in the article. A set of criteria was developed to best manually measure both bias and emotion. The following criteria was used to score the articles.

For political bias:

- Does the article criticize the leave- or remain campaign?
- Does the article have a primarily one-sided argument for or against?
- Does the article specifically advocate for either leave or remain?
- Does the article actively reflect on a topic?
- Does the article feature voices from both campaigns?

For emotion:

- Does the article have examples of fiasco-centered attitudes or references to defeatism?
- Does the article focus on achievements or prosperity?
- Does the article actively use negative or positive language?
- Does the article have elements of irony and sarcasm?
- Does the article refer to political actors or campaign members in either a negative or positive way?

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Both validity and reliability are simply put terms that are used to determine the quality of research. If a researcher is able to secure high validity and reliability the result of the research is a lot more valuable. As is explained by Neuendorf (2002, p. 112-117), when high reliability is secured, it means that the same result can be repeated. In the case of quantitative analysis such as used in this thesis, the method should produce the same result repeatedly. She also underlines another key point; the result should be the same for different people. Validity is described somewhat the same but revolves around the method itself. Validity is used to determine if the method used for the research is the best option in answering the thesis' research question. These two terms are also meant to confirm one another, as Neuendorf (2002, p. 112-117) continues, a valid measure is in many ways also a reliable one, but not necessarily vis a vis, since results can be replicated without the results being what the researcher intended it to be.

Some other interesting points by Neuendorf (2002, p. 115-116) are the term face validity and internal validity, where the former describes the ability to look at the study from afar and objectively evaluate the method and the measures that have been conducted. The latter describes whether or not the research has been conducted in a way that actually answers the research question(s). Since the overarching research question for this thesis is how the British press, considering political bias and tendencies of negative focus, covered the EU-referendum I am not looking for the effect of the coverage but simply trying to measure negativity and political bias.

4 Data

In this chapter the data from the content analysis will be presented. Firstly, more general data, followed by a more in depth look at bias and emotion. The data from both periods are presented together. Further analysis will be conducted in the next chapter.

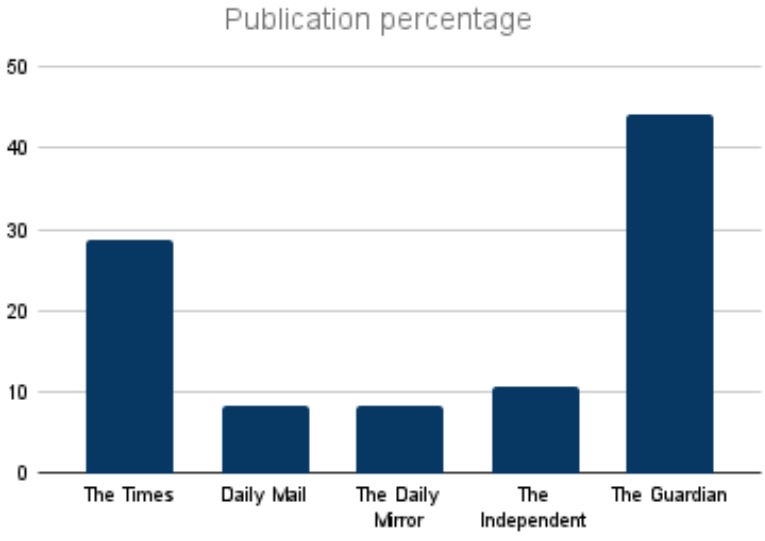


Figure 1: Total publications P1

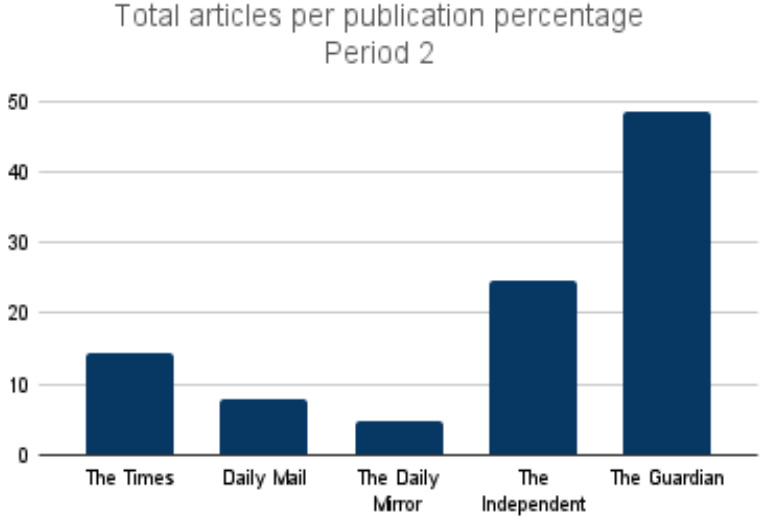


Figure 2: Total publications P2

Figure 1 and figure 2 shows how the Brexit/EU-referendum coverage varied from publication to publication. In both periods, The Guardian published the most articles with either EU, referendum, or Brexit in the headline. For the first period, The Guardian had 37 articles, The Times with 24, The Independent with 9, and both the Daily Mail and The Daily Mirror had 7 articles. That equals roughly to 44%, 29%, 11%, 8% and 8% respectively. For the second period, The Guardian published nearly double the amount with 61 articles, The Independent with 31, The Times with 18, Daily Mail, with 10, and The Daily Mirror with 6. That equals roughly to 48%, 25%, 14%, 8%, and 5% respectively.

For the last period, the number of articles went down or stayed somewhat similar to period 1. But for The Guardian and The Independent, the number went up a substantial amount.

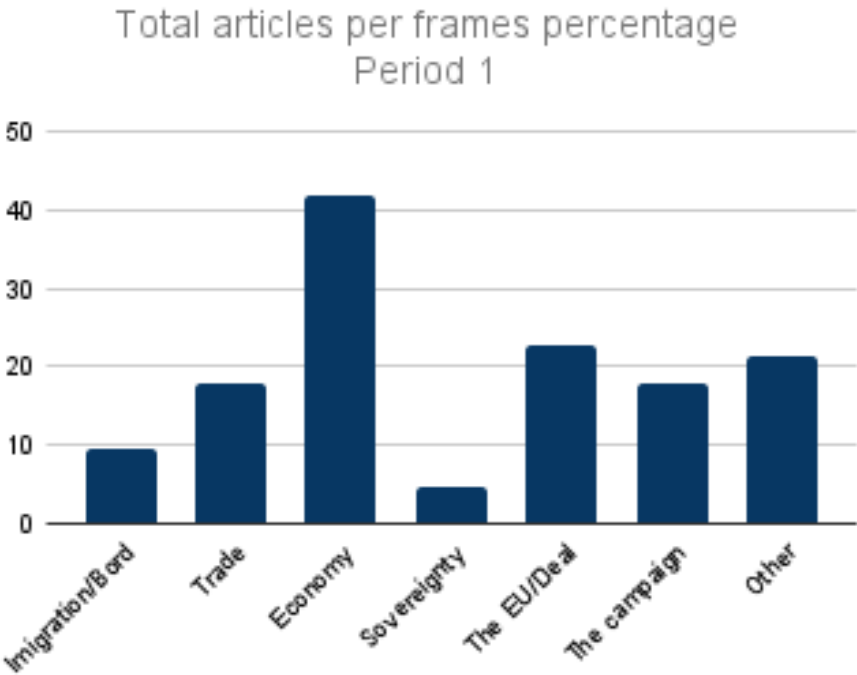


Figure 3: Total articles per frame P1

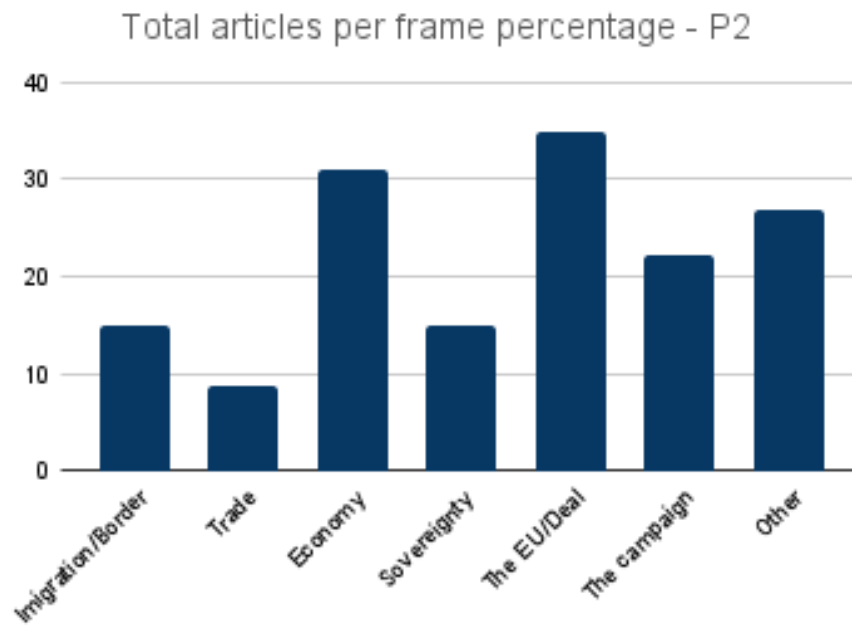


Figure 4: Total articles per frame P2

Each article contained at least one or more frames. Figures 3 and 4 visualize the extent of each frame used in the overall coverage. Figure 3 shows that the Immigration/Border-frame was present in 10% of the articles, the Trade-frame in 18%, the Economy-frame in 42%, the Sovereignty-frame in 5%, the EU/Deal-frame in 23%, and the Campaign-frame in 18%, while 21% of the articles in P1 also consisted of other frames. For P2 the Immigration/Border-frame was present in 15% of the coverage, the Trade-frame in 8%, the Economy-frame in 31%, the Sovereignty-frame in 15%, the EU/Deal-frame in 35%, and the Campaign-frame in 22%, while 27% of the coverage in P2 also consisted of other frames.

With *Trade* and *Economy* being the only frames that went down somewhat in the second period, all the other frames were used more. The Sovereignty- and EU/Deal-frame rose the most, with 10% and 12% respectively.

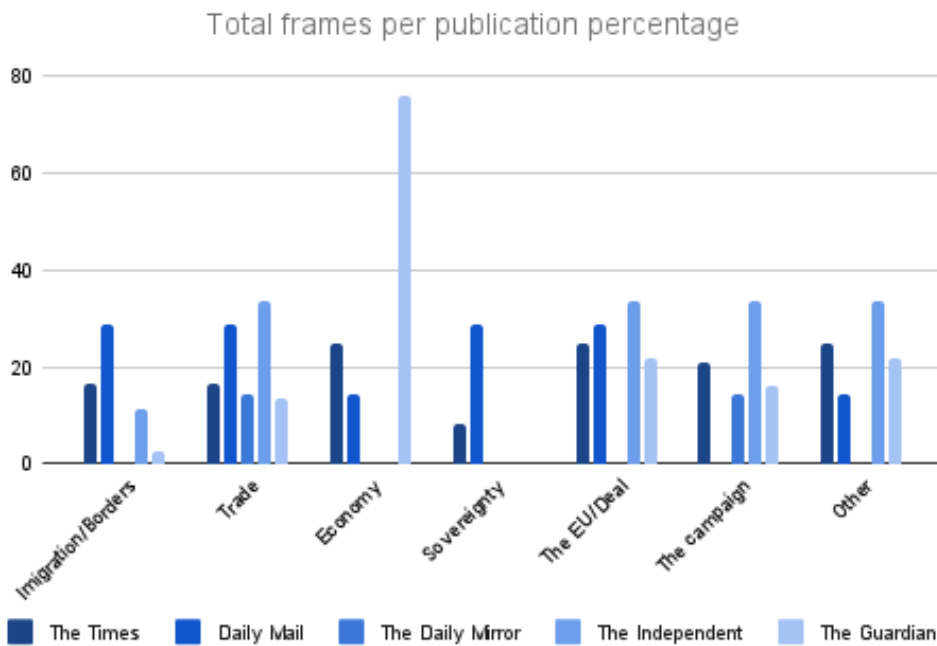


Figure 5: Total frames per publication P1

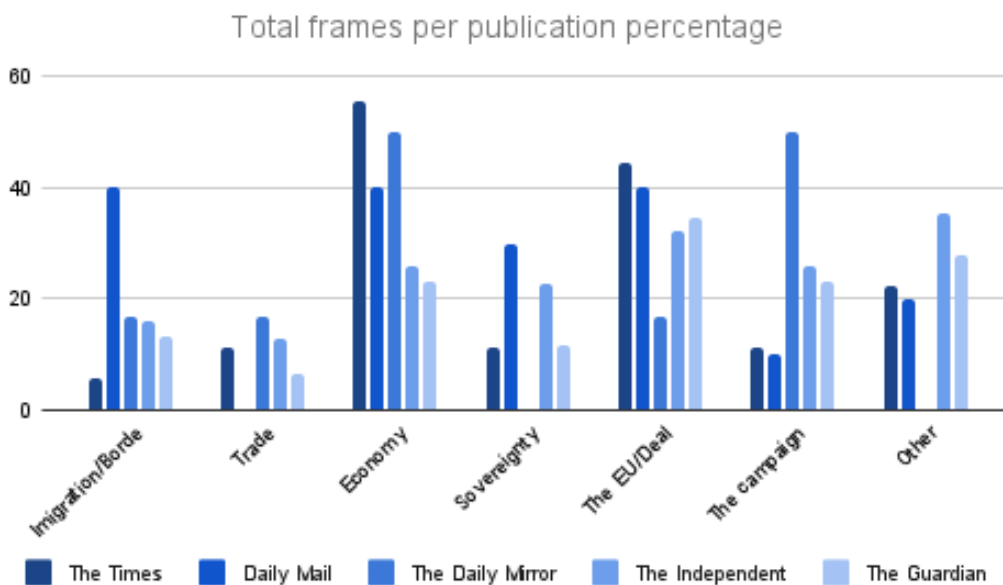


Figure 6: Total frames per publication P2

Figures 5 and 6 shows what frames were used the most by each publication. Figure 5 shows that *Trade* was used 17% of the time by The Times, 29% by the Daily Mail, 14% by The Daily Mirror, 33% by The Independent, and 14% by The Guardian. Figure 6 shows that *Trade* was used far less in the second period as The Times used it only 11% of the time, not at all by

the Daily Mail, 17% by The Daily Mirror, 13% by The Independent, and 7% by The Guardian.

The Economy-frame was used significantly more during the second period as figure 6 shows. During the first period, The Times used the Economy-frame in 25% of their articles, the Daily Mail 14%, and The Guardian used it in 76% of their articles. The Daily Mirror and The Independent did not use it at all. This changed during the second period as The Times now used it 56% of the time, the Daily Mail with 40%, The Daily Mirror with 50%, The Independent with 26%, and The Guardian with 23%.

The Sovereignty-frame was most used in the more right-leaning newspapers during the first period. It was featured in 8% of The Times' coverage and in 29% of the Daily Mail's coverage. As figure 5 shows, it was not present in the other three newspapers. During the second period however, *Sovereignty* was featured more heavily. For The Times it rose to 11%, and the Daily Mail used it 30% of the time. It was still not to be found in The Daily Mirror but was prominent in The Independent and in The Guardian with 23% and 11% respectively.

The EU/Deal -frame was used rather steadily during both periods. The Times used it 25%, the Daily Mail 29%, The Daily Mirror did not use it at all, and the Independent and the Guardian used it 33% and 22% respectively. There was an upsurge in period two, where the frame-usage rose in nearly every publication. The Times now used it 44% of the time, the Daily Mail 40%, The Daily Mirror 17%, The Independent 32 %, and The Guardian 34%.

A commentary on the camping itself was featured in almost every outlet, with only the daily Mail not mentioning it during the first period. The Times focused on the Campaign in 21% of their coverage, The Daily Mirror 14%, The Independent 33%, and The Guardian 16%. For the second period it fluctuated a bit, and The Times covered it 11%, the Daily Mail 10%, The Daily Mirror 50%, The Independent 26%, and The Guardian 33%. The most noteworthy being The Daily Mirror who went from 14% to 50%.

During the first period the Immigration/Border-frame was used 17% of the time by the Times, 29% by the Daily Mail, it was not present at The Daily Mirror, and then used 11% of the time by The Independent, and 3% by The Guardian. During the second period this had changed somewhat as it was down to 6% of the time by The Times, up to 40% by the Daily Mail, 17% by The Daily Mirror, 16% by The Independent, and up to 13% by The Guardian.

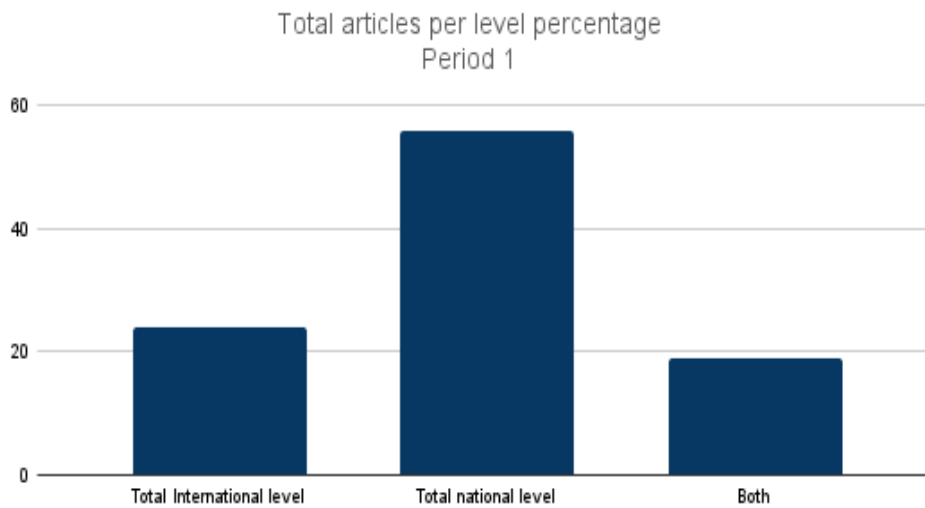


Figure 7: Total articles per level P1

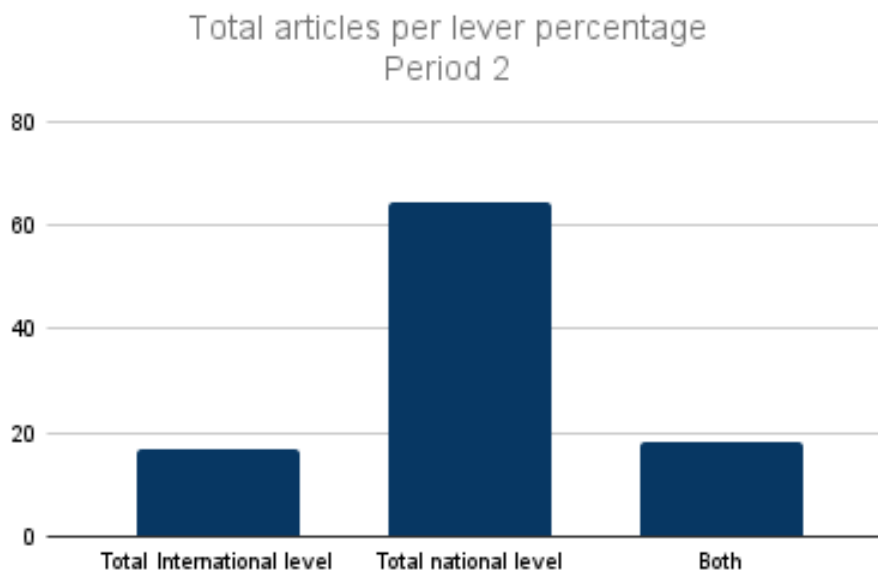


Figure 8: Total articles per level P2

As for level, figures 7 and 8 show how much of the overall coverage had an international, or national focus. During the first period, there was a bit more international coverage than during the second period. A total of 24% had an international focus where the article was primarily about either the EU or the UK and the international community, while a total of 57% had a national focus. 19% of the coverage shared focus-level.

For the second period, the coverage turned more national. Articles with an international focus went down to 17%, articles with a national focus went up to 65%, and the remaining 18% had a shared focus-level.

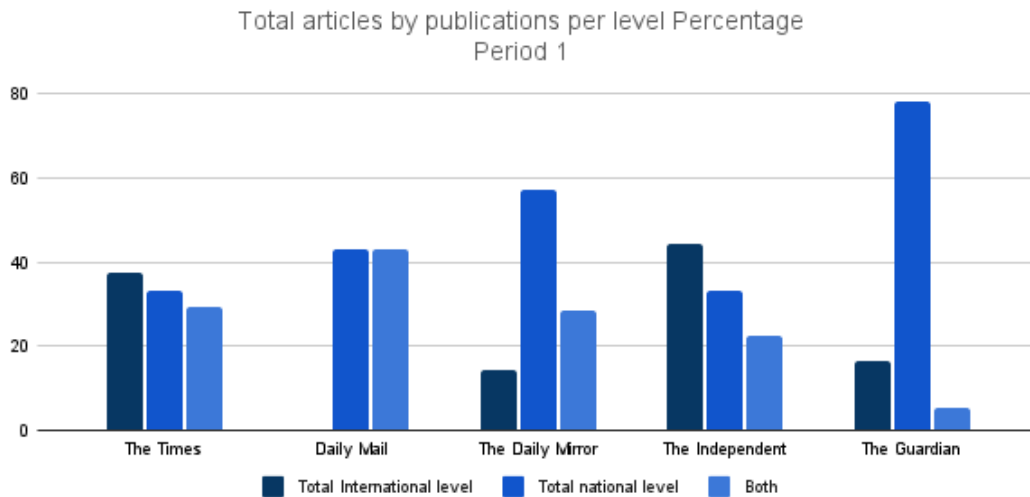


Figure 9: Total articles per level by publication P1

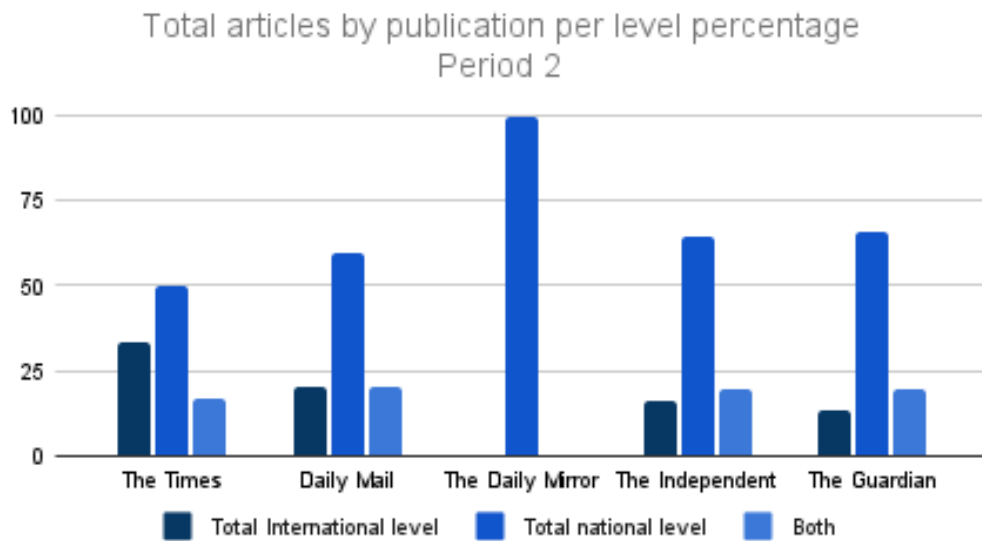


Figure 10: Total articles per level by publication P2

Figures 9 and 10 both show how much of the coverage by the five publications were on which level. During the first period, The Times had a relatively balanced coverage with 38% international, 33% national, and 29% with both. Daily Mail had no international focus during the entire first period, having only either national or both. For The Daily Mirror the focus was primarily national as 57% matched those criteria. For the rest of their coverage, it was 14%

international and 29% both. The Independent had just a bit more international focus than the rest with 44% international, 33% national, and 23% both. As for The Guardian, the coverage was primarily national with 78%, 16% international and 6% both.

Figure 10 shows the second period, where national focus seems to have become the dominant focus for all publications. The Times dedicated 33% of their coverage for international, 50% for national and 17% for both. Daily Mail had a bit of international focus with 20%, 60% national, and 20% of both. The Daily Mirror shifted focus to be only national with a 100% scoring. The Independent went down to 16% international, 65% national, and 19% of both. For The Guardian the national level of coverage went down slightly but remained high with 67%, and 13% and 20% for international and both respectively.

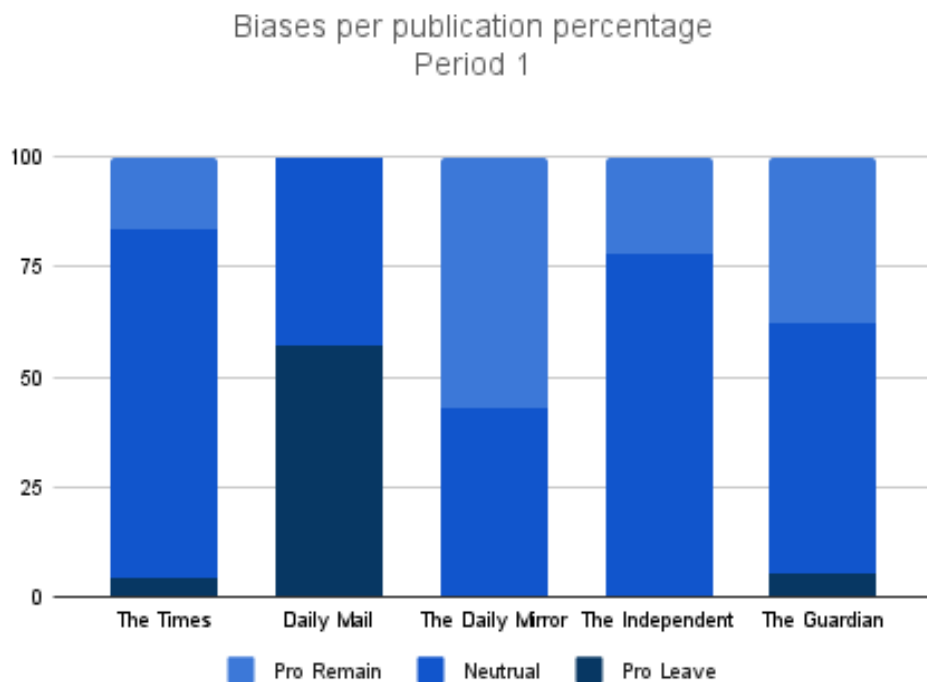


Figure 11: Biases per publication P1

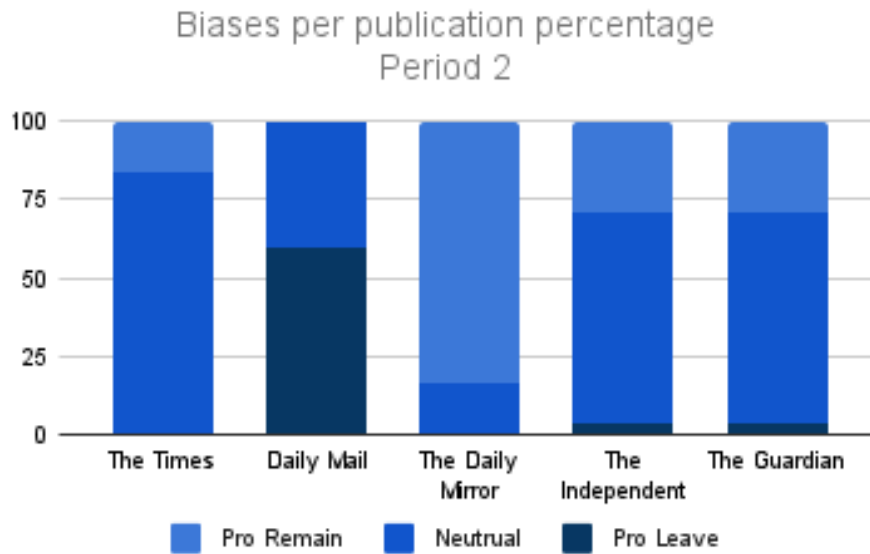


Figure 12: Biases per publication P2

Figures 11 and 12 show political bias, meaning either pro-Leave or pro-Remain sentiment in the coverage in all five publications. The articles have all been scored from 0 to 2 on bias, where a 0 indicates a neutral article, 1 being either a little pro-Leave or pro-Remain, and 2 being either a very pro-Leave or pro-Remain. In these figures 1 and 2 have not been differentiated. In The Times there were mostly neutral articles, where 79% of them neutral, 17% were pro-Remain, and only 4% were pro-Leave. In the Daily Mail the articles were either neutral or pro-Leave, with 43% and 57% respectively. The Daily Mirror on the other hand were either neutral or pro-Remain, with 57% and 43% respectively. As for The Independent the coverage was primarily neutral. 78% of their articles were neutral and the remaining 22% were pro-Remain. The Guardian shared some similarities with The Times having slightly more pro-Remain articles with 38%, 57% neutral, and only 5% pro-Leave.

During the second period, The Times seemed to have abandoned the pro-Leave sentiment altogether, having 83% of their articles be neutral, and 17% still being pro-Remain. The Daily Mail continued in the same direction as during the first period with 40% neutral and 60% pro-Leave. In contrast The Daily Mirror had no pro-Leave sentiment but had a staggering 83% pro-Remain articles and only 17% neutral articles. The Independent got a few pro-Leave articles, namely 3%, while 68% of their coverage was neutral and 29% was pro-Remain. The same was the case for The Guardian who had nearly identical political bias as The Independent. 3% was pro-Leave, and 67% was neutral and 30% was pro-Remain.

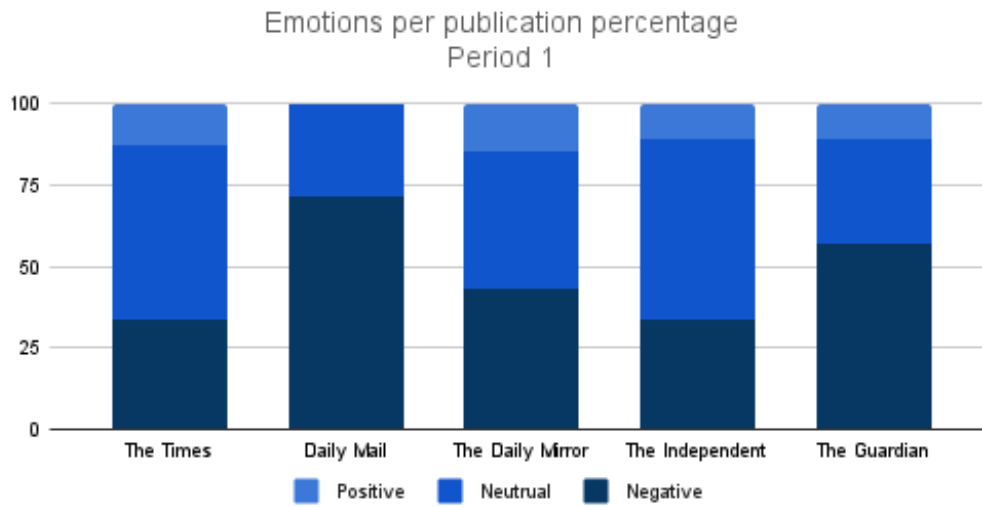


Figure 13: Emotions per publication

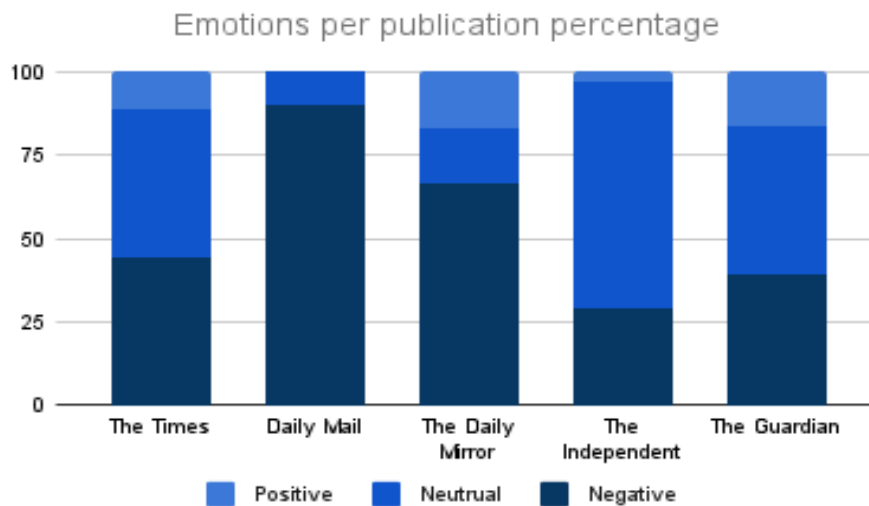


Figure 14: Emotions per publication

Regarding emotions, some clear tendencies emerge. In figures 13 and 14 emotions per publication is shown for both periods and while emotions have been scored similar to bias, neither in these charts have I differentiated between score 1 and score 2. These are all grouped together in figure 13 and 14. During the first period, The Times had 13% positive coverage, while the rest was 54% neutral and 33% negative. For the Daily Mail the articles seemed to be more negative as 71% were scored negatively and 29% were considered neutral. The Daily Mirror had 43% negative and neutral coverage, and 14 % positive coverage. 33% of the

articles from The Independent were considered negative, 56% were considered neutral, and 11% were considered positive. The Guardian had 57% negatively loaded articles, 32% were neutral, and 11% were considered positive.

During the second period the coverage remained similar, but with a few differences. The Times had 44% negatively loaded articles, 44% neutral ones, and 12% positive ones. The articles from the Daily Mail were almost exclusively negative, with 90% and only 10% of the articles being neutral. Articles from The Daily Mirror were 67% negative, 16% neutral, and 17% positive. The articles from The Independent were primarily neutral with 68%, while 29% were negative and only 3% were positive. Finally, The Guardian had 40% of their coverage be negative, 44% of it were neutral, and 16% were positive.

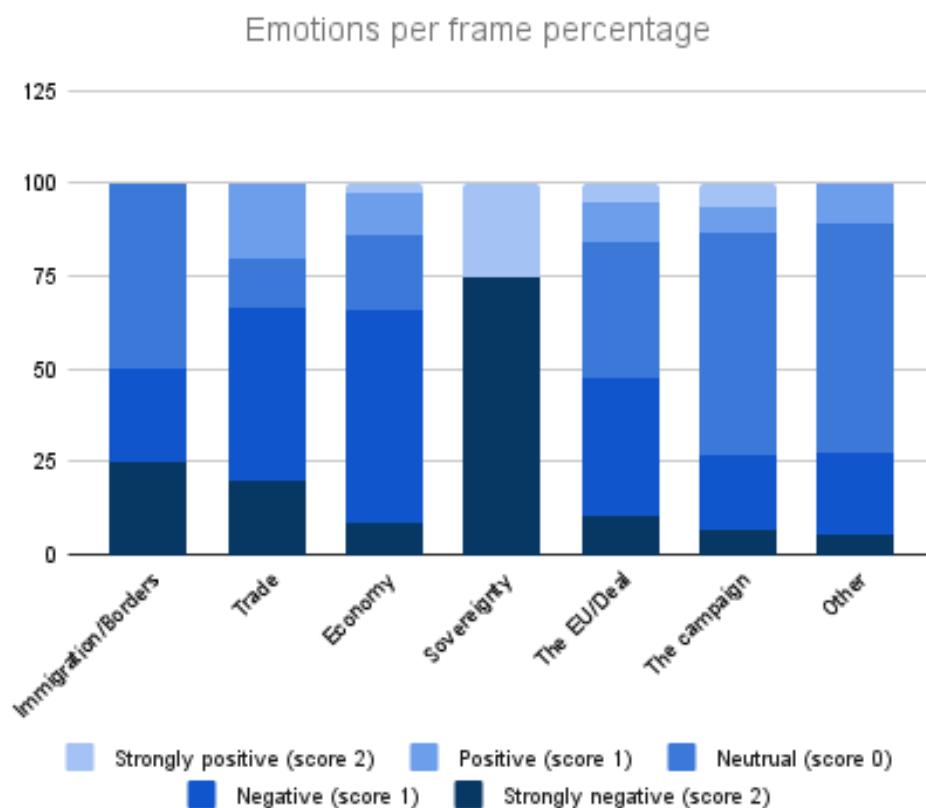


Figure 15 : Emotions per frame P1

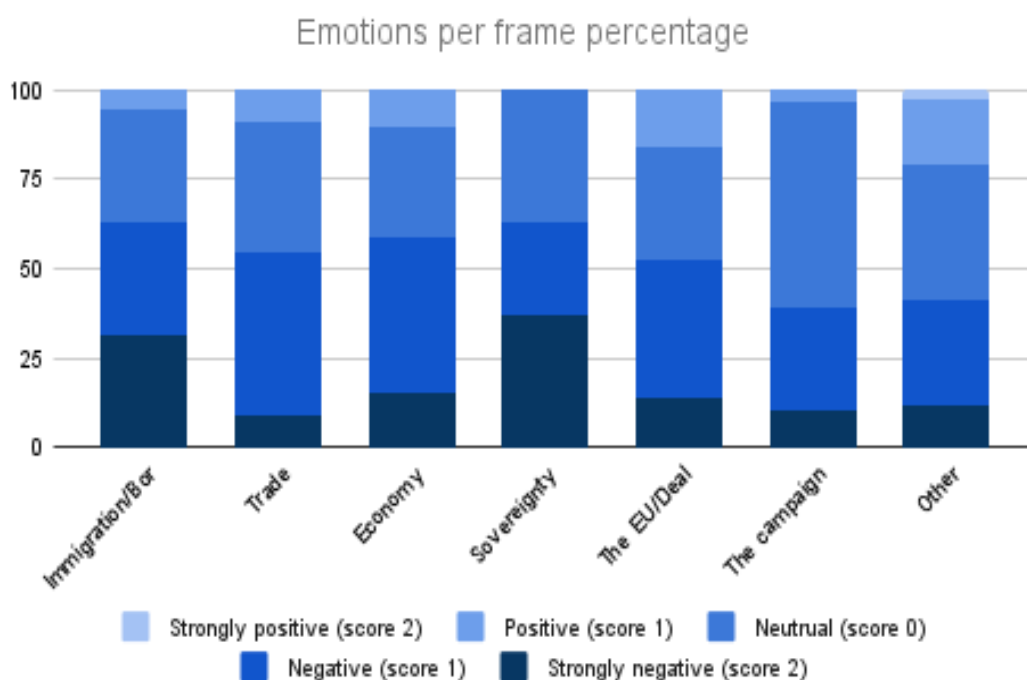


Figure 16 : Emotions per frame P2

Figures 15 and 16 show each frame and how the coverage overall has either been positive or negative. In these tables I have chosen to differentiate between each score instead of grouping them together.

As shown in figure 15, the Immigration/Border-frame has been discussed rather negatively with 25% of the overall coverage being strongly negative and 25% being negative. The remaining 50% have been neutral. During the second period, the coverage on immigration and borders turned even more negative with 32% of it was strongly negative and 32% being negative. 32% of it was neutral and only 6% was positive.

For the Trade-frame during the first period, most of the coverage was negative as well. 20% was considered strongly negative, and 47% were considered negative. 13% of the coverage was found to be neutral, and the remaining 20% were positive. The negativity surrounding the topic seemed to have calmed down a bit by the second period, since only 9% was considered strongly negative, and 45% was scored as negative. 36% of the remaining articles were neutral and 10% were considered positive.

The Economy-frame seemed to have been covered mostly negatively overall as 9% of the articles were strongly negative and 57% were negative. 20% of the articles were neutral, 11% were positive and only 3% were considered strongly positive. This did not change too much during the second period as 15% of the articles were now strongly negative, and 44% were negative. 31% of the articles were now neutral and the remaining 10% were positive.

In the case of *Sovereignty*, it stands out during the first period. A staggering 75% of the articles regarding sovereignty are strongly negative, and the remaining 25% were at the other end of the spectrum and were considered strongly positive. This changes somewhat during the second period as 37% of the articles are now considered strongly negative, and 26% as negative. The remaining 37% are now neutral.

11% of the articles surrounding the EU or the potential deal with the EU were strongly negative and 37% were considered negative during the first period. This is the first frame that is not primarily negative as more than half are considered neutral or positive, with 37% being neutral, 11% being positive, and the remaining 5% being strongly positive. This does change somewhat during the second period as 14% of the article are strongly negative, 37% were negative and 32% were neutral. The remaining 16% of the articles were considered positive.

The campaign coverage was primarily neutral during both the first and second period. During the first period, 60% of the coverage was neutral, the remaining articles were then mostly negative as 6% were strongly negative and 20% were negative. The remaining 14% were split equally between positive and strongly positive with 7% each. During the second period the coverage became somewhat more negative as 11% were strongly negative and 29% were negative. The amount of neutral articles remained high at 57%, but only 3% of the articles were positive.

For other frames during the first period a majority of them, 61%, were neutral. 6% were considered strongly negative and 22% negative. The remaining 11% were positive. The second period looked the same, with only a few minor differences. 12% of the articles were strongly negative while 29% were negative. The amount of neutral articles went down to 38%, and the remaining articles were considered positive, 18%, and strongly positive, 3%.

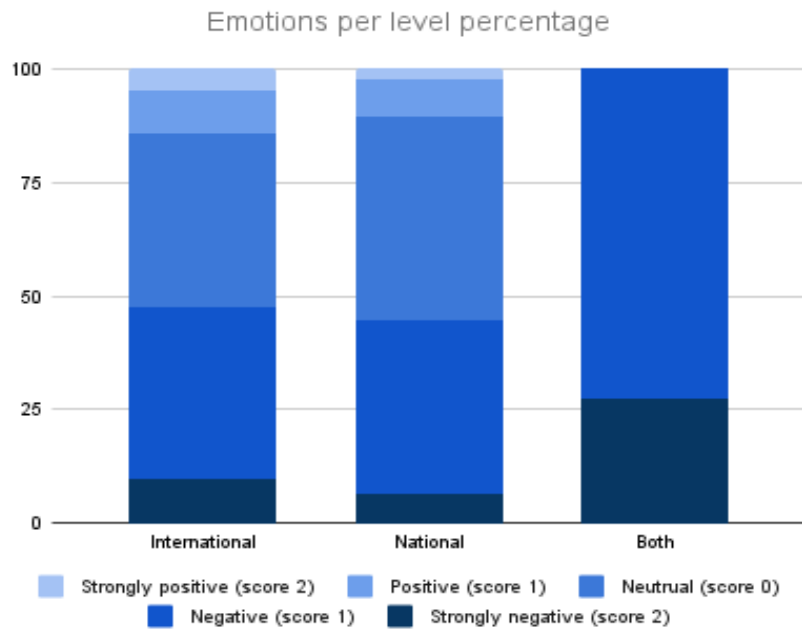


Figure 17 : Emotions per level P1

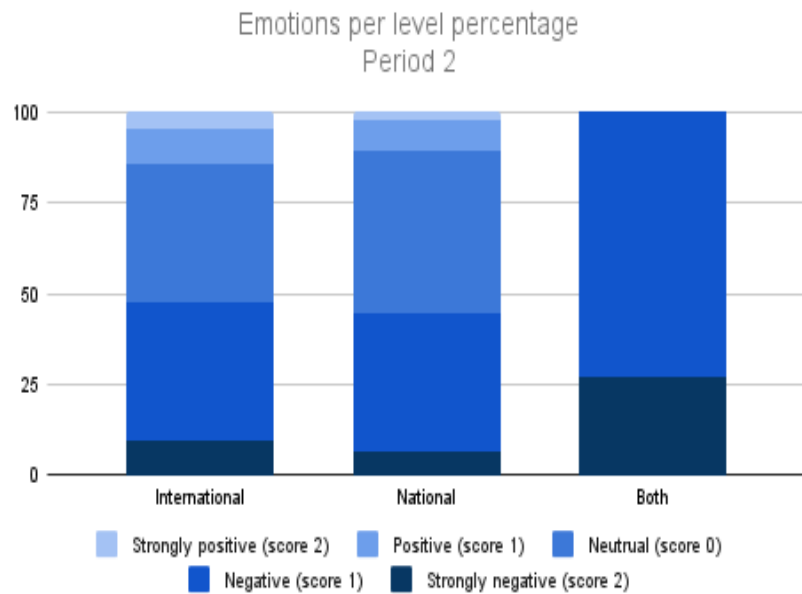


Figure 18 : Emotions per level P2

Very few differences can be seen on emotion per level between each period. During the first period articles written on an international level are slightly more negative than the national ones. 10% of the internationally focused articles are considered strongly negative, 38% are negative, and an additional 38% are considered neutral. Only 10% are scored as positive and

only 4% are scored as strongly positive. For those on a national level, 6% are scored as strongly negative and 38% as negative. The amount of neutral articles are a little higher with 45%, positive articles make up 9% and strongly positive articles make up only 2%. Articles that were focusing on both levels though, were only marked as negative since 27% were strongly negative and 73% were negative.

For the second period, the amount of articles with an international focus are exactly the same as for the previous period. 10% are strongly negative, 38% are negative, 38% are neutral, 10% are positive and 4% are strongly positive. This is also the case for those on both levels as 27% are strongly negative and 73% are negative. The only difference between the two periods were on the national level. While strongly negative, negative, and strongly positive are measured as the same, with 6%, 38%, and 2% respectively, neutral articles amount to 46% and positive articles amount to 8%.

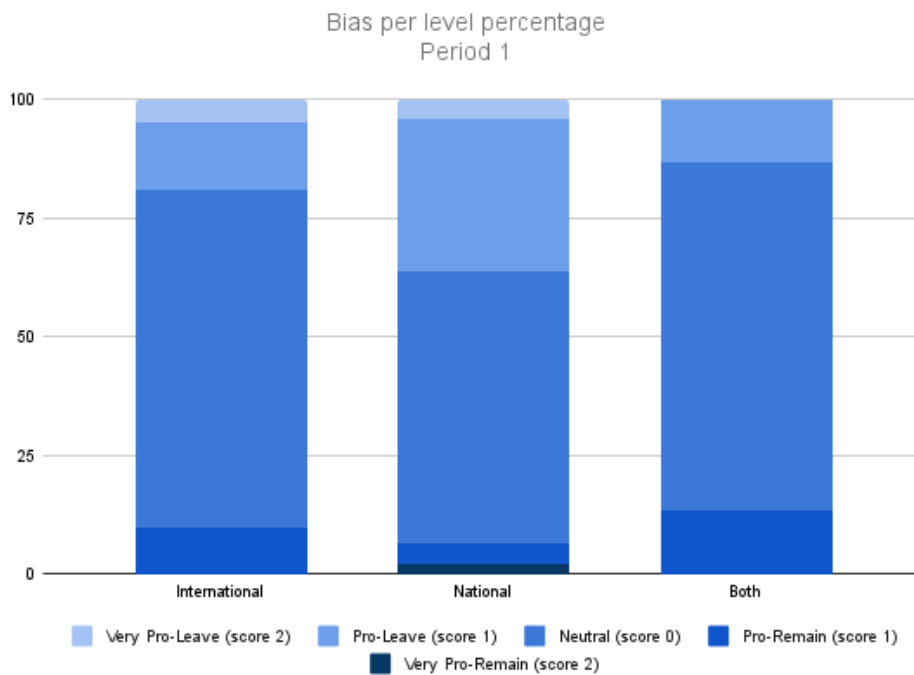


Figure 19 : Bias per level P1

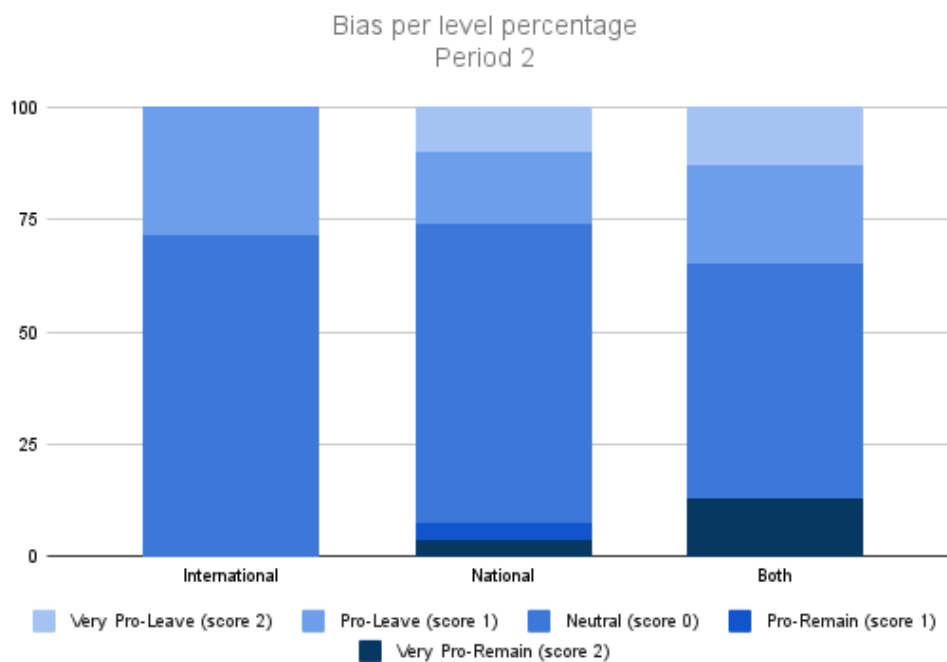


Figure 20 : Bias per level P2

Some clearer differences can be found in bias per level between period one and two. During the first period, 10% of articles written on an international level are scored as pro-Remain, 71% are scored as neutral, 14% were considered pro-Leave, and 5% as very pro-Leave. Articles on a national level much less pro-Remain, as only 2% were scored as very pro-Remain and 4% as pro-Remain. 57% of the articles were considered neutral, 32% were scored as pro-Leave and 4% as very pro-Leave. Those on both levels were primarily neutral with 73%, leaving 13% of the articles as pro-Remain and 14% as pro-Leave.

Articles on an international level were during period two primarily neutral with 71%, and the remaining 29% being pro-Leave. On a national level, the articles were still primarily neutral, but with a few differences. A total of 8% of the articles were scored as pro-Remain, with 4% for both very pro-Remain and pro-Remain. 66% of them were scored as neutral, with 16% being pro-Leave and 10% being very pro-Leave. Those on both levels were less neutral, but the percentage remains high with 52%. 13% of the articles were scored as very pro-Remain, 22% as pro-Leave, and 13% as very pro-Leave.

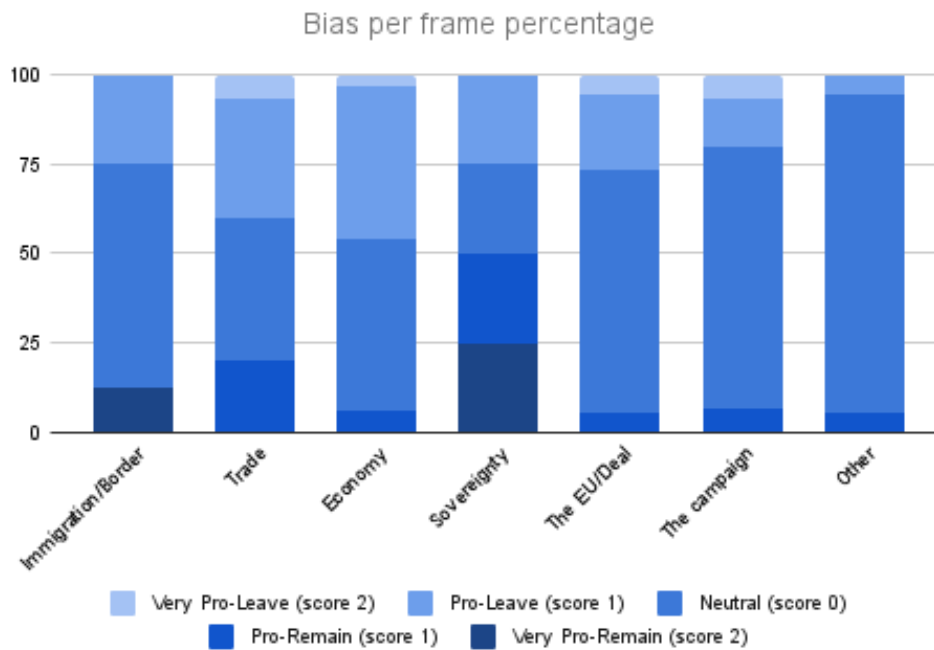


Figure 21: Bias per frame P1

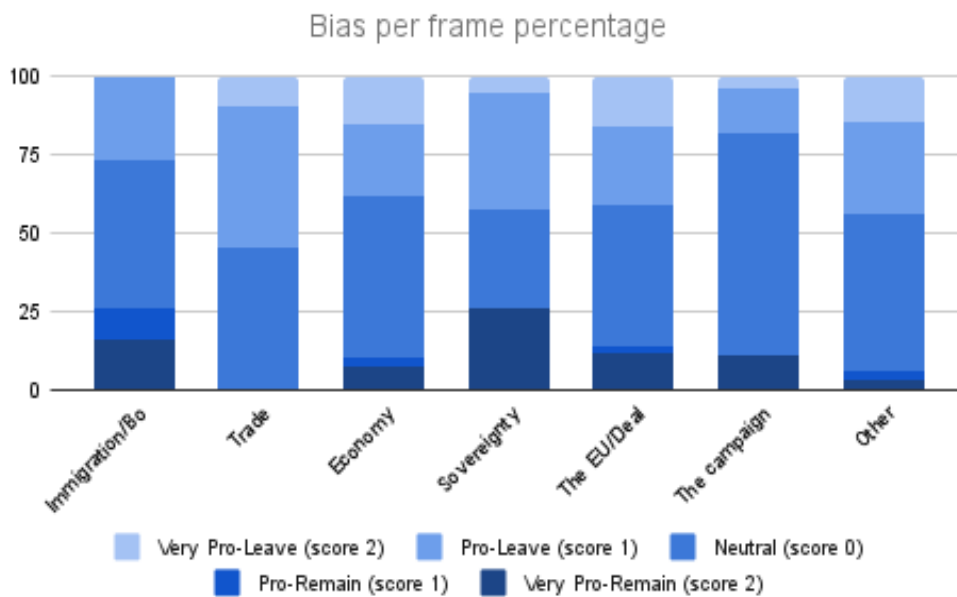


Figure 22: Bias per frame P2

The final dataset show just how much political bias there were for each frame. For the Immigration/Border-frame 13% of the articles were very pro-Remain, while 62% were neutral, and 25% were pro-Leave. During the second period, total pro-Remain coverage had risen slightly, with 16% now being very pro-Remain and 11% were pro-Remain. The amount

of neutral articles went down to 47% and the pro-Leave amount went up by one percentage, and were now on 26%.

For the Trade-frame, 20% were pro-Remain during the first period, while 40% were neutral. For the remaining articles 33% were pro-Leave and 7% were very pro-Leave. This changes quite noteworthy the following period as there is no pro-Remain articles, only neutral and pro-Leave. 45% of the articles were neutral, 45% were pro-Leave, and the remaining 10% had a substantial very pro-Leave sentiment.

The frame with the most pro-Leave sentiment seemed to be the Economy-frame. With only 6% of the articles being pro-Remain and 49% being neutral, 43% and 2% being pro-Leave and very pro-Leave respectively. Not too much changed during the second period, but 8% were now very pro-Remain and 3% were pro-Remain. The amount of neutral articles were still high with 51%, and 23% had pro-Leave sentiment and the remaining 15% had very pro-Leave sentiments.

The Sovereignty-frame was evenly distributed between very pro-Remain, pro-Remain, neutral, and pro-Leave with 25% each during the first period. While it remained almost the same during the following period, very pro-Remain sentiment were prominent in 26% of the articles, 32% were neutral, and 37% of the articles were pro-Leave and the remaining 5% were clearly very pro-Leave.

A total of 5% of the EU/Deal related articles were considered pro-Remain, while another 5% were scored as very pro-Leave. 21% were scored as pro-Leave and the remaining 68% were neutral. Neutrality did not last throughout the second period as it was down to 45%. 11% of the articles had a very pro-Remain sentiment and only 2% were scored as pro-Remain. Pro-Leave articles became more prominent as 25% were pro-Leave and 16% were scored as very pro-Leave.

Campaign coverage was primarily neutral with 73% during the first period, and 71% during the second period. Pro-Remain coverage were at a low 7% at first and were taken over by very pro-Remain sentiment with 11% during the second period. Pro-Leave articles were at 13% and very pro-Leave articles were at only 7%. This changed somewhat during period two where they went to 14% and 4% respectively.

As for the other frames, most of it were neutral, accounting for 89% of the total articles during the first period. Only 6% were considered pro-Remain and 5% were scored as pro-Leave. During the second period however, the amount of neutral articles went down to 50%,

pro-Remain remained low at 3% together with very pro-Remain also at 3%, and the amount of pro-Leave articles went up to 30% and very pro-Leave were at 14%.

5 Discussion

Based on the data presented in chapter 4, this chapter is dedicated to discussing my findings up against the theory presented in chapter 2. The following chapter is divided into three separate parts each focusing on the three RQs, where I have attempted to answer them as thoroughly as possible. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to the overall research question.

Firstly, the data shown in figures 1 and 2 gives an overview of how much each publication has focused on the EU and the UKs relationship with the union. Clearly, it is the left-leaning, more pro-Remain publication The Guardian who has dedicated most of their resources to the issue, with the slightly right of center The Times, and The Independent following in their footsteps. The reason why the broadsheet newspapers of my selection has more articles might be because the tabloids would use flashier headlines without using the search words I decided on. If there were news articles from either the Daily Mail or The Daily Mirror regarding the EU or the referendum, using more sensationalized and sarcastic headlines would have gone unnoticed. As mentioned in the first chapter, the headline “Up yours Delors” from the Sun does not mention Europe in particular but is by all means an article about Europe.

Regarding topics that the press has focused on during the first week of May 2016 and the last three days of the referendum, it seems as the focus shifted from being primarily about the economy to a larger variety. Figure 3 clearly shows that this was the case as the Economy-frame was the only one above 40% while the rest were between 10% and 20%. Given that the European economy and the Euro have been under scrutiny on several occasions before (de Vreese, 2001), there might be an underlining tension there that the media has picked up on. That can explain why the Economy-frame was used more prominently. But as figure 4 shows, the Economy-frame gets less used during the last days of the referendum, and other frames starts to take over. Both the EU/Deal- and the Campaign-frame grow in percentage, perhaps due to political figures slowing down their campaigning during the final days giving the press a chance to reflect on the campaign itself. What I found most interesting is that the Sovereignty-frame grew from almost nothing to well over 10%. Leaving the European Union was often a question about self-governance and sovereignty, why it was not mentioned more is surprising. Yet, as figure 5 shows, the Sovereignty-frame was used primarily by the Daily

Mail and a little by The Times, the two right-leaning newspapers. If the tabloid Daily Mail did not use the search words in the headline, it can explain why very little was written using this frame.

To answer RQ1, based on the data presented in chapter 4, in figures 3 and 4, the economy, sovereignty, the EU/Deal and the campaign were the most discussed. Other frames were also used quite often, but these were very fragmented. Regarding emotional tone, there is no secret that the news media covers topics of current affairs more negatively (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2011). Figure 15 and 16 both show that most of the coverage were to varying degree negative, especially articles on topics like Trade and Economy were well over 50% negative. What is more interesting is that during the last three days, the coverage, while still mostly negative, became more neutral. As people were heading to the polls to vote the horse-race was nearing its end, and the question of who's behind and who's ahead were no longer up for speculation or debate as the result started to come in (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). While the number of articles were higher during these three days than the first week in this study, when looking for live election results it might seem natural to go for televised news instead. As mentioned in chapter 2, Britons do still prefer TV as their source of news. This could explain the more neutral tendencies of the press during the final days of the referendum as Britons were voting and having decided, the press did not have to adhere to the public's love of spectacle (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, p. 36).

So, what topics has the media focused on when discussing potential EU-membership or covering EU- and referendum related news? A clear picture is painted by figures 5 and 6, and figures 13 and 14. The latter figures show that the broadsheet publications are more neutral in their coverage, and that the tabloids have a clearer negative focus. The former figures show that the conservative tabloid is more interested in the sovereignty- and immigration-frame, while the left-wing one was more interested in the campaign and the economy. But is there a correlation between topic and emotional tone? That is difficult to say, as most of the coverage were negative, but as figure 15 does show, the topics most used by the conservative newspapers were covered more negatively. Yet, I would argue that the data is not steady enough to prove a correlation.

As Schafer et al. (2022, p. 17) writes, it often is unavoidable to cover the news negatively, especially when it comes to political situations where public opinion might have formed negatively over time. So, when asking whether the right-leaning news media have been more

negative in their coverage, it is important to keep that in mind. As figure 13 and 14 shows, the two right-leaning newspapers, The Times, and the Daily Mail, do vary quite a bit. The Times has more neutral coverage while the Daily Mail has primarily negative coverage, which is especially noticeable during the last days of the referendum. But it is still interesting to see that the left leaning broadsheets are way less negative during the last period than the tabloids of both the left and the right.

It would have been worth noting if the right-leaning newspapers were primarily on a national level, as conservatism often focuses on matters and affairs directly affecting them in their home nation, and if left-leaning newspapers were more on an international level as these are more often positive to matters of globalization. This is not the case as seen in figures 9 and 10. But it is only natural as British news media often covers EU-related matters from a national, British point of view. There are only a few exceptions during period one where The Times and The Independent are on a slightly more international level. This changes during the following period where all publications are on a national level.

While the right-leaning media might not have been more negative, their opinion on Brexit have been quite prominent on their articles. As Hamborg, Donnay & Gipp (2019) writes media coverage often, but not always, exhibit an internal bias, which is reflected in a news outlet's coverage. This is quite clear in the British press as seen on figures 11 and 12. While the broadsheets are more neutral in their coverage, The Guardian is a bit more positive towards the Remain campaign, and the tabloids are much more blatantly open about their preferred outcome. This is not necessarily a bad thing for the media to do, since there are so many newspapers in the UK. If every newspaper have their own agenda and a reader reads multiple newspapers the readers insight might come close to the actual truth as the truth can emerge from collective reporting (Mullainathan and Shleifers, 2005, p. 1042).

As for the third RQ, have articles on a national level been more negative and articles on an international level been less negative? No, is the short answer. By looking at figures 17 and 18, it is clear that there is almost no need to compare the two. The only noteworthy element from these figures is that articles on both a national and international level have been negative, with a majority simply being negative in tone, while one fourth have been very negative. Neither is there much to say about political bias per level, since most of the articles are neutral. So, to say that there is a correlation between level and emotional tone, or even political bias is impossible to confirm using these data.

That leaves us with the overall research question. How has the British press, considering political bias and tendencies of negative focus, covered the EU-referendum? Well, it is clear that some areas have been covered more extensively than others, such as the economy, yet the frames that I selected for this thesis have been used and were discussed frequently in the British press. What has been noteworthy is that the two time periods have differentiated on certain unexpected areas. For instance, how negatively each frame was covered during the first period, and how the coverage became more neutral at the end of the referendum as figures 15 and 16 illustrates. Also, shown in figure 21 and 22, political bias was a differentiating factor. Topics that were important to one of the campaigns, such as sovereignty for the Leave-campaign, was more often discussed in pro-Leave articles. Similarly, topics like free trade and open borders were important for the Remain-campaign and were often found in articles with a pro-Remain sentiment.

Clearly, the British press is politically biased, but does have a fair share of fair neutral coverage. While there are some typical differences between broadsheets and tabloids, negativity was not more prominent in tabloids or in right-leaning newspapers. What Cappella and Jamieson (1997) believed to be a challenge for future research on the subject of cynicism was to find a way to evaluate news frames that could potentially lower the public's negative view of political event and issues. Since the EU debate has been ugly in Britain for decades having some neutral coverage is not necessarily what is going to help soften the mood.

Additionally, one of Trussler and Sorokas (2014, p. 374) suggestions were that one might want to differentiate between negative news and cynical news, rather than being preoccupied with positivity and negativity. They go on further and explain that since the media's prime function is to monitor politicians and our democratic institutions, having a negative press does not mean an unfair press. Instead, one should move the conversation about negative news over to constructive news, and rather ask whether a news article is constructive or if it focuses primarily on one-sided attacks.

6 Conclusion

The goal of this thesis has been to identify emotional tone and political bias in the EU-referendum coverage of five prominent UK publications. This has been done by conducting a quantitative content analysis of *The Times*, *the Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Independent*, and *The Guardian*. Articles published by these newspapers have been collected from two separate time periods and then analyzed. The research question has been: How has the British press, considering political bias and tendencies of negative focus, covered the EU-referendum? This has been answered with the help of three additional research questions. These have been: What topics has the media focused on when discussing potential EU-membership or covering EU- and referendum related news? Is there a correlation between topic and emotional tone? The second one being: Has the right-leaning news media been more negative and less confrontational in their coverage? And lastly: Is there a correlation between level and emotional tone? Have articles on a national level been more negative and articles on an international level been less negative? The research has found that several topics, or frames, have been present in most of the referendum coverage, namely trade, immigration and borders, the economy, sovereignty, the EU and Britain's deal with the union, and the campaign itself. These frames have been used in varying degrees of emotional level and political bias. Some have been more frequent than others and featured in several more articles. Furthermore, we have found that the coverage overall was negative, but there were times it was considered mostly neutral. Regarding political bias, there were nothing overly surprising that stood out. For future research it can be wise to do as Trussler and Sorokas (2014) suggest, namely differentiate between negative news and constructive news. This way, it can bring another dimension into the research.

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