

Crimmigration as Electoral Strategy: The Case of Brexit

“Crimigración” como estrategia electoral: El caso del Brexit

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ABSTRACT

Immigration has become an election weapon. Some politicians disseminate a negative image of immigration to improve their electoral chances in several contexts. Rhetorically linking immigration to crime was a strategy utilized to gain political advantage during Brexit referendum. In this paper, we analysed front pages of British broadsheet newspapers and tabloids and their references to immigration in the two months preceding the referendum. We studied how these references were linked to crime and the evolution of the surveys and polls. Furthermore, we comparatively analysed the presence of immigration on front pages with other periods of time, both before and after that campaign. As a conclusion, we have been able to establish that Brexiters focused on immigration -mainly crimmigration- as a key element to win the referendum.

Keywords: Brexit, crimmigration, hate speech, election campaign, immigration.

RESUMEN

La inmigración se ha convertido en un arma electoral. La propagación de una imagen negativa sobre la inmigración como estrategia para obtener votos ha sido utilizada en diversas situaciones. El elemento fundamental de este discurso se centra en la vinculación entre inmigración y delito. En este trabajo se discute sobre la utilización de la inmigración y su vinculación con el crimen como instrumento para obtener ventaja electoral durante la campaña del Brexit. En este sentido, se han analizado las portadas de los periódicos y tabloides británicos durante los dos meses previos a las elecciones y las referencias que contenían sobre la inmigración. Además, se han estudiado los vínculos entre esta utilización y la evolución de las encuestas electorales. Puede afirmarse que, durante la campaña electoral

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del referéndum del Brexit, los partidarios de abandonar la Unión Europea convirtieron la inmigración, especialmente la crimigración, en un elemento trascendental para obtener la victoria.

Palabras clave: Brexit, crimigración, discurso del odio, campaña electoral, inmigración.

1. Approach

In recent years, the discussion on negative implications of immigration and, particularly, on its link to criminality and insecurity has increased significantly. A growing tide of xenophobia is running throughout the world. In Europe, this hostility to immigrants grew in a particular moment (ICMPD, 2018). During the mid-2010s, certain social groups were feeling the effects of the global financial crisis while refugees from war torn countries, specifically from Syria, were arriving and Jihadist terrorism was active in Europe, with some attacks in Belgium, France, or the United Kingdom.

As Brandariz García (2011) explained, this link has been encouraged by politicians and media. Even so, speeches associating immigrants and or refugees to criminality and insecurity have affected different social classes, encouraged partly by the media and have been put at the centre of the political agenda in different countries, such as United Kingdom, the United States, France, and in recent years, Spain. In fact, immigration and crime has become central themes in different electoral processes developed over the past few years.

For instance, during the US presidential campaign in 2016, Donald Trump announced plans to construct a wall physically separating the United States from Mexico and to deport three million immigrants who have been charged with a crime. In a similar way, he expressed his intention to deny asylum and refugee status to people from Muslim countries and to publish a list of crimes committed by people not considered as citizens of the United States.

French candidate, Marine Le Pen, who passed second round of voting in the 2017 presidential election, focused her rhetoric on linking immigration and crime to defend a 'no immigration' policy, during the main televised debate (Arango et. al., 2020). Also, in Spain, the growth of the extreme right movement Vox has been based on anti-immigrant messaging (Ferreira, 2019; Rinken, 2020), such as accusing immigrants of sexually assaulting women.

The political and media campaign against minors migrating without relatives has been particularly serious. In similar terms, the examples of German Alternative für Deutschland (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019) and, even, Brazilian Jair Bolsonaro (Mendes & Menezes, 2019) can be added.

However, one of the most obvious examples of rhetoric criminalizing immigration for electoral purposes can be found in the United Kingdom during the Brexit referendum campaign. Political parties such as UKIP and leaders as Nigel Farage or Boris Johnson, who later became Prime Minister, articulated a discourse depicting immigrants and refugees as those responsible for all evils in British society, among them, crime.

None of this is new. Historical references linking immigration and crime can be found (Scarnazella, 1999). One particular example in Britain is the "foreign national prisoners' scandal". This highly publicised crisis began in April of 2006 when the Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced that, over the preceding seven years, more than 1,000 foreign nationals had been released from prison without being considered for deportation. Those statements led to a media frenzy over foreign national prisoners that caused legislative and policy shifts (Kaufman, 2013). The development of anti-immigrants or clearly xenophobic speeches during different election campaigns has also been studied (Garcés Mascareñas et al., 2012).

Thus, this work aims to analyse the impact of speech criminalising immigration during the election campaign and its relationship to the election results. To this end, we analysed the campaigns and results of the Brexit referendum for two main reasons. First, it allows us to refer the electoral body as one unit, a characteristic of referenda. Secondly, and related to that, voting in such a yes/no referendum is easier to analyse and link to the speeches given by politicians and covered by mass media. In multi-party-political elections, both pro and contra stances on immigration can be exploited by different political actors. However, in Brexit case, where options were *Remain* or *Leave*, speeches against immigration generated electoral benefit only for *Leave* camp. The evolution of polls conducted during the campaign and the voting results allow us to reach conclusions on the significance of anti-immigrant messaging on the electorate decision.

For this purpose, we examined the front pages of the main British broadsheet newspapers and tabloids during the last couple of months before Brexit voting, from 23 April until 23 June 2016. This methodology has allowed us to count the references on immigration during Brexit campaign. Also, the content of these references and the media they appeared on are analysed. provides more context on the referendum. Section three lays out the theoretical lens through which this study was conducted. Section four describes the objectives and methodology of the study. Section five elaborates on key quantitative and qualitative findings obtained in the study.

2. Context: the Brexit referendum

On 23 June 2016, citizens of the United Kingdom voted in a referendum on whether to remain a member State of the European Union. It was the second referendum about British participation in the European political project. The first one took place in 1975. In 2016, a slight majority of 51.9% voted to leave the EU, a decision coined as Brexit, mixing Britain and Exit.

British attitudes towards the European Union have always been quite complex. While the United Kingdom had been a member of the European Union (then called European Communities) since January 1973, only sixteen years after the Treaty of Rome, many facets of British society have rejected or questioned the European project. Levels of support for the United Kingdom to be integrated into Europe politically and economically has been the lowest of any member state of the European Union. In fact, the term Euroscepticism originated in Britain in the mid-1980s (Spiering, 2016) and Euroscepticism has always been present in the whole British party system (Baker et al., 2008).

In his 2015 campaign, David Cameron promised to call a Brexit referendum if his party won the general election. It was his strategy to challenge the Eurosceptic position within his own party, the Tories. The growth of UKIP, led by Nigel Farage, played a role in this promise. In fact, some MPs defected from the Conservative to UKIP as a sign of their opposition to the Lisbon Treaty. Considering these circumstances, David Cameron decided

to ask the British electorate to vote on the United Kingdom EU-membership (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Cameron's strategy was also a way to pressure the European Union into providing a better guarantee of British sovereignty or, in other words, to try and reduce the reach of European policies.

The Brexit campaign was unusual because it involved members of Conservative Party supporting both the Remain and Leave camps. The Remain side was led by David Cameron with widespread support from Labour Party, whose leader, life-long Eurosceptic Jeremy Corbyn (Room, 2019), was forced by Labour Party membership to stand against the Brexit. The Scottish National Party, led by Nicola Surgeon, also strongly backed the Remain camp. Key players of the Leave campaign included Nigel Farage, mentioned above, and Boris Johnson, former Mayor of London and current Prime Minister, or Michel Gove, an important cabinet member of David Cameron's Government at that time.

This splitting of the Conservative party and its traditional loyal electorate made the Brexit referendum a fascinating study subject since its analysis requires careful scrutiny of the specific circumstances motivating voters. Many studies conducted after the referendum have underlined the role that immigration played on the voters' decision (Abreu & Öner, 2019), albeit offering different explanations. Some authors have emphasised that higher net migration regions more likely voted for Leave (Arnosson & Zoega, 2018). Other scholars have shown that the Leave vote was higher in areas experiencing rapid immigration growth (Kaufmann, 2017). However, some studies exposed that more homogeneous communities were more likely to support anti-immigration positions and consequently, more likely to vote for Leave (Becker et al., 2017). Still other authors have underlined the role that perceptions about high immigration played, regardless of reality (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017).

While all the previously mentioned studies were conducted after the referendum to analyse vote flows, our paper differs in that it focuses on the role of the media in the transmission of these perceptions about immigration and the role of criminalizing immigration in the dissemination of those negative views on migration.

Like our work, other studies analysed the media coverage on immigration during the Brexit referendum campaign. For example, from a journalistic point of view, Gerard (2016a,

2016b), in her blog, monitored British broadsheet newspapers and tabloids' front pages and their migration splashes to analyse the prevalence and the tone of anti-immigration stories. From a more academic perspective, Fox (2018) analysed articles, not front pages from the BBC News website and The Guardian backing the Remain campaign and the Daily Telegraph supporting the Leave campaign.

These thought-provoking studies employed slightly different methodologies than we did. Gerard (2016a, 2016b) also studied the front pages but over a longer period (from May 2010). Her work focused less on the Brexit campaign and more on a broader perspective of British journalism about immigration. On the other hand, Fox (2018) only analysed three media outlets, before and after the referendum and opposed some of their claims about immigration.

In fact, we reached some similar conclusions, i.e. that certain media outlets and the "Brexiteer" politicians exaggerated the negative effects of immigration during the EU referendum campaign or that the amount of coverage on immigration lessened after the referendum (Fox, 2018). However, our work differs in three ways; we mixed a quantitative and a qualitative approach, we analysed front pages from eight media outlet in different periods and, we based our work on a different theoretical construction: crimmigration.

3. Theoretical aspects: why do we use crimmigration?

Crimmigration is a term coined by the American scholar Juliette Stumpf (2006). At the start, the word emerges in the legal context, as crimmigration law, to highlight the merging of Criminal Law and Migration Law. Crimmigration is a wordplay to emphasise a dual process: criminalization of migration and the subjugation of Criminal Law by the principles of immigration policies (Stumpf, 2006, pp. 379 et seq.).

Recently, though, the term crimmigration has gone beyond the legal context and has been used in the more complex process of criminalizing immigration or immigrants. In some cases, crimmigration has served as a concept to clarify the design and the execution of public policies (Rosenbloom, 2016).

In much of the literature the conceptual framework of this term has been extended to include practices and speeches linking immigration and crime (Brouwer et al., 2017). So, it is not only a legal term but also a social perspective that identifies immigration and crime and even highlights negative aspects of immigration. In some ways, it extends beyond the criminal punishment of immigrants towards wider dynamics such as suspicion, intimidation, harassment, or penalties (González-Páramo, 2019). These dynamics feed off fear, ignorance, or lack of empathy to generate an anti-immigration feeling. The discursive construction of immigration as a criminal or a misfit group is employed to legitimise political approaches against immigration (Brouwer et al., 2017, p. 102).

This extension of crimmigration is the reason to study the media narrative of British printed press during the Brexit referendum campaign. By analysing the speech about immigration and its portrayal in the media, we can gain a better understanding of how the rhetoric evolved during the referendum process, how it underlined the negative aspects on immigration, how it employed terms conceptualizing immigration as a threat, and how it directly criminalized immigration or immigrants.

Crimmigration is not a new phenomenon on British media and its public opinion. The previously mentioned "foreign national prisoners" crisis was a clear example of mixing crime and immigration and showing deportation and control over foreign criminals as the only solution. That scandal caused several changes in British legislation and policies making them increasingly tough (Kaufman, 2013; Pakes & Holt, 2017). But it was not enough, and the control of immigration became an essential point of some British politicians' discourses and media coverage.

Crimmigration rhetoric in the United Kingdom was not born in times of Brexit referendum. Fox (2018) states that the negative representation of immigrants in the news started in 2004. Gerard, in her approaches (2016a, 2016b), focused on a period starting in May 2010. It cannot be denied that this long-term narrative influenced attitudes and behaviours toward immigration and, in turn, it eased the impact of the crimmigration speeches during the Brexit campaign.

4. Objectives and Methodology of the Research

The main goal of the research was to analyse the use of immigration, mainly its negative aspects, as a tool for gaining votes during the Brexit referendum campaign. The initial hypothesis was that immigration became one of the main points in the political debate during the Brexit campaign. The most relevant aim was, therefore, to compare this hypothesis with data and, if appropriate, to analyse its content, its reasons, and its consequences.

To achieve these goals, we set out to check how often immigration was mentioned during the campaign and which points were emphasized in this field. In addition, we sought to test the origin of these references on immigration. There were numerous potential sources of such information, but we decided to analyse the front pages of the leading British newspapers.

This decision was based on several reasons. Social media clearly played a relevant role during the Brexit campaign. However, the literature has shown the differences between social media and traditional media in terms of frequency, permanence, and reach (Agichtein et al., 2008). For the objectives of this study, we focused our analysis on reach. Traditional media achieves broad outreach to the public, while accounts in social media are limited to people who interact with them. Another important point in this choice is the information flow. The monologic model of traditional media, in contrast to the dialogic structure of social media, impacts public opinion with a different intensity. In fact, some media analysts highlight the role of newspaper front pages on social media (Barr, 2013).

Of course, it is also easier to monitor newspapers' publications than it is to sift through millions of user posts. This is an advantage of newspapers over social networks and, also, over television and radio channels. Furthermore, there are three circumstances in the British press that make it particularly interesting. First, broadsheet newspapers, generally regarded as quality press, are quite distinct from tabloids that represent popular press. Secondly, British broadsheet newspapers and tabloids usually choose an editorial line positioning themselves, open and clearly in a campaign. Finally, the whole political spectrum is represented in the British daily print media, from the conservative *The Times* to the

progressive *The Guardian* or *The Independent*, although it is true that the overall British print media lean towards conservative positions.

We chose to analyse front pages because this is where print media places the important news. Their immediacy, prominence, impact, and proximity make front pages the most important location of a newspaper (Kim & Chung, 2017). Front pages, also, generate greater visual impact to readers. As Bridges & Bridges (1998) stated, "the front page is the reader's window to the tone and the 'spirit' of a newspaper". Since the first page of the newspaper is the first thing that the readers will see, those producing the paper have a vested interest to put in there the most relevant things they want to send out.

In this sense, we defined a pre-Brexit referendum period of two months to review, one by one, the front covers of the British daily print media. In fact, four tabloids (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, and *The Sun*) and four broadsheet newspapers (*The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Times*), and their respective Sunday editions (*The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Sunday Mail*, *Sunday Express*) were reviewed.

This quantitative approach is interesting albeit not sufficient. Firstly, it was essential to find a comparative term. The number of references to immigration on the front pages of British daily print media during the two months before Brexit referendum obtained by this review would not be relevant if there was not a relation with other periods. To avoid this, other two-month periods have been reviewed, specifically, the couple of months following the Brexit as well as the same period in the previous year and the year after.

In conjunction with those quantitative and comparative analyses, qualifying the references obtained seemed important. In this sense, each reference was marked in a twenty units scale where 0 was the neutral point. Using this scale, those headlines or pieces of news with a clear anti-immigration content or those underlining dangerous or harmful features of immigration, were marked between one and ten. The highest mark was assigned to those references openly linking immigration and crime. On the other hand, references showing a positive view of immigration, deepening its benefits or its helpful role in the British society were marked between minus one to minus ten. The highest mark was assigned to those

references explaining the contribution of immigration to the UK. However, no reference was assigned the highest mark (-10). In fact, the only positive messages we found were statements against the anti-immigration campaign, and they were marked in the low area of the scale.

5. Results: crimmigration during Brexit campaign

This study employed a mixed methods approach. Firstly, from a quantitative point of view, we counted the references on immigration published on the front pages of the British daily print media during the Brexit campaign. Secondly, this quantitative analysis was followed by a qualitative approach about the content of these references. This qualitative study showed that most of the references published about immigration during Brexit campaign were not very “realistic” and can be defined as fake-news. In the following sub-sections, we detail the data obtained in our quantitative and qualitative approaches and focus on some specific examples of fake news.

5.1. Quantitative approach

More than a hundred references on immigration were published on the front covers of the eight print-media previously mentioned. Checking the references on immigration on the front pages of British daily print media for the two months before the Brexit referendum reflects the abundance of this kind of news.

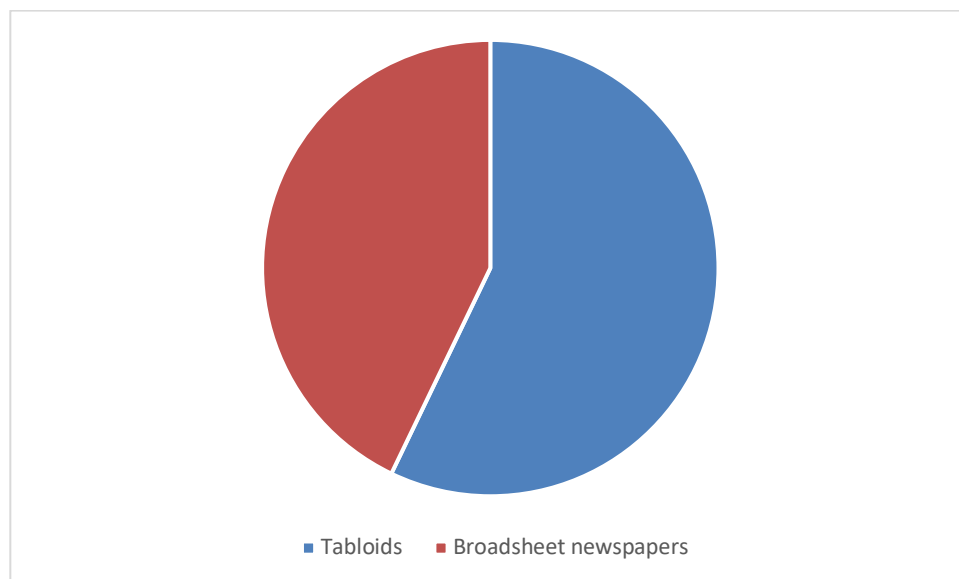


Figure 1: *References on immigration on front pages Tabloids/broadsheet newspapers*

As shown in Figure 1, the number of references on immigration published on tabloids was higher than those published in broadsheet newspapers. Although the difference is obvious, it is not so high. This is a very interesting point because contrasts between tabloids and broadsheet newspapers' readers are usually underlined. In fact, according to the National Readership Survey 2016, tabloids are more widely read among manual social classes (according to the definition given by British National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification) with 91% readership, whereas 60% of people with professional, managerial, technical, or skilled occupations read tabloids. It can be expected a greater breach as economic insecurity is one of the main reasons to explain the attitudes against immigration (Manevska & Achterberg, 2013).

Figure 2 shows evidence that The Daily Telegraph published the most front-page references on immigration among all newspapers in the study. The Daily Telegraph is a traditional conservative newspaper that advocated Brexit and many of Boris Johnson's positions. Among the tabloids, Daily Express and Daily Mail published the same number of references on immigration on their front covers. It is interesting that the Rupert Murdoch-

owned The Sun, considered the yellowest tabloid and a staunch supporter of Brexit², published the fewest references on immigrations, aside from the Daily Mirror which shunned front-page stories about migration (Gerard, 2016a). It bears considering that Daily Mail and Daily Express also promoted Brexit, but their campaigns were even harder and more proactive³. In fact, both tabloids have consistently exhibited a higher (and more negative) coverage of immigration issues (Gerard, 2016b), and both have even been accused of racism (Lugo-Ocando, 2007).

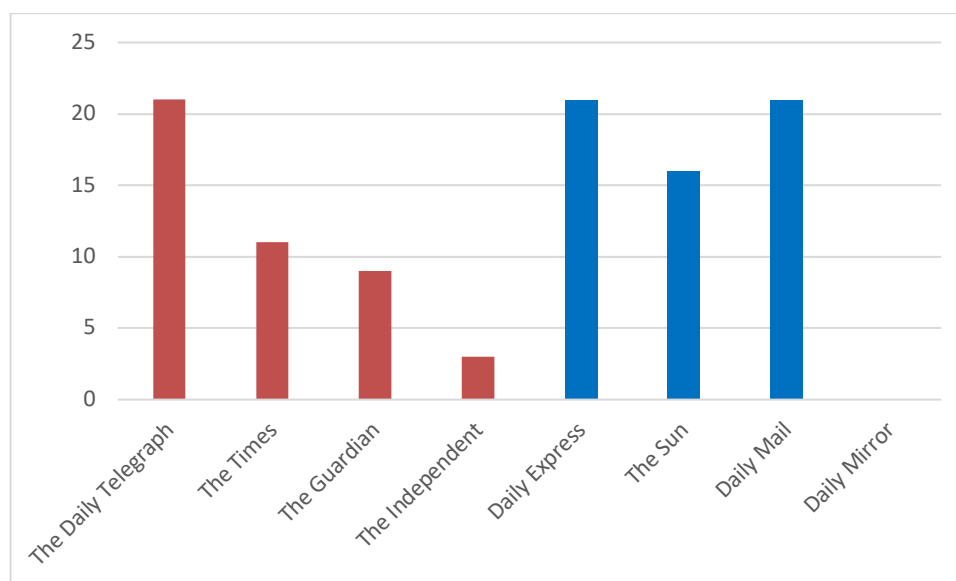


Figure 2: *References about immigration on front pages. Mastheads*

Figure 2 shows that The Guardian and The Independent, the most progressive newspapers and the only clear advocates of Remain, published the fewest references to immigration. Surprisingly, the Rupert Murdoch-owned The Times, the most traditional

² On 14 June 2016 The Sun published on its front cover a big headline: “BeLeave in Britain”.

³ Daily Express considered Brexit a real crusade in which this tabloid was another soldier. In fact, the day before the referendum, it gave a poster asking the vote for Leave option and its front cover, on 23 June 2016, contained two sentences: “Your country needs you. Vote Leave today”, paraphrasing Lord Kitchener’s statement during IGM. The day before the referendum, Daily Mail entitled “If you believe in Britain, vote Leave”. Daily Mirror was the only tabloid advocating Remain option. However, there are no mentions of this tabloid (traditionally near to Labour Party) in this work because its front covers didn’t contain any references on immigration.

British newspaper which provided a moderate conservative editorial line and no clear stance on the Brexit referendum, published only slightly more front-page references to immigration to the more progressive newspapers. In consequence, regarding the distribution of the references among the different mastheads, the media that published more references on immigration were those clearly pro Brexit.

Taking a temporal perspective of the two-month study period, Figure 3 shows that the number of front-page which referred to immigration intensified in the days closer to the referendum. In fact, during the last month, news on immigration was published on front-pages nearly every day.

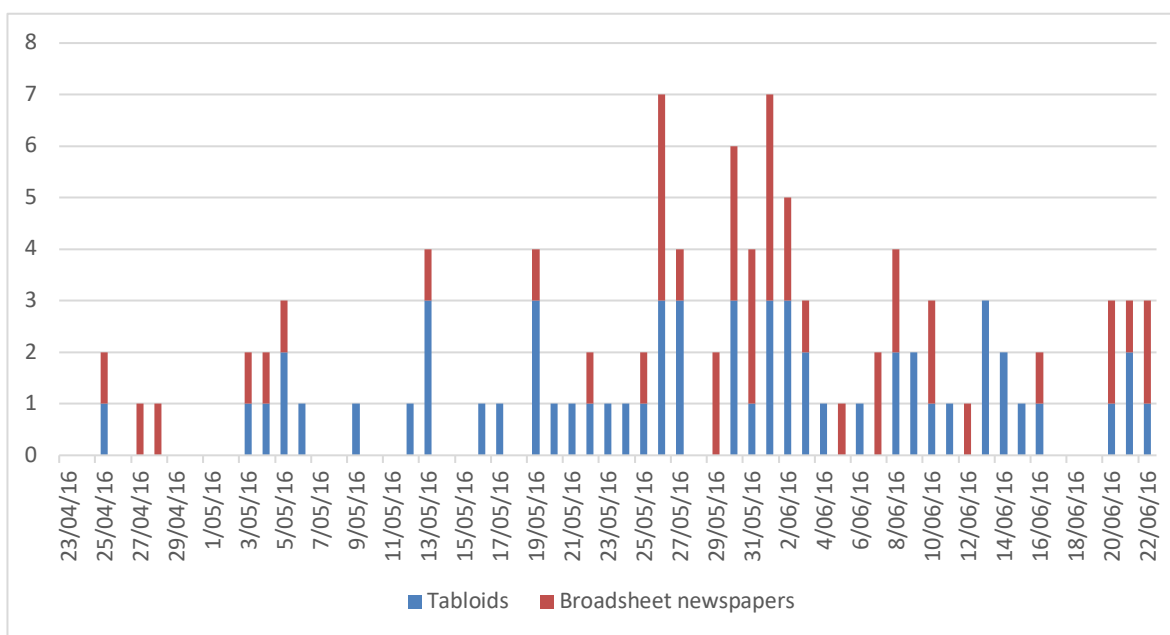


Figure 3: *References on immigration on front pages. Temporary distribution*

It is only between 17 and 19 June that there weren't any references to immigration on front pages. However, it is important to point out that MP Jo Cox was murdered on 17 June and her death dominated front pages of all media outlets during those three days.

This quantitative analysis is not without limitations. One could argue that immigration has always been a prominent issue in the British print media and the months leading up to the referendum reflect a normal amount of media attention to immigration in the United Kingdom. Therefore, we conducted a comparative analysis to determine whether immigration was a standard frequent issue in the British press or if the media intensified coverage of this issue in the run-up to the referendum to make this an essential issue.

To run this comparative analysis, we counted and reviewed the front pages of the selected print media for similar two-month periods. We sampled the two months after the referendum, and the same periods (from 23 April to 23 June) of the previous and the following year. As can be seen in Figure 4, media coverage of immigration during the two months before Brexit referendum is unparalleled in any of the other time spans studied. References to immigration reached, at most, a quarter of those published during the period before the referendum. This result can be observed despite polling which had said that immigration was the main problem for the United Kingdom from June 2015 (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017).

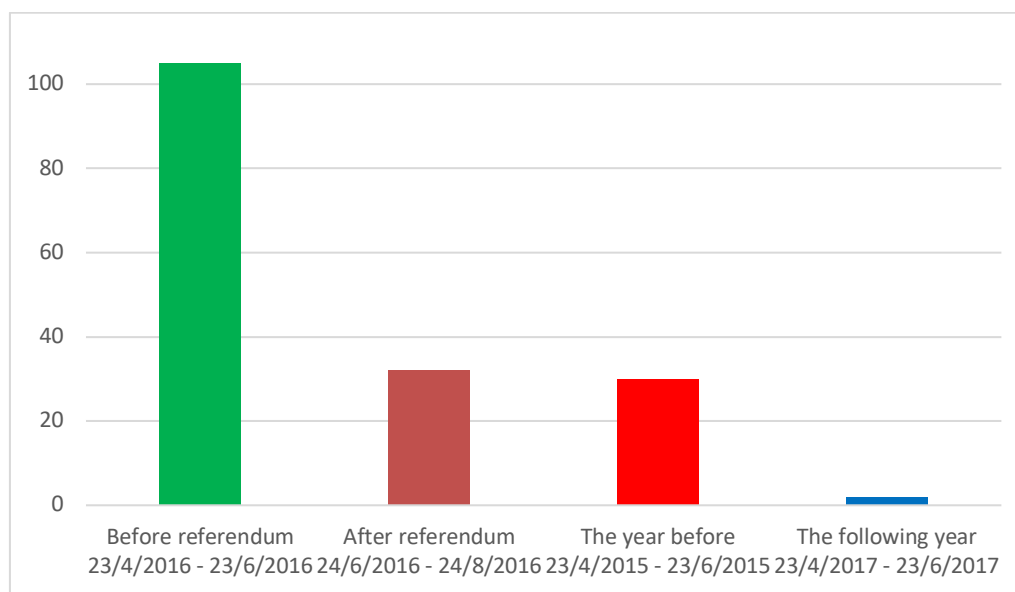


Figure 4: *References on immigration on front pages. Different two-months' periods.*

This figure evidences that front page print media increased the number of references to immigration considerably in order to highlight the significance of this political issue in the run-up to the Brexit referendum. This is a clear example of agenda setting theory (Shaw, 1979, p. 101). According to Caviedes (2015), “the more often the press mentions a particular issue and links it to a social ill, the more likely that issue is to be considered a 'crisis' meriting political action and resolution”. Media that have considered Brexit as a crusade, adopted this approach to paint immigration in the United Kingdom as a grave problem requiring a political solution. For these media outlets, the only political solution to limit/reduce immigration to the United Kingdom was leaving the EU.

5.2. Qualitative analysis

At this point, it is necessary to make a qualitative analysis of these references and scrutinize what the media wrote about immigration during the referendum campaign to evaluate the content and its origin. Our objective was to determine whether politicians injected immigration into the British political debate and the media amplified that message to the public or it was the media outlets which catapulted the issue into the political debate and opportunistic politicians who utilized this messaging.

To conduct this qualitative analysis, references published in print media were categorized as follows: pieces of news reflecting statements done by politicians or authorities; news reflecting specialists' opinions about different issues related to immigration; references contained in editorials; references that could be considered as a scoop and generic references with informational value but a pro or contra stance on immigration.

In this sense, as Figure 5 shows that 56% of the references fall into the generic category, followed by politicians or authorities' statements at 22%. Scoops and editorials about immigration on front covers were one fifth of the references.

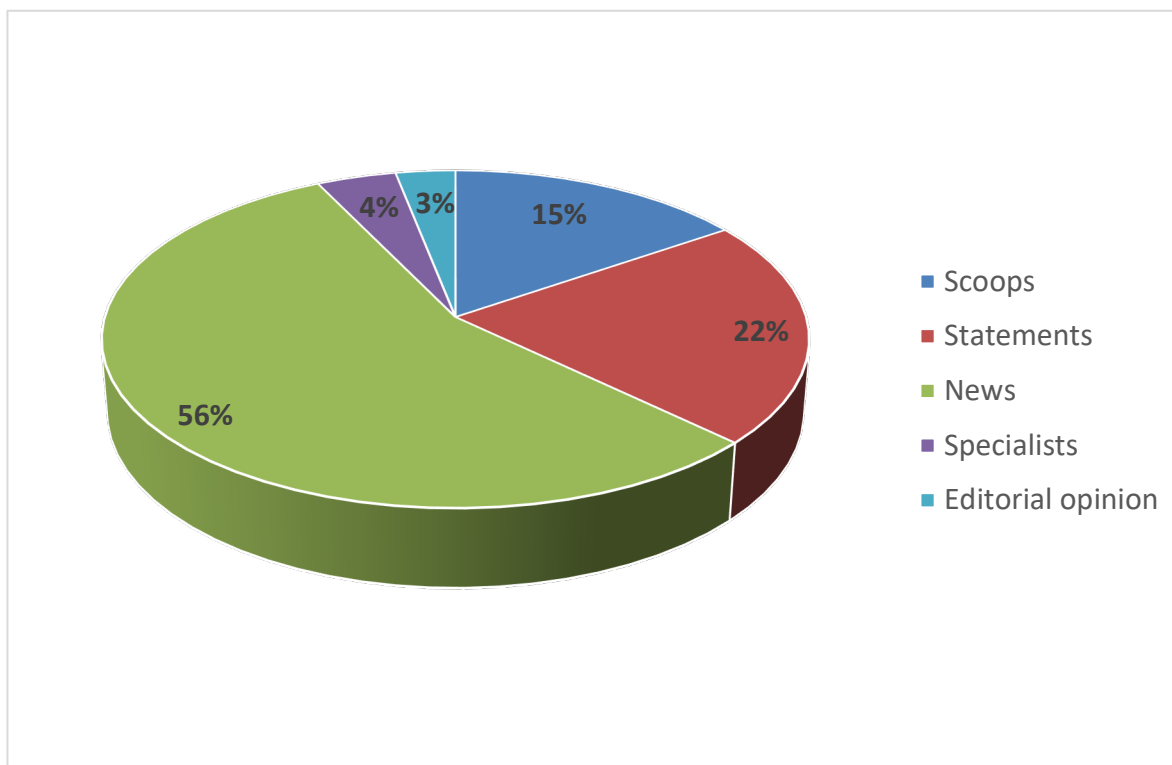


Figure 5: *References on immigration on front pages. Typology*

This approach should be complemented by a review of the precise content of the reference in order to identify the sense and the image on immigration shown by these references during the Brexit campaign. To achieve this goal, each reference on immigration was rated on a scale from 10 to -10 in which 0 is given to neutral references, 10 to highly negative news, specifically those linking immigration and crime, and -10 to news portraying immigration as a positive or a beneficial aspect of British society. In fact, the negative part of the scale was barely used.

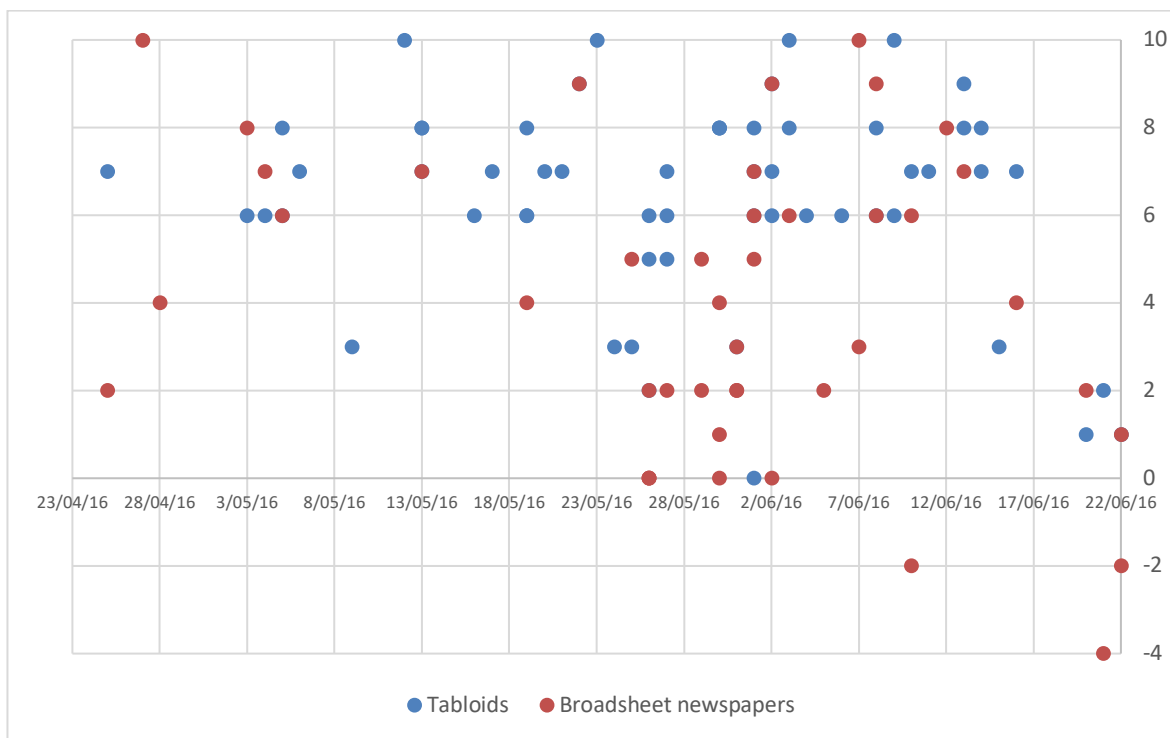


Figure 6: *References on immigration on front pages. Content analysis*

As can be seen in Figure 6, references were clearly anti-immigration. However, the intensity of this negative perspective on immigration did not appear in any one specific type of print media. In fact, extreme references -those marked with 10- were published by tabloids (four) and broadsheet newspapers (two), with The Daily Telegraph being the only newspaper to publish extremely negative references on its front page.

Three positive references on immigration were identified. As shown in Figure 6, they get low marks (-2 and -4). Actually, they didn't express a genuine positive message about immigration, but rather voiced some criticism about the anti-immigration positions from the Leave campaign. Only one of them was an original position put forth by the newspaper; the other two articles contained statements from pro-Remain politicians.

The first positive reference about immigration was published on The Guardian and was about the TV debate between Boris Johnson, Nicola Sturgeon and Angela Eagle. The newspaper highlighted a Scottish Prime Minister's sentence in the debate: "Sturgeon: blame

politicians not migrants”⁴. The other newspaper supporting Remain, The Independent, published two references that could be considered as positive. One of them was the Mayor of London's statement about the "project hate" over immigrants' strategy that the Leave campaign was running⁵. The other one was a scoop revealing how the Vote Leave campaign had modified a video about Turkey to warn about the dangers of Turkish accession to the EU⁶. In fact, the 'supposed' Turkish membership of the EU and its links with immigration and Islamic surge in the United Kingdom gained a prominent position in the campaign (Lindsay, 2017).

Neutral references were published by The Guardian, the most progressive British newspaper, along with The Independent. Only when a boat full of migrants sank in the Mediterranean Sea on 26 May 2016, did The Times and The Daily Telegraph put neutral references on immigration on their front pages⁷.

As Figure 6 shows, most of the references were negative, locating them in the medium-high intensity zone. It is also important to keep in mind that the number of references increased as the campaign progressed, especially during the last two weeks before the referendum. Those references were published in broadsheet newspapers, primarily The Daily Telegraph, and on tabloids, such as, The Sun, Daily Mail and Daily Express.

Considering these results, the question is what was the role that this escalation of the anti-immigration speech in the British press played in the voting decision. To address this question, we observed polls published during the campaign. Due to the quantity and variety of polls, we focused on phone polls carried out by polling institutes instead of online polls. Phone polls are more consistent and unbiased whereas online polls are less random (people vote online as opposed to being selected by pollsters) and can exclude demographics without Internet skills or access (Díaz de Rada, 2012).

Based on phone polling, Figure 7 depicts how the Leave camp numbers changed in the six weeks before Brexit referendum. The Leave camp was trailing considerably a month

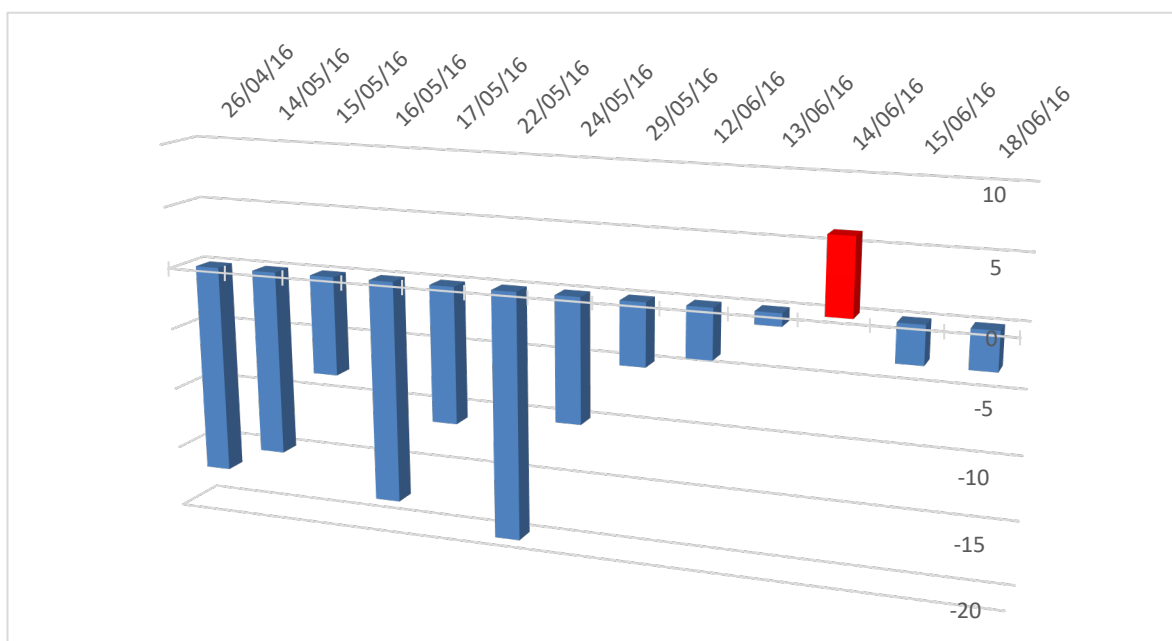
⁴ The Guardian, 10 June 2016.

⁵ The Independent, 22 June 2016.

⁶ The Independent, 21 June 2016.

⁷ Both published a photo, but Daily Telegraph added a headline “Migrants drown as packed boat capsizes”.

before the vote. However, a turn in polls coincided with the intensification of anti-immigration headlines on the front pages of print media. The Remain camp lead shrank and, in the 14 June survey, the Leave option took the lead. As is well known, that was the referendum result.



Source: yougov.co.uk

Figure 7: Phone polls from different media *References on immigration on front pages. Content analysis*

The shift towards negative rhetoric and linking of immigrants to crime, coincided with the turn in polls towards the referendum result. However, it seems important to determine whether this shift was a coincidence or a contributing factor to the referendum result. Further research would be necessary to answer this question. However, some studies argued that 33 percent of Leave voters stated that immigration was their most important reason for voting to leave the EU (Bourne, 2016; Ashcroft, 2016). Also, during the campaign,

British press noted that immigration has become an essential element on voting decision⁸. Some studies point to immigration as one of the main reasons to explain the Leave vote in areas where average levels of education are low, and the local population is heavily white (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). This is a very interesting point that links with Fox's (2018) argument: "For local readers/viewers that have never inter-acted with immigrants, the news media anti-immigration discourse had a powerful impact".

5.3. Fake news, crimmigration and Brexit

Leavers focused on immigration as an essential problem to gain more votes and they achieved this goal. To do that, the main strategy was associating immigration and crime in a dishonest fashion and, in many cases, via traditional sensationalism of the British tabloids. This sensationalism is a predecessor of what is now known as *fake news* (Tandoc et al., 2018). Misinformation and distorted or manipulated news were a fundamental instrument for attacking immigration in the United Kingdom.

Some examples from these days support this statement. Firstly, The Daily Telegraph ran a front page where it stated that open borders have allowed Isil to enter in the United Kingdom, according a US spy's testimonies⁹. Thus, while the headline clearly linked borders and terrorism, the text offered questionable statements as the link between immigration and Islamist attacks committed in Belgium and France. A second example concerns Daily Express and its front page titled "Scandal generated by migrant crimewave on British streets"¹⁰. However, instead of providing reliable information about this migrant crime growth, the tabloid published content on perceptions or sensations.

The Daily Mail wrote about the alleged tour of a suspicious Afghan terrorist through the United Kingdom¹¹. The article reported that this person, a refugee, had been arrested in

⁸ On 14 June 2016 Daily Mail published on its front cover this headline "Brexit poll boost ad migration fears grow". The text argued that immigration has become the main question in referendum campaign.

⁹ "Open borders let Isil into Britain, warns US spy", The Daily Telegraph, 26 April 2016.

¹⁰ Daily Express, 23 May 2016.

¹¹ "Bomb 'plotter's' tour of Britain", Daily Mail, 12 May 2016.

Italy and charged with terrorism. According to the Daily Mail, there were several photos of some important British places on the terrorist's phone. However, upon googling his name, it was revealed that he was released by Italian authorities the next day, a fact not reported by the tabloid.

Another question highlighted during the Brexit campaign was the deportation of criminals with EU citizenship. Daily Mail's headline warned of the inability of the United Kingdom to deport killers and rapists from the EU¹². The information was based on a report noting that 4,171 EU nationals were in British jails and that 13,000 foreign people had been sentenced in the United Kingdom. Given that prison population in England and Wales were near 85,000, it is not an excessive figure¹³. It is also not true that EU Law prevents the deportation of EU criminals. In fact, Directive 2004/38, in its Chapter VI allows the States to take measures restricting the right of entry or the right of residence on grounds of public policy or public security. Among these measures, States are allowed to issue a deportation against an EU national when the personal conduct of the individual concerned represents a genuine, present and sufficiently serious threat affecting one of the fundamental interests of society.

The full-page story in the Daily Mail with a clear sensationalist bias mentioning two striking type of crimes (murders and rapes) was also mentioned by The Times, albeit briefly and focusing on the existence of a deportation order against those EU nationals¹⁴.

Links between EU freedom of movement and crime rise in the United Kingdom were also underlined by The Daily Telegraph on its front page as leading information. It noted that European criminals were free to live in the United Kingdom¹⁵. This information was based on a dossier with 50 cases of European criminals not deported by the United Kingdom.

Thus, The Daily Telegraph highlighted the connection between the European Union, immigration and (lack of) security. Following Michael Gove's declarations on 2 June 2016¹⁶,

¹² "EU killers and rapists we've failed to deport", Daily Mail, 3 June 2016.

¹³ Exactly, 84,968, at the end of 2016, accordingly to Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics (SPACE).

¹⁴ "Deportation warning", The Times, 3 June 2016.

¹⁵ "European criminals free to live in Britain", The Daily Telegraph, 7 June 2016.

¹⁶ "EU rules expose UK to terror", The Daily Telegraph, 2 June 2016.

the newspaper repeated a full-page headline published some days before stating that EU rules exposed the United Kingdom to terror.

Via graphic examples which stoke fear, the British print media also used the practice of transforming a specific case into a broader generalization about a certain group of people. The Daily Mail published a front page the story of an Albanian citizen charged with a double murder and living freely in the United Kingdom for 18 years, allegedly because of open borders¹⁷. However, the information hid the fact that the crime was committed in Albania twenty years before and he was charged in absence. The tabloid excluded nuances capable of undermining sensationalism to its scoop. The Daily Mail front page included a picture of this person in front of a table with two knives that the tabloid subtitled with the word “threat”, even though this person has not been charged with any crime in twenty years.

Before closing this content review, Turkish danger must be mentioned. Turkey became a focal point of Leavers campaign. Turkey was by far the most referenced nationality during the campaign (Moore & Ramsay, 2016). Leavers blamed Turkish people for a crimewave¹⁸ and some media highlighted the risk of suffering an “invasion” by Turkish people if the United Kingdom remained in the EU. The Sunday edition of the Daily Express (Sunday Express) published the most remarkable and misleading information. Its front page reported that 12 million Turkish people will relocate to the United Kingdom¹⁹. However, that figure was obtained from a survey of 2600 people in Turkey. The question was “If Turkey becomes a full member of the EU, and Britain remains in the EU, would you, or any members of your family, consider relocating to the UK?”

The question elicited a positive answer from 15,8% of the respondents. Then, the Sunday Express inaccurately applied the 15.8% to the entire Turkish population to conclude that 12 million Turkish people will move into the United Kingdom. The misrepresentation was so egregious that on 19 June the same tabloid was forced to retract the story; however, the effect of the disinformation on readers likely outweighed the effect of retracting the story.

¹⁷ “The Albanian double killer who’s lived freely in open borders UK for 18 years”, Daily Mail, 9 June 2016.

¹⁸ “Race row over 'Turkish crime wave' warning by Vote Leave”, The Observer, 22 May 2016.

¹⁹ “12M Turks they’ll come to UK”, Sunday Express, 22 May 2016.

6. Conclusions

Immigration played a key role in Brexit campaign. Leavers, from their political, representative or media positions, focused on immigration and borders control as one of the fundamental elements, *rectius* the fundamental element, in the Brexit campaign. This emphasis on immigration issues began to intensify in both political speeches and print media a month before the referendum. There seems to have been a coordinated effort between both areas. As a result, the polls turned, and the Leave camp achieved its goal.

As the maxim goes: correlation doesn't imply causation. Especially when we refer to the interaction of politicians, media, and the public. As Gerard (2016a) stated, "it is hard to determine whether newspapers are reflecting or fuelling public anxieties". In other words, the direction of the anti-immigration positions -from politicians to public opinion, through media, or from public opinion to politicians- is not clear (Boza, 2016). The literature deeply discusses this point. For example, Hericourt and Spielvogel (2014) stated that "media exposure appears as a key determinant of beliefs". Facchini et al. (2017) arrived at a similar conclusion. In fact, some studies have found very limited influence of actual immigration on immigration attitudes (Manevska & Achterberger, 2013; Van Klingeren et al., 2015). As Fox (2018) argued, about Brexit, "Most British people have no daily personal negative experiences with EU immigrants, so they rely on the news and the elite to tell them what these people are like".

In any case, this research was not able to prove a direct effect between the crimmigration strategy and the Brexit referendum results. It can be accepted that crimmigration rhetoric had a greater impact on the public because it reaches to an audience previously worried about immigration. However, this research shows a clear trend towards focusing on crimmigration during the campaign. Comparing references about immigration on front pages with other similar periods shows that explicit choice during the referendum campaign. Media coverage on immigration during the campaign was three, four or, even, ten times higher than other similar periods considered. It is relevant how, immediately after the

Brexit referendum, tabloids and newspapers became less interested in the topic, as if immigration no longer represented a real threat (Fox, 2018).

In this sense, crimmigration played a key role. As Goodwin and Milazzo (2017) said, the perception that Brexit will cut down immigration was the main reason for the Leave vote. To achieve this perception, it was necessary to create the contrary perception in advance, in other words to portray immigration as out of control in the United Kingdom. Therefore, generating a fear linking immigration to crime (and both to European Union and its freedom of movement) was a clear feature of Leavers' campaign. To this effect, they spread biased news and unverified information to utilize immigration panic as an election weapon.

It is a characteristic of election populism: generating fear (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). In this sense, immigrants are scapegoats because they have no political rights which allows them to use their vote to stop people spreading this speech (Hugo, 2003; Solanes Corella, 2008; Fox, 2018; Goodfellow, 2019). In fact, they are rarely covered by the media and their opinions are rarely reflected in the media (Bennet et al., 2013; Gemi et al, 2013).

At this point, one of the most remarkable features of the Brexit referendum campaign is the lack of a counter narrative. Pro Remain media or, at least, more progressive media, hardly addressed questions about immigration and failed to challenge the vision spread in society (Fox, 2018). As has been noted, the Daily Mirror, a tabloid that is considered pro-Labour, didn't mention immigration on its front pages during the campaign. The Guardian and The Independent, supporting Remain, were the only media that offered a positive image of immigrants on its front pages. It must be pointed out that some editorials and articles with a positive perspective on immigration can be found in these newspapers, but they didn't take them to their front pages, the most valuable location of a newspaper (Kim & Chung, 2017).

In short, while Leave campaign focused on xenophobic discourses, none of the print media in this study highlighted the positive effects of immigration in the public debate, as some studies had exposed before (Wadsworth et al., 2016). Nobody challenged crimmigration at the same level as the Leave campaign and media were using anti-immigrant rhetoric.

It had two effects. Firstly, immigration became one of the referendum campaign focal points and it fuelled the Leave campaign surge which eventually led to victory in the referendum. In retrospect, this smearing, attacking and criminalizing immigration campaign can be deemed a success. Secondly, since the Brexit referendum, race and religious hate crimes have notably grown in the United Kingdom (Fox, 2018; Cavalli, 2019). The rise of these crimes in the days following the referendum is particularly striking. Clashes between different ethnic and religious groups is a serious consequence of the anti-immigration campaign and may contribute to further societal breakdown.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric used by populist politicians in different countries is very risky. Those politicians are aware that their societies are heterogeneous, and that diversity will not disappear. In other words, to win elections there are willing to destroy present and future coexistence.

7. References

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