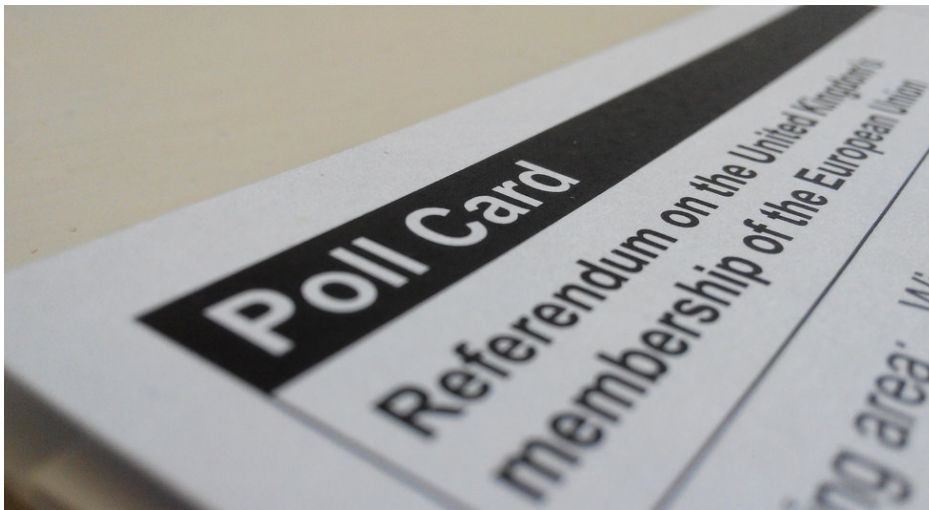


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Immigration was the most prominent referendum issue in the UK media during the EU Referendum campaign in 2016, finds [a study published by King's College London's Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power](#). After analysing 15 000 articles published in the UK during the EU Referendum campaign, King's College's researchers concluded that some media outlets blamed migrants for many political, social and economic ills. Some media blamed migrants for taking, but also for not taking British benefits, for violence, rape, traffic congestion, creating a schools crisis, costing a fortune to detain/imprison, even for benefitting from cheaper weddings.

King's College study also finds that the EU Referendum campaign was 'the UK's most divisive, hostile, negative and fear-provoking of the 21st century' and the national media's inflammatory rhetoric was at least partly responsible for this. On the subject of anti-immigration sentiments, the researchers argue that although it is impossible to prove a direct link between hate speech and the recorded increase in hate crimes following the referendum, 'explicitly blaming migrants for economic and social problems [...] is almost certain to stoke resentment'.

The study recently published also finds that although most outlets copiously reported on immigration, it was Leave campaign that dominated this debate. Based on opinion polls, the Leave campaign realised it had to concentrate on the issue of immigration in order to win the referendum. 'As the campaign wore on, Leave campaign leaders and Leave-supporting news outlets began to wrest the agenda [set by Remain] away from economic issues towards immigration. Coverage of immigration tripled over the course of the 10-week campaign.' Almost 80% of the front-page stories on immigration were published by newspapers that backed Leave, mainly the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*.



Leave campaigners and supporters blamed immigrants and immigration for a wide range of political, economic and social problems in the UK. Immigrants were often portrayed as violent, as benefit seekers, or as rapists and murderers. In other words, articles on immigration were overwhelmingly negative and, according to the study, 'based on most definitions, it is hard not to find [Leave campaigners' and news outlets'] claims and coverage discriminatory', despite Leave's claims to the contrary. The Remain camp was generally slow to criticise this rhetoric, initially deciding to downplay the issue or to call attention to their own plans to curb immigration.

Most print front pages during the 10-week campaign focused on immigration – out of the 195 Referendum-related front pages, 99 pages were on immigration, followed by the economy with 82 front pages. The study's authors also highlight a clear and important shift towards a stronger emphasis on immigration during the 10-week campaign.

The study is the first to analyse all articles referencing political issues within the context of the EU Referendum that were published by the 20 main UK news outlets online during the official 10-week campaign, 15,000 articles in total. These outlets include the online platforms of national press and broadcasters as well as online only news outlets. All front-page lead stories on every print newspaper were also incorporated in the analysis. The two most covered issues were the economy and immigration. Of the nearly 15,000 articles on the EU Referendum, 7,028 covered the economy, 4,383 immigration and health is number three on the list with 1,638 articles.