

Unsustainable and Uncontrolled:
Framing Immigration During the Brexit Campaign

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Abstract

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The British vote to leave the European Union in 2016 came as a major surprise to politicians and scholars. Pre-referendum scholarship indicated that while British voters had concerns about cultural issues, such as identity and immigration, they would ultimately decide based on economic considerations. However, post-referendum voter surveys and scholarship showed that immigration was a key issue for many Leave and Undecided voters. This paper addresses why immigration was such a significant issue, and why it was so closely tied to leaving the EU, by discussing how the official campaigns and print media sources prioritized and characterized the issue. I argue that the relative prominence of immigration in media coverage, and the increased likelihood that newspapers would use Leave-associated frames, which also corresponded with

pre-existing negative attitudes towards immigrants, contributed to immigration's overall salience and strong ties to Leave.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

On February 20th, 2016, then-Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the United Kingdom would hold a referendum on the question of continuing their membership in the European Union on June 23, 2016 (*BBC News* 2016a). Cameron had previously promised that an “in/out” referendum would take place if the Conservatives (“Torys”) won a majority in the 2015 parliamentary elections and could form a government (Mason 2014), due in part to the rising popularity of the nationalist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which campaigned heavily on the prospect of a similar referendum and threatened Cameron’s chances of winning a majority (Curtice 2016). After the Conservatives won a majority in parliament, Cameron embarked on negotiations with the EU to address several concerns, including increased political integration with the rest of Europe and future financial bailouts of countries in the Eurozone, which the UK did not join (*BBC News* 2016b). When negotiations concluded, Cameron promptly announced when the referendum would take place, but that he would be campaigning heavily to remain in the EU.

The initial outlook on the referendum by British politicians and the media was that the “Remain” campaign would win the referendum and that the UK would not leave the EU (White and Guererra 2016), a belief shared by most voters when surveyed (Cohn 2016). This belief was predicated on the fact that leaving the EU would be disastrous for the UK economy because of the loss of access to the single market (White and Guererra 2016). Strengthening this assumption was previous scholarship on how a future referendum on further EU integration would ultimately shake out. In a study of the British Social Attitudes survey published shortly before the referendum, Curtice (2016) found that only 22% of voters in 2015 wished to outright leave the

EU (211). He also made the following observation: "...while cultural concern is both widespread among the British public and underlies much of the skepticism that exists about the EU, on its own it is often insufficient to persuade someone that Britain should actually leave the EU. For that to happen someone needs also to be persuaded of the economic disadvantages of EU membership" (Ibid., 216). This follows previous scholarship noting that nationalism may play less of a role than utilitarian or economic concerns in forming one's attitude towards European integration (McLaren 2004). Both prevailing public attitudes and previous scholarship therefore suggested that the economic consequences of quitting the EU would sufficiently concern enough voters that they would trump ongoing cultural issues, such as high levels of EU migration that could pose a "threat to British identity" (Curtice 2016, 214). Since Remain represented the economically beneficial and stable status quo, they would therefore eke out a victory over Leave, which was more closely tied to cultural concerns over identity and migration.

In a shocking outcome, the British public voted by 51.83% to leave the EU after forty-three years of membership. While later polling suggested that the result would be tight, the outcome clearly stunned members of the media, politicians, and certainly David Cameron (Cohn 2016). Furthermore, more than half of Leave voters (52%) cited immigration as important to making their voting decision, compared to 18% who cited the economy (Ipsos MORI 2016). Immigration was also a frequent concern for undecided voters, along with the economy (Prosser, Mellon, and Green 2016). These results suggest that cultural issues, such as anxieties about immigration, were a key contributor to Leave's victory over Remain, despite Remain's strong position on economics. Recent scholarship conducted after the referendum has only strengthened these suggestions and confirmed the importance of immigration to the vote (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017). In light of this, this thesis seeks to investigate the following questions: how did

immigration become such a prominent policy issue for voters, and why was it so closely associated with leaving the union?

I argue that the relative prominence of the immigration issue in newspaper coverage leading up to the referendum increased the salience of the issue for voters compared to other potential policy topics and made it highly “accessible.” In this coverage, references to immigration were more likely to use similar frames (language that suggests a particular problem definition, causal effect, or association) as those used by the Leave campaign, rather than the frames used by the Remain campaign. This use of similar framing or themes thus heightened the association between being concerned about immigration and the Leave campaign. Furthermore, Leave’s framing of immigration appealed to preexisting negative attitudes and values about immigration, thus increasing the likelihood that voters would recall their messaging rather than Remain’s. As such, voters received a large amount of information emphasizing immigration’s importance, which framed the consequences of immigration as necessitating leaving the EU. This may have increased the likelihood that voters saw immigration as a deciding factor in their vote, especially if they previously shared similar attitudes and values that the Leave campaign highlighted. Finally, the ways in which the campaigns and media framed the issue emphasized both economic and cultural concerns, making it less easy to categorize as one or the other. As such, immigration may have factored into voters’ economic as well as cultural considerations, giving it more weight than a “purely” cultural issue.

There are several alternative possibilities for why a significant subset of British voters prioritized cultural concerns like immigration when making their choice. One option is that British voters are much more Eurosceptical compared to other Europeans, making them more resistant to the idea of eliding national identities into a single European one and thus priming

them to take the referendum as an opportunity to reject the EU and its threat to British culture. There is some merit to this, as Euroscepticism as a phenomenon has its roots in the UK, and has been embedded in British political culture since the 1980s (Gifford 2014). The rise of UKIP in the 2010s, with its focus on abandoning the European project for a nationalist future, was seen as evidence of a larger shift towards greater Euroscepticism, British nationalism, and anti-immigrant sentiments (Bale 2014). The UK has also consistently been seen as the most nationalistic of the members of the EU, and most antagonistic towards further integration, even before the increased profile of UKIP (Fligstein, Polyakova, and Sandholtz 2012).

Despite the prominence of Euroscepticism in British political culture, I am skeptical that it would be significant enough to serve as the only factor leading to a vote to leave. Polling from between 2012 and 2015 demonstrated that most British voters preferred some kind of relationship with the EU, whether it be further integration, consistent with the current relationship, or a return to membership solely in the economic community (Ipsos MORI 2015). Only 18% of respondents preferred leaving the union entirely (Ibid.). These results demonstrate that while a subpopulation of voters may have always had a desire to leave the union completely and regain a sense of British separatism, most were not ready to take the plunge before the referendum. As such, other factors must have influenced these voters to decide that leaving the EU entirely would be worth the economic risk.

Another option, presented by Goodwin and Milazzo (2017), is that increases in immigration on the local level strongly predicted the likelihood that a community would vote to Leave, in part because these shifts would increase individual's negative attitudes and perceptions of immigrants and immigration. Their study of demographic changes in certain regions and individual attitudes towards immigration pointed to these sudden demographic shifts as a strong

predictor of whether a community was more likely to vote to Leave, due to increasing perceptions of burdens on welfare and the local economy (Ibid.). As such, communities that saw higher rates of migration were more likely to see immigration as salient, and base their ultimate vote on these local changes.

Again, parts of Goodwin and Milazzo's argument are highly compelling, especially their discussion of individual attitudes, but I believe there is more to the swing to Leave than just high rates of demographic change. Nearly every region in the UK, excepting London, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, voted to leave the EU (*BBC News* 2016d). Meanwhile, Goodwin and Milazzo focused on the ten areas that experienced the greatest demographic change and highlighted the predicted effect on Leave's share of the vote. This rate of demographic change was much lower across many of the areas that ultimately voted to exit the Union, and does not account for the glaring exception of London, which is highly multicultural. As such, while I agree that demographic changes could be a strong predictor and potential explanation for a shift in voter attitudes, I would argue that there are other important factors that would emphasize and reinforce these negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Similarly, in his post-referendum study of survey data, Curtice (2017) implied that voter demographics were also a strong predictor of whether a given voter would choose to leave or remain. Specifically, he found that the highly educated and the young were more likely to favor Remain, while older and less educated voters favored Leave, in part because they were "more likely to be concerned about the cultural as well as the economic consequences of immigration" (Ibid., 33). Thus, certain segments of the British population were more likely to think about EU membership in cultural terms, and view immigration as important to their vote. This social division can certainly help explain why cultural concerns appealed to a certain group of voters,

which if large enough could have tipped the vote in their favor. However, while demographics may have played a strong predictive role and potentially informed how voters thought about immigration, I would again posit that there must be additional factors that would have increased immigration's salience to voters and influenced the terms in which they thought about the issue. Something must have tapped into those attitudes, making it more likely that voters would have acted upon those beliefs.

Thus, while Euroscepticism, migration flows, and voter demographics are all partial contributors to immigration's salience, I argue that campaign and media agenda-setting and framing helped increase immigration's prominence and made it more likely that voters would think about the issue on Leave's terms. The relatively high proportion of Brexit coverage that discussed immigration increased the issue's accessibility; meanwhile, the increased likelihood that newspapers would turn to Leave frames rather than Remain ones strengthened Leave's perceived "ownership" of the issue. Furthermore, the frames Leave used corresponded to certain beliefs and prejudices about immigration, thus increasing their "applicability" for voters who shared those attitudes. Finally, the ways in which immigration was framed allowed the issue to tap into both economic and cultural concerns, making the issue less easily categorizable than Curtice proposed and potentially granting it more weight in voter decisions than a general appeal to nationalism or identity. Combined, these agenda-setting and framing processes increased immigration's overall salience to the debate and gave Leave an advantage in messaging that cemented its status as the campaign that understood and could address voter concerns.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Chapter 2 briefly reviews the relationship between the UK and the EU, including dynamics and agreements that emphasized the UK's distance from the rest of Europe, as well as the role of Euroscepticism in domestic party politics

and the news media, especially newspapers. The chapter ends with a timeline of the events leading up to the referendum. Then, Chapter 3 discusses agenda-setting and framing as they appear in political communications scholarship, with a focus on how each process works and who serves as the source of information. I also discuss how each of these concepts changes in the context of a referendum, where the role of political elites and parties is much weaker compared to that of the news media.

Following these reviews, Chapter 4 represents the first section of my data analysis, which focuses on the materials published by the official Remain and Leave campaigns in the period leading up to the referendum. After reviewing the literature on the UK's historical approach to immigration policy to uncover potential key themes and concepts, I conducted a frame-focused content analysis of a sample of campaign materials that primarily or incidentally discussed immigration. Frames, motifs, and concepts were identified through inductive coding of materials, and later refined and redefined based on historical themes. I also reviewed each campaign's platform to determine whether immigration was a key issue for either campaign. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the results of this content analysis, with a focus on the major affirmative framings of immigration for each campaign.

Chapter 5 comprises the second part of my data analysis, which focuses on a sample of three national daily newspapers – *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, and *The Times*. These papers were chosen for their political diversity in order to gauge how effectively each campaign was able to spread its messaging across ideological lines. For each paper, I pulled all articles discussing “Brexit” or the “EU Referendum,” and then searched within these articles for mentions of “immigration,” “migration,” etc. Using the coding schema I developed for the campaign materials, I then coded all immigration-related articles and analyzed which campaign's

frames they used, as well as how these frames were deployed. Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the major conclusions of my research, potential areas for future study with a similar data set, potential lessons for policy and political practitioners, and the implications for current immigrants in the UK.

Chapter 2. THE UK IN THE EU

To understand how the UK reached the point of holding a referendum on its membership of the EU, a brief review of the relationship between the UK and EU is necessary. As Stephen George (1990) memorably titled his early history of the relationship between the UK and the EU, the United Kingdom has long been considered “an awkward partner” within the EU and its predecessors from almost immediately after it joined in 1973 (1). This chapter discusses the relationship between this awkward partner and the rest of the Union with a brief overview of the UK’s tenure as an EU member that focuses on major events or flashpoints which characterized or strained the relationship between the two. It then briefly reviews the role of Euroscepticism in British political discourse and its influence on political parties and the media. Finally, the chapter concludes with a timeline of key events that led up to the referendum.

2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UK IN THE EU

The United Kingdom joined the then-European Community on January 1, 1973. At this time, the European Community was the result of a 1967 merger of three communities – the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Atomic Energy Community, and the European Economic Community (George 1990, 2). Britain had applied to join the Community twice before in the 1960s, but both applications were vetoed by Charles de Gaulle, who viewed Britain as too “insular” and unwilling to “[accept] a European vocation,” as well as too closely linked to the United States (Ibid., 34). However, upon de Gaulle’s resignation from the French government in 1969, Britain’s path to membership was cleared, and negotiations began in earnest in 1970.

Despite the UK's interest in membership in the 60s and 70s, George does not dismiss de Gaulle's concerns, and indeed sees them reappearing throughout the UK's membership in the EU. Key themes include Britain's strong national identity, lack of commitment to the union project, and the UK's unique relationship with the US (Ibid., 40-41). Additionally, positive public sentiments about the Commonwealth nations (such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa) often impeded attempts to appeal to a broader sense of European identity. As George describes it, "popular sentiment... could easily be mobilized in favour of 'kith and kin' in the Commonwealth and against 'foreigners' in Europe," thus creating a significant domestic political barrier to European membership and integration (Ibid., 16).

One of the first signs that the UK's relationship with the European Community would be uniquely difficult came during the Labour government of Harold Wilson. The terms of entry into the Community had been hammered out by the Conservative government of Edward Heath, and Britain had already established a reputation as being "difficult to work with" during negotiations (George 1990, 70). However, when Labour came into power in 1974, domestic tensions surrounding Community membership both within the governing party and the government in general led Wilson to decide to renegotiate membership terms, and then put those terms to a public vote (Ibid., 77). Not two years into their membership, the UK was already holding a referendum. Fortunately for pro-membership Wilson, the Community largely agreed to his terms, and the 1975 referendum outcome was overwhelmingly in favor of membership, with "Yes" winning with 67.2% of the vote (Ibid., 88; 95).

Over the next several decades, the relationship between the UK and the rest of the European Community continued to be "awkward" due to incidents such as Margaret Thatcher's rejection of a potential monetary union (Gowland and Turner 2000, 274). However, the next two

significant flashpoints occurred shortly after Thatcher was forced to resign and John Major became the next Conservative prime minister in 1990. First, there was Britain's brief and embarrassing participation in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) between 1990 and 1992, which tied several currencies together and served as a precursor to the eventual Eurozone. In 1992, a storm of regional political and economic crises eventually led to "Black Wednesday," where the pound sterling was devalued to the point where it was forced out of the ERM (Ibid., 282). This incident soured many domestic political leaders on any further economic integration, such as the proposed European Monetary Union (EMU).

At the same time, the European Community had signed the Treaty on European Union, or Maastricht Treaty, in 1992, which would create the new European Union and increase political and economic ties between its members. Maastricht required unanimous ratification by all member states to come into effect, and members of Major's own party were against the treaty's terms (Gowland and Turner 2000, 279-280). The ratification and later treaty review processes were incredibly fraught both domestically and within the Union (Ibid., 282-283; 292). The UK did gain some concessions, such as an "opt-out" deal to postpone committing to joining the EMU (Ibid., 279). However, the impacts of Maastricht on foreign and domestic politics were generally negative. By the end of Major's tenure, "Britain, while not completely isolated, was nevertheless out of step with most other EU countries over a whole range of important issues" such as currency and enlargement (Ibid., 292), and the "attempt to stake the national prestige of the government on a revived Europeanism proved to be an unmitigated disaster that split the Conservative party and destroyed the credibility of the government" (Gifford 2014, 105).

After Black Wednesday and Maastricht, the next two key agreements or exceptions occurred under Labour's Tony Blair in the late 1990s. First, the UK, along with Ireland, was able

to negotiate its exception from the removal of internal border controls taking place under the Schengen agreements (Gowland and Turner 2000, 337). Second, the UK did not join the EMU or the single currency of the Euro. This refusal to join the Eurozone resulted in some major political limitations, as non-EU countries like the UK were “prevented from playing anything like a full role” in decision-making (Ibid., 352-354). As such, both the UK’s lack of membership in the borderless Schengen Zone and their refusal to join the single currency reinforced the sense that the UK was separate and apart from the rest of the EU bloc.

During the 21st century, the UK-EU relationship has been further challenged by domestic and supranational events. First, the global financial crisis that began in 2007 greatly impacted members of the Eurozone. The eurozone crisis created a “vicious circle” where governments went into debt after bailing out banks, thus requiring international assistance; loan conditions required austerity, which then weakened growth and made it harder for countries to pay off their debts (Laursen 2013, 17). Blair argues that this crisis emphasized “the divisions that exist between those member states that are part of the eurozone and those that are not,” like the UK, and that the role of EU political “elites” in addressing the crisis indicated how further integration was driven by actors who are “not in touch with [their] electorate” (Blair 2013, 79-80).

Second, the period between 2010 and 2014 marked the ascendancy of the United Kingdom Independence Party, or UKIP. Profoundly anti-EU – Tournier-Sol (2015) describes Euroscepticism as their “very *raison d’être*” (134) – UKIP was able to position itself as different from the other political parties due to its staunch opposition to the EU project (Gifford 2014, 159). Electoral victories in the 2012 by-elections and the 2013 local elections, where the party captured a quarter of the overall vote, further solidified UKIP’s position as a rising political movement (Ibid., 159). UKIP especially posed a threat to the Conservative party, as many party

members and supporters were “ideologically closer to UKIP than to their own party leaders” (Ibid., 160), though Labour also suffered from the party’s rise (Bale 2014).

Finally, the Mediterranean migration crisis stemming from the Syrian war has further strained the EU and its institutions. The crisis, where refugees from Middle Eastern and North African countries crossed the Mediterranean by boat or entered the EU via land routes, arguably peaked in 2015 when several boats full of refugees sank and killed most passengers (Goodman, Sirriyeh, and McMahon 2017). Not only have the refugee crises been characterized as “threatening the European way of life” (Ibid., 106), but the way the EU has handled the crisis also arguably shows a breakdown in how the EU has handled integration beyond the single market (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018). On top of the reverberations from the eurozone crisis and the increasing political sway of UKIP, the migrant crisis added additional pressure to the EU project as a whole and to the UK’s relationship with the union.

2.2 BRITISH EUROSCEPTICISM

Key to understanding the strained and awkward relationship between the UK and the EU is the idea of “Euroscepticism.” Originally emerging in the late 1980s as a response to European pushes for further integration, and further strengthened by the tensions surrounding Maastricht and the ERM (Gifford 2014, 106), Euroscepticism can roughly be defined as a broad political movement, unconstrained by party loyalty or membership, based on either “hard” (principled) or “soft” (qualified) opposition to European integration (Gifford and Tournier-Sol 2015, 2; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008, 8). While the United Kingdom is not the only EU member with a skeptical political movement, it is considered an outlier compared to other members. This is in part because of how mainstream skepticism is in the British context (Gifford and Tournier-Sol 2015),

but also because Britain has had a unique historical and geopolitical relationship to Europe and the world that has strengthened their sense of exceptionalism and isolation (Baker et al. 2008).

Contributing to the prominence of Euroscepticism is the integration of Eurosceptic thought into major political parties, such as the Conservatives. Alexandre-Collier (2015) notes that between the 1990s and the 2010s, Eurosceptic Tory MPs were “representing a widespread attitude in the party but... receiving very little attention, as if they had become an organic component of the Conservative Party” (101). The center-left parties (Labour and Liberal Democrat, or Lib Dems) have domestically positioned themselves in opposition to Euroscepticism in the Conservative party and other, more extreme parties (Schnapper 2015, 118). However, this pro-European stance is relatively weak compared to similar parties in the rest of the EU (Ibid.), and there are also Eurosceptic members of both parties. Furthermore, the rise of UKIP in the 2010s began to challenge the tenets of the “British political system as a whole” by positioning itself as different from the centrist parties (Tournier-Sol 2015, 134). Amidst these pressures, the response from Labour and the Lib Dems has been fairly unsuccessful at pushing back against Euroscepticism (Schnapper 2015). As such, “Britain’s Euroscepticism remains therefore exceptional in the EU because of the strength of Euroscepticism and the weakness of pro-European parties” (Ibid., 118).

One of the consequences of the Eurosceptic movement has been what Schnapper (2015) refers to as “a hegemony of Eurosceptic discourse” (119). Schnapper describes this hegemony as “the norm in political circles, press and public opinion, to criticize European bureaucracy, its lack of reform, lack of democracy ... This makes it very difficult, if not eccentric, to articulate a positive discourse about the EU if you aspire to govern Britain” (Ibid., 119). Liddle, a former political advisor on Europe to the Blair government, has a complementary assessment. He writes,

“The root of the British problem with Europe lies not so much with public opinion, but with the failure of our political class to make the case for membership” (Liddle 2014, xxxiii). This statement is reflected in the polling data that Curtice (2016) discusses; between 1992 and 2015, the percentage of the British public who actively wanted to leave the EU fluctuated between 10 and 30%, but never gained an outright majority (211). Thus, Euroscepticism appears to stem much more from political discussions than public attitudes. With the center-left parties failing to make a consistent positive case for membership in the union, the baseline discourse on Europe has focused on its faults, rather than its benefits. As such, Euroscepticism as a movement has flourished thanks to a lack of political opposition, rather than a natural public anti-EU disposition.

Euroscepticism’s strength in the British context can also be partially attributed to the news media, which has been “dominated by various forms of Eurosceptical sentiment” (Daddow 2015a). Gifford (2014) notes that a particular British version of Euroscepticism which is “populist and exclusive” appears in “a large segment of the national press” (7). Key figures in this Euroscepticism include media mogul Rupert Murdoch, whom Daddow (2012) largely attributes with spearheading the rhetorical shift into Euroscepticism in British print media. The strength of Euroscepticism in the British press contributed to Euroscepticism’s new position within the political mainstream. Daddow (2012) argues that one of the reasons British politicians are less likely to position themselves as pro-EU is that “pro-Europeans were caught off guard... they became less and less willing to counter the Eurosceptic challenge systematically, either organizationally or in terms of providing a coherent alternative narrative to the Eurosceptic rendering of Britain’s global position” (1236). Liddle (2014) appears to agree with this assessment; he notes that one of the reasons for political failure to argue for the EU stems from

“fear of media attack: the anti-European press have a track record of treating pro-Europeans ruthlessly” (xxxiii). Of course, not every outlet is fervently Eurosceptical; however, enough of them are that their coverage reinforces Schnapper’s “hegemony” and ensures that Euroscepticism remains a major thread in British political discourse.

2.3 A TIMELINE OF BREXIT (2013-2016)

With this history in mind, we now must look at the specific series of events that led up to the Brexit referendum of 2016, as shown by Figure 2.1.

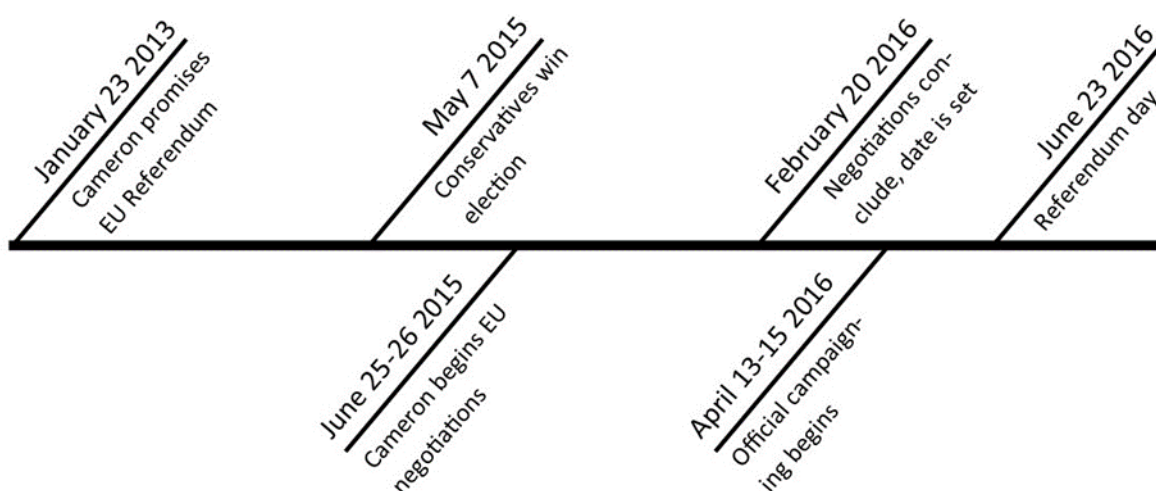


Figure 2.1. Timeline of EU Referendum, 2013 – 2016.

The possibility of an in/out referendum on the EU became much more likely in 2013, thanks to a speech given by David Cameron. Cameron, who was currently leading the Coalition government of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, was under significant pressure from both within his party and from the rising popularity of UKIP to propose a referendum (Todd 2016, 84). Initially resistant, Cameron eventually relented when he gave a speech on **January**

23, 2013 on the relationship between the EU and the UK. In it, he outlined five areas where he hoped to see major reforms and renegotiation, and then made the following promise:

The next Conservative manifesto in 2015 will ask for a mandate from the British people for a Conservative government to negotiate a new settlement with our European partners in the next parliament. ... And when we have negotiated that new settlement, we will give the British people a referendum with a very simple in or out choice. To stay in the EU on these new terms, or come out altogether. (Cameron 2013)

The possibility of a referendum became even more likely on **May 7, 2015**, when the Conservatives won an outright parliamentary majority (*BBC News* 2015a). Following through on his 2013 promise, Cameron promptly began renegotiating Britain's terms of EU membership during the summer of 2015, formally outlining his demands to other EU leaders on **June 25-26, 2015** (*BBC News* 2015b). Cameron's key demands included an "opt-out" of the "ever closer union," increasing sovereignty for national parliaments, protections for countries outside the Eurozone, decreasing access to welfare for EU migrants, and "streamlining" the EU (*BBC News* 2015b).

After months of negotiations, which were often interrupted by other EU concerns such as Greece's economic collapse and the Mediterranean migrant crisis, Cameron closed his EU deal on **February 20, 2016** (*BBC News* 2016b) and promptly announced that an in/out referendum would be held on June 23 that year (*BBC News* 2016a). While several groups had positioned themselves to potentially lead the "leave" or "remain" sides of the referendum and conducted campaigning since late 2015, the Electoral Commission designated Stronger In (Remain) and Vote Leave (Leave) as the official campaigns on **April 13, 2016**, while the official campaign period began on **April 15, 2016** ("The Designation Process" 2016). Finally, on **June 23, 2016**, the British public went to the polls and voted to leave the Union.

2.4 SUMMARY

As this brief review demonstrates, the relationship between the UK and the EU has historically been awkward and fraught. Ever since the first EU referendum of 1975, the UK has been set apart from the rest of the Union and characterized as difficult to work with and resistant to further integration. This relationship has experienced further tension thanks to events such as the EU's handling of the eurozone and migration crises and the rise of new national Eurosceptic parties such as UKIP. Furthermore, the strength and power of Euroscepticism in British political discourse and party politics has made it difficult for national parties to put forward a pro-EU stance, even while most of the public has consistently wanted to maintain some sort of relationship with the EU. Without a strong Europhile counter-narrative, the baseline of public discourse has been to question and resist the UK's current membership. The strength of the right's Euroscepticism was enough, in fact, to pressure David Cameron into making the decision to promise an in/out referendum, a promise that represented the culmination of decades of anti-EU political mobilization.

Chapter 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

As Chapter 2 discussed, Brexit is the result of decades of strained relationships and anti-EU organizing. Even while acknowledging the importance of these factors, however, there is still the question of how the anti-EU movement overcame the reluctance to leave that Curtice (2016) identified in his pre-referendum research. To answer that question, I reviewed key theories from the field of political communications. Specifically, I focused on two related concepts – *agenda-setting*, which concerns how the news media and occasionally political actors determine which political or social issues are discussed and which are neglected, and *framing*, which focuses on which aspects of an issue are made more salient than others. These mechanisms work together to create an agenda where certain issues are discussed more prominently than others, and where the issues are characterized in ways that evoke specific problem definitions, evaluations, or recommendations. Finally, I review how these mechanisms operate in the unique context of a referendum, where the interactions between media and political elites grow much more complex.

3.1 AGENDA SETTING

To understand how certain issues become more or less important to the public during a debate or in the overall political environment, political communications scholars have developed a theory of *agenda-setting*. Broadly speaking, agenda setting is how certain actors, primarily the news media, influence public opinion (Sheafer 2007). The news media tells the public “what to think about” in the context of a given election or period of political debate by emphasizing some issues more frequently than others (Ibid., 22). Then, “certain issues or aspects of issues [are made] more accessible (i.e. easily recalled) for people” (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 15). This “accessibility effect” explains how the media can “influence the standards [people] use when

forming attitudes about candidates and political issues” (Ibid., 15). By increasing coverage of a certain issue over another, the media can effectively “set the agenda” of the election to focus on a few key issues that emerge as the most salient, and potentially influence voting behavior by this prioritization.

Because the theory emerged from political communications, most scholars discussing agenda-setting view it as a purely media-based phenomenon. McCombs and Shaw (1972), who first established agenda-setting theory by studying the correlation between media coverage and voter opinions, began their paper by saying, “candidates go before the people through the mass media rather than in person... The pledges, promises and rhetoric encapsulated in news stories, columns, and editorials constitute much of the information upon which a voting decision has to be made” (176). Since McCombs and Shaw’s influential paper, other authors have followed their lead, focusing exclusively on the media as the agenda-setters (McCombs 2014; Sheafer 2007; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). However, some scholars have examined whether political entities like campaigns or politicians can influence which issues are discussed within the media, and therefore increase their relative salience, to align with their preferred portfolio of policy issues (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003; Dalton et al. 1998; Ridout and Mellen Jr. 2007). The results of these studies have been mixed, as sometimes media coverage aligned with candidate agendas and highlighted the issues they favored, while at other times coverage diverged considerably. These mixed results occurred on both the national (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003; Dalton et al. 1998) and local levels (Ridout and Mellen Jr. 2007). This suggests that the mass media is primarily responsible for agenda-setting, but campaigns or politicians may occasionally have their agenda faithfully reported, and can therefore influence agenda-setting to some degree.

An additional theory which can influence agenda-setting is *issue ownership*. Initially discussed by Petrocik (1996), issue ownership is the idea that certain parties or politicians are perceived as better able to “handle” or “solve” certain issues or problems (i.e., “owning” them). Politicians therefore campaign in ways that highlight the issues where they are perceived as more competent, in an attempt to set favorable vote criteria (Ibid.). Scholars have added nuance to this initial theory by discussing other aspects of issue ownership, such as negative ownership (Wagner and Meyer 2015), or its relative stability (Walgrave, Lefevre, and Nuytemans 2009; Dahlberg and Martinsson 2015). Of note is Bélanger and Meguid’s (2008) study uncovering that issue ownership is generally only effective when the given issue is salient to voters. If an issue is not made accessible, then the impacts of ownership are limited at best. Furthermore, the news media may also be influenced by preconceived understandings of which issues a typical party member ought to own, and be less responsive when politicians campaign on issues that aren’t “theirs” (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003). This could lead to party and media behavior that reinforces perceived ownership. Parties try to emphasize the issues that they have traditionally “owned”, which can be reflected in news coverage, while at the same time, news media coverage can be colored by their understandings of key party issues to the detriment of attempts to campaign on weakly or non-owned issues. As such, knowing which party “owns” what can help further contextualize the effects of agenda-setting on voting patterns.

3.2 FRAMING

After the agenda for the election is set, the next question is *how* voters think (or are told to think) about the issues that have been deemed most important. In political communications, *framing* theory is used to answer this question. To use the definition established by Entman (1993), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a

communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (52). While a frame can include all of these elements, they do not have to, and the “problem definition” aspect is generally considered “the most important feature of a frame” (de Vreese 2012, 367).

Framing is generally considered to be a dynamic process. Scheufele (1999) first developed a synthesized “process model” of framing, with a focus on four distinct processes that interact with and impact one another (114-115). Chong and Druckman (2007) paraphrased this model as follows:

(a) “[Frame] building,” which focuses on the dynamics of how speakers, such as media outlets, choose specific frames in communication; (b) “frame setting,” which concerns the influence of frames in communication on frames in thought, and the precise psychological processes at work; (c) “individual-level effects of frames,” which refers to the impact of frames in thought on subsequent behaviors or attitudes; and (d) “journalists as audiences,” which looks at how citizens’ actions affect the initial frame building process. (101)

Each of these processes affect one another – while the model begins with elites choosing which frames to communicate, they are also responding to public sentiment or behavior, creating a feedback loop. It is also important to note that in Scheufele’s original formation of “frame building,” the process is influenced not only by “journalist-centered influences,” but also by “the type or political orientation of the medium” and “external sources of influence (e.g. political actors, authorities, interest groups, and other elites)” (Scheufele 1999, 115).

As this process model demonstrates, framing focuses not just on what was said within the media, but how audiences respond to a given discourse. Framing processes are considered effective when audiences take the connections that frames suggest – tying taxes to unemployment, for example – and apply these connections when thinking about the issue being discussed (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 15). In order to ensure audiences adopt or use a

frame, therefore, frames must be both *accessible*, as in agenda-setting, and *applicable* (Wettstein 2012). Accessibility alone is not enough – a frame “also has to be in *accordance* with the recipient’s beliefs and preferences” (Ibid., 320). People tend to favor frames that are “consistent with their values” (Chong and Druckman 2007, 102), even if other frames are equally familiar to them. As such, unlike in agenda-setting, the applicability of a frame is equally as important as its overall accessibility.

In addition to the applicability effect, political awareness and media consumption also play a role in the effectiveness of agenda-setting and framing. Hobolt (2009) notes that “voters who pay more attention to politics are likely to be less susceptible to the recommendations of national politicians and instead rely on their own opinions” (24-25). Implied here is that voters who are more politically active have already formed their own judgements, and are thus more resistant to the cues they receive than a casually engaged citizen. Media consumption patterns also matter. Wirth et al.’s (2010) results demonstrated that “only those individuals who relied heavily on the mass media for political information were influenced by salient media arguments” (339). Voters who did not read media sources, and therefore were not exposed to relevant frames or told “what to think about,” were less likely to frame the issue in the same way.

Some scholars, like McCombs (2004), have argued that framing should be considered as a part of agenda-setting (called “second-order agenda-setting”), and discuss framing effects using this terminology (see Sheafer 2007). Indeed, political communications scholarship often discusses the two processes together, as their effects on media consumers tend to apply jointly (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). However, the different effects of agenda-setting and framing, the different levels of audience attention required for each to be effective (low for agenda-

setting, high for framing), and the importance of applicability to framing suggests that maintaining this distinction is desirable (Ibid.). As such, I will use both terms.

Perhaps even more than in agenda-setting, the news has the most power in determining the framing of a given issue. While it is understood that both journalists and political elites influence the frame building process (de Vreese and Lecheler 2012; Scheufele 1999), “both journalists and politicians agree that journalists have the ultimate power over the framing of the news” (Gerth and Siegert 2012, 281). Since political elites lack the same reach as journalists or media figures, “getting access to journalists and the editorial content of the mass media is crucial for political parties and organizations as well as for individual politicians” (Ibid., 280-281). Because of this, the news media has a central role in determining the dominant framing of certain political issues or events.

The implications of this power are complicated by the role of slant and bias in news coverage. As defined by Entman (2007), slant applies to individual news pieces “in which the framing favors one side over the other in a current or potential dispute,” while bias refers to “consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts over the use of government power” (165-166). While Entman notes that the use of certain heuristics is inevitable, he urges scholars to “study how the news slants in particular instances and whether slant falls into recurrent patterns that... ‘mobilize bias’ in the political system by helping some actors regularly prevail over others” (Ibid., 166). As Entman’s paper suggests, framing can easily be mobilized to assist one set of actors over another. Thus, with the amount of power that the media holds over framing in mind, discussing who benefits from media framing of a given issue is a key consideration when attempting to understand the impact of framing in general.

3.3 AGENDA SETTING AND FRAMING IN THE REFERENDUM CONTEXT

While agenda-setting and framing are discussed and applied in a variety of political contexts, referendums like the Brexit case present a unique set of circumstances. Unlike standard elections, where voters choose between political parties or politicians who will make public policy decisions, referendums serve as a mechanism of direct democracy that allow voters to make their views known on specific issues and potentially make a decision (Hobolt 2009, 3). Generally, referendums are held on “divisive issues that go beyond the lifespan of individual governments,” so the way the public chooses to vote often has more historical impact than a regular election (Dekavalla 2016, 793). Referendums are also unusual because they lack the standard two- or multi-party or candidate framework of a standard election. Political parties are less likely to present a unified message, especially if there are internal divisions or cross-party alliances on the issue in question (de Vreese and Semetko 2004, 3). These shifting behaviors, as well as the absence of parties or persons on the ballot, means that voters cannot rely on the informational cues they receive during a general election (Ibid., 3-4).

The combination of direct voter input on a policy issue and the variation in party behaviors influences how the agenda-setting and framing processes play out during referendum campaigns. For example, agenda-setting functions differently during referendums because the choice is not between multiple political parties or politicians, which can vie to ensure their “owned” issues are prominently discussed, but instead focused on a single policy issue. As de Vreese and Semetko (2004) discuss, “a national referendum campaign is distinctly different from a general election in that the broader theme of the campaign has been defined a priori” (15). As such, they state that the focus is not so much on what the major theme of the election will be, but rather “if, and when, sub-issues emerge within the broader issue” (Ibid., 15). Additionally,

referendums on certain issues are more likely to give rise to related sub-topics. In her discussion of referendums on EU integration, Hobolt (2009) notes that “membership” and “treaty ratification” referendums “touch upon a number of interconnected economic and political issues related to the integration process” (14). As such, while referendums naturally narrow the field of potential issues up for discussion and prioritization throughout a campaign, the complexity of a question can easily result in political actors and media engaging in agenda-setting behavior.

Another major difference between referendums and standard campaigns is the source of informational cues for voters. During normal parliamentary or legislative elections, the mass media and political actors both participate in the agenda-setting and framing processes. The unique context of the referendum disrupts these processes, particularly because of its effect on political parties. As de Vreese and Semetko (2004) discuss, during referendums “the information cues from political parties are often ambiguous” (4). This ambiguity is reflected in the uncertainty that different campaigns have regarding what the other side is doing, as the normal and predictable cues for a party (for example, that Labour will campaign on increasing social welfare) are not always present, especially when a party is split on the main topic of the referendum (Ibid., 11).

The media interpretation and presentation of arguments and frames also becomes even more important during referendums. While the media always serves as a “key source of information” on politics for many people, its role grows significantly during referendums (Dekavalla 2016, 794). The creation of “strange” camps to promote one or another side of the debate results in greater focus on the promotion of specific arguments as opposed to candidate or party cues (Wirth et al. 2010, 330-331). Thus, “arguments are conveyed by the media;” the media becomes a mediator between the campaign and the public (Ibid., 331). Campaigns must

therefore focus their energy not only on different kinds of elite cues, such as opinion leaders, polls, and campaign events (Hobolt 2009, 35), but also on ensuring their arguments are featured in media coverage (Wirth et al. 2010, 331).

3.4 SUMMARY

This review discusses two key concepts from the political communications field: *agenda-setting* and *framing*. These two related processes work together to determine “what voters think about” and “how they think about them” – though the effectiveness of these mechanisms depends in part on how well this communication aligns with the audience’s previously-held beliefs. Both the news media and political actors such as parties or candidates can influence these processes; however, while campaigns and candidates can try to ensure that the issues on which they are strongest get the most coverage, the news media is generally considered to be the more important actor due to its role as an intermediary with voters. With that power in mind, it is important to keep in mind Entman’s warning to consider how the media may favor one party over another, even if they attempt to live up to standards of journalistic objectivity. Finally, the unique context of the referendum greatly complicates both processes. The focus on a single broad issue, the potential for inter-party divisions, and the overall lack of clear political cohesion can lead to even greater reliance on the media to organize, prioritize, and characterize the issues at stake.

As this review has demonstrated, the way in which political actors and the media focus their attention and frame certain issues can have a significant impact on how the public thinks about political or social issues, especially in the context of a referendum or election. Thus, in order to understand how an issue like immigration became so salient to the Brexit referendum and so closely tied with one campaign over the other, my paper attempts to describe how agenda-setting and framing were operationalized during the lead up to the vote. The next two chapters

will explore these concepts as they apply to how each campaign approached the issue of immigration, and how the media discussed and framed the issue in their campaign coverage.

Chapter 4. ANALYSIS OF CAMPAIGN MATERIALS

To answer the questions of how immigration became so salient to the Brexit debate, and how it became so closely tied to the Leave campaign, we first turn to how each official campaign characterized the issue of immigration. Both the Remain and Leave campaigns worked to convey certain messages not only directly to the public, but also to the media, as they hoped to ensure that journalists would discuss key issues in ways that would be favorable to their overall argument (see Gerth and Siegert 2012). Thus, by looking at materials such as news releases, pamphlets, opinion pieces, etc., we gain an understanding of what each side wanted to convey both in terms of which issues were important to their overall argument, and how they preferred to characterize key issues such as immigration. Looking at the relative prioritization and framing of immigration between the two main campaigns can therefore help us understand why immigration was tied so strongly to the Leave campaign, rather than Remain.

4.1 METHODS

To understand how each campaign characterized immigration leading up to the Brexit referendum, I conducted the following research and analysis. First, I reviewed the literature on UK immigration policy and public responses to immigration in order to understand the historical context of immigration as a policy issue. There were several key reasons for conducting this review before analyzing any campaign materials. First, reviewing literature on historical policies helped me understand the “status quo” of UK immigration policy, and especially the role of EU migrants within that policy. Secondly, this review identified several key events or changes to migration flows and perceptions of migrants, any of which could have been referenced in campaign discussions of immigration overall. The most important role of this review, however,

was to help identify the key themes surrounding immigration before the referendum was proposed. Identifying these key concepts before I coded my campaign materials allowed me to see where this most recent framing of the immigration “problem” fit compared to past immigration policy debates, and situate each campaign’s rhetoric in the overall historical context of immigration to the UK.

After reviewing the literature, I then collected materials from the websites of the official campaigns for each side of the referendum: Stronger In (Remain) and Vote Leave (Leave). These campaigns were each designated the official campaign for their side on April 13, 2016 (*BBC News* 2016c), giving them access to designated funding and certain free materials courtesy of the government (“The Designation Process” 2016). However, both campaigns were actively publishing materials and debating rival cross-party campaigns well before official designation was given (Baneth 2016), giving them the opportunity to propagate their views to the public before the official campaign period of April 15, 2016 to June 23, 2016. Major actors associated with the Remain campaign included then-Prime Minister David Cameron, the leaders of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, Jeremy Corbyn and Tim Farron, and several members of Cameron’s cabinet. On the other side, the former mayor of London Boris Johnson (Conservative), several other cabinet members, and the leadership of UKIP were associated with Leave. Both campaigns had members of multiple political parties due to referendum campaign rules requiring cross-party appeal (Calamur 2016; “The Designation Process” 2016).

The campaign materials I collected for both Leave and Remain include news posts, endorsed opinion pieces, linked open letters, white papers, presentations, brochures, media graphics, etc. dated from October 12, 2015 to June 22, 2016 for Remain, and December 8, 2015 to June 22, 2016 for Leave. All materials were either collected directly from each campaign’s

website or through links promoted on the website. While I looked at all published materials for Remain, the Leave campaign website's news posts were not available past a certain date due to broken links. However, as I reviewed all other available materials such as linked opinion pieces, briefing papers, and brochures published before and during official campaigning, I believe the materials I collected are sufficient to demonstrate Leave's framing of immigration.

A small number of campaign materials, such as pages discussing each campaign's platform or key issues, were collected to determine the relative importance of immigration to each campaign's overall argument. These materials helped determine whether immigration was a priority issue for the campaign, or if it was relatively unimportant to the campaign's overall argument. However, the majority of campaign materials were collected based on whether they mentioned or discussed immigration, migration, or freedom of movement, to determine how each campaign characterized the issue.

To analyze the campaign materials, I conducted multiple rounds of coding, where the unit of analysis was one blog post, web page, brochure, etc. The first round of coding was inductive, where every mention of immigration or migration was highlighted and coded based on the in-text descriptions. Codes, descriptions, and examples were tracked on a master spreadsheet. During this process, I not only coded for arguments or positions, such as highlighting the economic aspects of immigration or the benefits of immigration, but also for certain descriptors, such as "refugee," and mentions of certain events or policy proposals. I also wrote regular memos to describe the coding process and trace code development over time.

After my initial round of coding, I then reviewed the campaign materials and my literature review of immigration policy to redevelop and refine my codebook. Once I had consolidated, removed, or refined my codes, I then recoded all campaign materials. A final

version of my codebook is located in Appendix A. During the recoding process, I used a system modeled after Jerit (2008), where I coded for both affirmative and responsive (e.g. saying a given argument is not true or inaccurate) uses of a frame, argument, or code. As I coded, I tracked which codes were used in a spreadsheet. I also recorded the use of multiple frames or codes per unit of analysis to account for co-appearing frames (see Dekavalla 2016). Finally, once the second round of coding was complete, I analyzed my results to determine which frames were affirmatively used the most by each campaign.

4.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF UK IMMIGRATION POLICY

To fully understand the context in which the Leave and Remain campaigns were making arguments and framing immigration, considering the historical context in which each campaign was operating is key. Immigration to the UK has been a historically fraught topic, where control and management, fear of “overcrowding,” and economic anxiety have all played a part in policy formation and public opinion. While typically these policies have targeted non-European migrants from former Commonwealth countries, the accessions of ten new EU members in the early 2000s shifted the focus of government and public concern. This section discusses several key themes and trends in British immigration policy in order to situate the referendum debate and identify concepts that reappeared in campaign materials.

4.2.1 *Managed Migration*

Over the last six or seven decades, immigration policy in the United Kingdom has generally focused on a single goal: controlling or “managing” migration (Balch 2010, 121). Initially during the post-war period, immigration was seen as an economic necessity for recovering from the economic, physical, and generational devastation of World War II, and Europeans, the Irish, and

Commonwealth migrants all fulfilled these labor demands (Small and Solomos 2006, 239). However, by the late 1950s, British attitudes towards migrants became much more negative. The Immigration Acts passed in 1962, 1968, and 1971 were all based on what Small and Solomos (2006) call “the ‘numbers game,’” where the basis for policy was an assumption that Britain was “overcrowded” and “reaching its capacity of immigrants” (247). As will be discussed later, these Immigration Acts did not equally restrict access to the UK for all immigrants, despite occasional claims to the contrary, and instead targeted members of the Old and New Commonwealths (Ibid., 237; 247). As a result of this legislative period, non-European immigration dropped substantively from previous levels (Balch 2010, 122).

Later iterations of the immigration control approach focused explicitly on work permits and economic contributions, and introduced the language of “immigration management” (Balch 2010, 126). While the 1971 Immigration Act made work permits a requirement for any non-European migrant (Demireva 2011, 638), the introduction of “managed migration” by the Labour government in 2000 explicitly discussed migration as a question of economics (Balch 2010, 126). The new migration policy sought to acknowledge the positive impacts on economic growth that migration could have, and avoid the perception of restricting migration without adequate reason (Ibid., 125-126). At the same time, the implications of the “managed migration” strategy were that having more “good” migration of workers who would fill shortages in low- and high-skill sectors would naturally lead to less “bad” migration – i.e., “asylum-seekers and irregular migrants” (Ibid., 131). The formal definition of “managed migration” put forward in 2002 also emphasized the importance of “having an orderly, organized and enforceable system of entry” (Ibid., 131). Thus, while managed migration attempted to make a more positive case for

immigration, generally in terms of overall economic benefits, maintaining control over who came to Britain continued to be a driving force behind policy development.

Immigration policy grew more restrictive and focused on economic criteria through the introduction of a points-based system by the Labour government in 2008, and later revisions to eligibility criteria under the Coalition government between 2010-2012. Based on Australian immigration policy, Labour's new system was intended to "[curb] immigration from non-EU countries" (J. Smith 2008, 424). The new system replaced 70+ policies for labor migration and introduced a "Skills Advisory Board" to determine admissions (Balch 2010, 132). Then, under the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, eligibility criteria for non-EU migrants led to limitations on visas for migrants without job offers and a "'minimum income' requirement for partner visas," which required spouses moving to the UK to make at least £18,600 (Gower 2015, 1). The goal of these policies, as described by David Cameron, were to achieve "good immigration, not mass immigration" (Ibid., 1). Again, the focus of immigration policy was a combination of economic needs and introducing a new component for controlling, restricting, and reducing "bad" or unwanted immigration.

Intriguingly, the British focus on controlling and managing immigration emerged out of a dynamic of political convergence between the center-right (Conservative) and center-left (Labour and Liberal Democrat) parties. When considering the New Labour (1997-2010), Coalition (2010-2015), and Conservative (2015-present) governments, immigration has widely been seen as a "valence" issue, as all parties have come to a consensus of relying on restrictive policies (J. Smith 2008, 416; 420). When the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition took power in 2010, they had already "accepted Labour's point-based system and 'managed migration' more generally" as the prevailing policy framework (Hampshire and Bale 2015, 151),

and then built on that system with the reforms they introduced in 2012. While each party had a slightly different approach on sub-issues of immigration, such as asylum seekers or “irregular” migration, all three parties had converged on a mutual framework of controlling immigration (Ibid., 151).

4.2.2 *Commonwealth Migrants and Racialization*

When discussing the theme of immigration control, it is key to note which populations are subjected to that control. Small and Solomos convincingly argue that British immigration control primarily focused on non-European migrants of color. Unlike the Irish, who have benefited from exemptions from immigration control since the 60s (Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy 2012, 683), or European immigrants, the first attempts to restrict migration targeted non-European migrants, and more specifically migrants from Commonwealth countries (Small and Solomos 2006, 247-248). Migrants from these countries, such as India or Uganda, were the focus of “genuine fears” of British citizens, and racial prejudice was specifically taken into account in the drafting of legislation, such as the 1962, 1968, and 1971 Immigration Acts (Ibid., 238). The racialization dynamic grew from the (flawed) premise that only by preventing more immigration could existing minority populations be fully integrated into British society (Ibid., 240). It also required a certain level of hypocrisy – despite the high levels of migration from European nations, only “colored” migrants required “control” or “management” (Ibid., 237). Finally, Small and Solomos note that in drafting these policies, successive governments and politicians failed to address racism and racial prejudice in the white British population by focusing instead on numbers (Ibid., 247).

4.2.3 *EU Migration and the Accessions*

While Commonwealth migrants were always the target of immigration restriction, European immigrants are another matter. During the period before the UK joined the European Economic Community in 1973, European immigrants did not present the same racialized threat as their Commonwealth counterparts (Small and Solomos 2006, 237). After the UK joined the EU, during a period Geddes (2005) describes as a transition between “post-imperial downsizing” to “Britain in Europe” (730), there was a new reason for this lack of restriction: the EU prevents any restrictions on citizen movement among member states. As Hampshire and Bale (2015) note, “at least one important component of immigration – the free movement of EU citizens – cannot be restricted so long as the UK remains in the EU” (148). This enshrined right of freedom of movement thus prevented any type of policy that would similarly restrict or control the immigration of EU citizens to the UK.

These rights for EU citizens became particularly salient when 10 new countries joined the Union in 2004 and 2008. The United Kingdom was one of three countries (including Ireland and Sweden) which chose not to restrict the right to work when the A8 nations - the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia – joined the EU in 2004 (Pemberton and Scullion 2013, 446). The Labour government believed that allowing unrestricted movement would ensure that key labor shortages would be filled, as aligned with the “managed migration” strategy of increasing migration to meet needs (Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy 2012, 683). The UK was also a major advocate for the membership of former Soviet countries, and wanted to ensure that they became fully integrated into the EU (Portes 2016, 16). The result was that “the UK experienced an unprecedentedly intensive and utterly unplanned wave of immigration, particularly (though by no means exclusively) from Eastern and Central Europe”

(Bale 2014, 297). Instead of the 13,000 migrants that the government predicted, 500,000 arrived (J. Smith 2008, 421).

Smith argues that because British people believed CEE migrants are “hardworking,” and because CEE nationals could not use welfare benefits, the initial A8 migrants were “generally [accepted]” (J. Smith 2008, 421). Recent economic scholarship has also proven that the A8 migration had little or no impact on either employment or wages for native UK citizens (Portes 2016, 17). However, even if A8 migrants were initially accepted due to their ability to contribute economically, the overall number of migrants led to a public backlash that resulted in the government not immediately opening the labor market for migrants from Bulgaria and Romania (the A2 countries) in 2008, therefore “toughening its stance” on immigration (J. Smith 2008, 421; Bale 2014, 297). As Fox et al. (2012) describe it, the A2 migrants “paid for British anxiety... in the form of new and strict immigration controls” (684).

In response to these influxes of migrants, multiple administrations attempted to introduce new restrictions or policies, only to be faced with failure. In 2007, Labour PM Gordon Brown promised to create “500,000 British jobs for British workers” to address growing “indigenous” unemployment in comparison to migrants, but was promptly criticized by the Conservatives for the illegality of his proposal under EU law (J. Smith 2008, 425). Three years later, the new Conservative-led coalition government promised to bring down non-EU migration from “the hundreds to the tens of thousands,” only to face skepticism because restricting non-EU migration would do little to address migration flows from the EU (Bale 2014, 298). These failed policies or impossible promises underscored the way in which EU law cordoned off a major immigrant population from regulation or “control,” and the inability of the national government to adequately respond.

4.2.4 *Growth of Anti-Immigrant Sentiments*

As noted in the previous section, the national economic impacts of the A8 and A2 migrations were relatively limited and benign (Portes 2016, 18). However, a 2012 study showed that many British citizens believed that “their opportunities have been adversely affected by the arrival of the new migrants” (Cook, Dwyer, and Waite 2012, 331). Cook et al. hesitate to say that their respondents are merely xenophobic or racist. Rather, they note that the primary concerns of respondents were that “new migrants ultimately increase competition for the limited jobs and finite welfare resources available to local residents,” resources to which the British respondents felt they had stronger claims, and also highlight the complicated interplay between class and ethnic identity in British society (Ibid., 342-343). Tonkiss finds similar results in her study of Herefordshire, while Portes notes the potential localized negative impacts of migration, such as shortages of primary school placements in London, especially if governments are too slow to respond to demographic change (Tonkiss 2013, 42; Portes 2016, 18). Some of these concerns are more legitimate than others, as Cook et al. discuss a widely debunked theory that “A8 migrants receive preferential access to social housing” alongside more reasonable concerns around jobs and wages (Cook, Dwyer, and Waite 2012, 342). While studies like Cook et al.’s demand a nuanced understanding of the British electorate, they also show how combinations of economic anxiety (both legitimate and racialized) and a strong cultural claim to certain government rights and benefits can lead to anti-immigrant sentiments.

In light of these anti-immigrant sentiments in the aftermath of the A8/A2 accessions, it is not surprising that a right-wing and anti-immigrant party rose to prominence. The rise of UKIP between 2004 and 2014 was based on their staunch opposition to government policies on immigration. UKIP first presented themselves as an anti-immigrant party under Nigel Farage in

2004, and took the “unusual... stance of refusing further immigration from within the Union at its annual conference in 2007” (J. Smith 2008). UKIP’s approach paid off electorally during the 2014 local and European elections. Bale (2014) discusses how “concern about the influx of foreigners and the apparent pressure that their presence put on public services... boosted the electoral fortunes” of UKIP during the 2010s, especially among “white, poorly educated, often badly off voters... who feel ‘left behind’ by social, economic and cultural change and unrepresented by any of the mainstream political parties” (297).

Among Britain’s far right parties, UKIP was particularly able to capitalize on the anxieties Cook et al. discuss through its presentation of an anti-immigrant, anti-Europe platform that promised to address migration flows. UKIP has maintained this platform for years despite the illegality of preventing European immigration under EU law. This has posed a problem for the centrist parties, who have advocated for EU expansion and a “liberal-internationalist” worldview that advocates for multiculturalism, but then faced public backlash over the migratory flows this produces (J. Smith 2008; Bale 2014). UKIP, which wanted to pull out of the EU, could advocate for stopping migration – not so for Labour, the Conservatives, or the Lib Dems. Thus, centrist commitments to both restriction and the European project were put under further pressure by the rise of fringe parties, like UKIP, who could actively advocate for an entirely new approach to migration.

4.2.5 *Summary*

The above section has several key points relating to immigration’s historical salience and framing. First, this review shows that immigration has always been a major public policy concern in the UK since before the country joined the European Union. As such, it is not necessarily surprising that immigration, as an overall concept, would have been significant to

British voters. What *is* intriguing is the shift in focus from non-EU migrants, primarily from Commonwealth countries, to EU migrants. The A8/A2 accessions and the subsequent inability of the British government to predict or control these migratory flows made EU migration appear much more out of control than non-EU migration, which by that point had been subject to several increasingly complex systems for determining who could or could not enter the country. As such, this analysis suggests that British voters and governments have been and will continue to be interested in immigration policy, thus creating a built-in salience that only varies in terms of the target population.

Second, this analysis uncovers several “themes” in how immigration (policy) has typically been conceptualized or discussed from the mid-20th century onwards. First, multiple administrations from across party lines have focused exclusively on controlling or managing migration, even in cases (such as EU migration) where such control is impossible. Secondly, the economic value or burden of migrants has been both a political and public focus. Policies have been conceived around ensuring the “right” kinds of immigrants, who hold down jobs and contribute to society, are allowed to enter, while the “wrong” types of immigrants are excluded. Meanwhile, recent studies have shown the importance of perceived negative economic impacts on public opinion about immigration. Another example for EU migration specifically is government failure – the UK government has tried several times to control immigration and its impacts and has been prevented from doing so by its commitments to the EU. These themes have been relatively persistent across administrations and governments, so it is thus more likely that campaigns and media will use these concepts when discussing immigration. Indeed, as the next section demonstrates, the Leave campaign specifically highlighted several concepts that have

appeared regularly in UK immigration policy and revised them to fit the context of EU membership.

4.3 CAMPAIGN MATERIALS FRAMING ANALYSIS

After reviewing the historical context of immigration policy in the UK, I then examined the ways in which the two campaigns, Stronger In (Remain) and Vote Leave (Leave) framed and characterized the “problem” of immigration. The following section discusses both the relative prominence of immigration in each campaign’s overall argument, and how each campaign framed the issue, specifically identifying the aspects of the issue that each campaign could be considered to “own.”

While I am only looking at the frames that are positively associated with each campaign, this does not mean that campaigns did not regularly try to rebut or respond to their opponent’s arguments. However, I am focusing exclusively on these “owned” frameworks because it demonstrates attempts to set the terms of the debate in ways that are favorable to one’s own side. Addressing a false assumption about security, for example, acknowledges security as a dimension of the problem even if that is not necessarily advantageous to one’s own argument; on the other hand, asserting that economic benefits are an important consideration of immigration better positions the debate as on the economic merits, rather than on security. As such, for this portion of the analysis, I am exclusively focusing on the frames that are assertive, rather than responsive.

4.3.1 *Remain*

Compared to other issues such as the economy, security, and Britain’s place in the world, immigration was not a key topic for the Remain campaign. Economic topics especially were

much more central to Remain’s overarching argument than immigration concerns. For example, a list of “experts” who had given their pro-EU opinions were categorized into the economy, business, the NHS, science, security, and world leaders (Stronger In n.d.). Immigration was not cited either as a major topic or within the quotes experts gave. In a “get the facts” section, the topics Remain presented to voters included “jobs & opportunities,” “prices & family finances,” “workers’ rights,” “the risk of leaving,” “Britain’s place in the world,” the “impact on UK businesses,” and “our economy” (Stronger In n.d.). Here, the only mention of immigration was the potential difficulties for UK families emigrating to European countries, not the other way around. In the materials where Remain did discuss immigration, two prominent frames emerged: the necessary trade-off of accepting free movement, and the benefits of immigration (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Positive Immigration Frames for Remain (N=48)

Frame	Number of Articles	Percentage
Necessary Trade-Off	24	50%
Beneficial	15	31%

Necessary Trade-Off

The most prominent frame used by the Remain campaign to discuss immigration was the “*necessary trade-off*.” Here, campaigners argued that continuing to have freedom of movement between the EU and the UK was necessary to ensuring economic stability and staying in the single market. A typical example of this argument would be a statement like the following: “It seems highly unlikely that the EU would be prepared to negotiate anything resembling current levels of single-market access without the retention of a high degree of free movement of labour” (Tyrie 2016).

This frame generally served as part of a broader argument focusing on the economic disruption that leaving the EU would cause, and a lack of clear economic alternatives. For example, David Cameron said in a speech:

“Those who want to leave aren’t clear about what sort of access we’d have to the Single Market. Clearly there would be a strong case for having full access. But as the German Finance Minister made clear last week, if you want that you must pay into the EU and accept complete freedom of movement, two of the reasons many people cite for wanting to leave. Norway is one example we could follow. They have almost full access. They pay into the EU; accept nearly double the number of EU migrants per head that we do...” (Cameron 2016)

As this speech demonstrates, accepting immigration is directly tied to economic certainty in this frame; the UK can have a strong economy or less migration, but it cannot have both. This either/or framing is echoed by a statement in an open letter from economists: “Leaving would entail significant long-term costs. The size of these costs would depend on the amount of control the UK chooses to exercise over such matters as free movement of labour and the associated penalty it would pay in terms of access to the single market” (Stronger In 2016c). Again, immigration control and economic stability are presumed to be negatively correlated and unable to coexist.

Furthermore, this framing also removes the possibility of EU concessions or compromise. In a pamphlet that discusses and rejects alternative “models” or trade deals to EU membership, the Remain campaign considers the cases of Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland, all of which have access to the single market. In their discussion of Switzerland’s arrangement with the EU, they note: “Switzerland cannot restrict migration from the EU. It voted to do so in a referendum in 2014, but the EU has said it cannot accept any compromise on its core principle that European citizens have the right to free movement”(Stronger In n.d.). Thus, the Remain campaign argues, there is no room for negotiation.

Implicit in this framing is the assumption that economic certainty is more desirable than seeing more control over immigration; this assumption is what makes the trade-off *necessary*. The dangers of disruption are that “Britain would be permanently poorer” (Osborne 2016); to avoid this fate, the campaign argues, the UK must accept freedom of movement. The argument therefore hinges on the perceived inability to have either condition, the lack of room for compromise, and the assumption that economic prosperity is more important than the impacts of migration.

Beneficial

The second most prominent positive argument is that immigrants and immigration are economically and socially “*beneficial*.” One benefit cited is the skills that immigrants bring to UK industries and public services. An open letter from medical professionals circulated by the Remain campaign noted that “rather than ruining the NHS, as some have claimed, immigrants play a large part in running it. Without the 10 per cent of doctors and 5 per cent of nurses who come from other EU countries, not to mention even larger numbers of care workers, the NHS would face severe staff shortages” (Stronger In 2016f). Talent and skills are repeatedly cited in open letters from sectors like technology, academia, and the sciences (Stronger In 2016e, [b] 2016, [a] 2016). Immigrants are also “net” beneficial; as Remain’s Immigration FAQ cites, “EU citizens have contributed £20 billion more in taxes than they have taken out in benefits” (Stronger In n.d.).

Occasionally Remain discusses benefits beyond job skills and tax revenue. One news briefing focused on creative industries featured artists discussing how “[they] wouldn’t know half their friends” if not for free movement, and the value of cultural exchange (Stronger In 2016d). However, Remain primarily framed immigration as *economically* beneficial because of

the value that immigrants brought to the NHS, businesses, and the UK overall. “The facts are clear: the overwhelming majority of EU citizens in Britain are contributors, not freeloaders” (Stronger In n.d.). Immigrants are considered beneficial insofar as they boost Britain’s economy; any potential societal benefits of multiculturalism and tolerance are much less central to this argument.

Looking at the two most prominent positive frames, the economic argument central to the overall Remain campaign clearly colored its framing of immigration. Both “necessary trade-off” and “beneficial” center economics; either immigration must be accepted to protect market access, or immigration itself is economically desirable. This is not necessarily surprising given the overall campaign focus on the economic argument, as highlighting the economic gains of immigration supports the larger point that EU membership means financial security. However, there is an intriguing absence of arguments for the value of a multicultural society beyond the single mention of cultural and artistic exchange. By focusing solely on the economic benefits and necessity of immigration, Remain did not address whether there are other benefits to immigration that come from a more diverse society, or if immigrants are more than just the job skills and tax payments they bring.

4.3.2 *Leave*

In marked contrast to Remain, immigration was central to the Leave campaign. When answering the question of “why vote Leave,” the second and third answers the campaign gives are to take “charge of our own borders” and to “control immigration” (Vote Leave n.d.). Immigration ranks second only to the amount of money that the UK contributes to the EU on the list of reasons to leave (Vote Leave n.d.). Addressing immigration is clearly a key tenet of Leave’s argument, and this centrality is reflected in the five most prominent positive frames:

regaining sovereignty and control over immigration; the number of immigrants arriving in the UK; the social and economic burdens of immigration; the threats to security posed by immigration; and the inability of past UK governments to address the issue effectively (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Positive Immigration Frames for Leave (N=55)

Frame	Number of Articles	Percentage
Sovereignty/Control	44	80%
Numbers	38	69%
Social/Economic Burden	32	58%
Security/Threat	21	38%
UK Gov. Performance	21	38%

Sovereignty and Control

The most prominent frame in the Leave campaign was that the UK lacks “*sovereignty and/or control*” over immigration. The theme of “taking back control” – of migration and borders in this case – appears repeatedly. “We will take back control of migration policy... The public will again be able to control migration policy at elections,” says a joint letter from the lead campaigners on the eve of the referendum (Stuart, Johnson, and Gove 2016). A speech by Boris Johnson was titled: “The only way to take back control of immigration is to Vote Leave” (Johnson 2016b). Framing the issue as a deficit of control – over borders, over “numbers,” over “the terms on which people come” (Ibid.) – is central to Leave’s campaign.

In framing the problem as a lack of control, Leave positions the EU as an entity that has all the power. Sometimes specific institutions within the EU are targeted, such as the courts. For instance, Boris Johnson wrote, “The Government has failed because of the simple reality that inside the EU we cannot control immigration – it is literally impossible because we have no choice but to accept the principle of free movement and the European Court has ultimate control over our immigration policy” (Johnson 2016b). In other cases, the EU as a whole is to blame –

“Our membership of the EU means we don’t have control” (Gove et al. 2016). In all instances, the EU and its institutions are identified as having power over the UK in this area, to the UK’s detriment.

This framing also argues that this power imbalance creates a lack of democratic accountability. Michael Howard, a prominent Conservative leader, wrote in an opinion piece, “[Immigration] is an issue where we must be able to exercise control through our Government, accountable to our Parliament and ultimately to our electorate” (Howard 2016). He does not make a judgement on whether there is too much immigration or not, but argues, “The essential point is we must be able to have that debate and argue it out here in the UK” (Ibid.). Here, the argument is not so much a value judgement of immigration and immigrants themselves, but rather that the lack of control keeps the UK from responding to public concerns.

Numbers

Another key argument is that there are, simply put, too many people immigrating to the UK (“*numbers*”). Boris Johnson began a speech on immigration by saying, “Last year, 270,000 people came to this country from the EU and net migration was 184,000. We are adding a population the size of Oxford to the UK every year just from EU migration. Since 2004, 1.25 million people have been added due to EU migration. That is bigger than the city of Birmingham” (Johnson 2016b). Another campaigner, Iain Duncan Smith, compared the numbers to the population of “Swindon or Aberdeen,” and warned of future migrant “stampedes” overtaking the country (I. D. Smith 2016). These descriptions imply that sheer number of people currently entering the UK is enough of an issue to warrant immediate action.

Included in this framing is the potential threat of more people from new EU members. Specifically, the Leave campaign discusses the possibility that nations like Albania, Serbia, and

Turkey could join the EU and send their citizens abroad. As one briefing discussing the potential accession of Turkey notes, “the result would inevitably be increased migration to the UK” (Vote Leave 2016b). A speech by Chris Grayling describes “millions more people” coming to the UK as these potential new members join the EU (Grayling 2016). Thus, the numbers frame does not only include current levels of migration, but also the potential for even larger migration flows in the future.

Social/Economic Burden

Another framing of the problem of immigration is that immigrants are a “burden” on British society or the economy. By moving to the UK, migrants are putting “pressure on jobs, wages, and housing” (I. D. Smith 2016), schools and school placements, and the NHS (Ross 2016; Stuart 2016). Implicit in this argument is the idea that British citizens are losing out on key social benefits, earnings, or jobs because immigrants are taking them or otherwise “straining” the system. “People are already experiencing the cost of uncontrolled immigration” – and the “people” in this phrase are clearly supposed to be UK nationals (I. D. Smith 2016). Meanwhile, Leave campaigners referenced how “jobseekers” who immigrate without offers of employment are pushing down wages for “low paid British workers” (Gove, Johnson, and Stuart 2016). This implies an element of deservingness – British citizens have earned the right to school placements, NHS services, and good jobs, while immigrants do not deserve access to these same benefits. Under this framework, the social and economic woes British people may be experiencing is directly connected to undeserving immigrants taking advantage of the UK’s growing economy and robust social services and benefits.

Security/Threat

Leave also associated immigration with potential criminality or security risks (“*security/threat*”). Leave campaigners referenced cases of “criminals” that they could not deport, such as the daughter of a fundamentalist Islamic cleric guilty of terrorism charges (Gove, Johnson, and Stuart 2016). The campaign also implied that within the EU, the UK is unable to “effectively screen new arrivals for... extremist connections or past criminality” (Gove 2016). A speech on security discussed the threat of terrorists taking advantage of free movement privileges, possibly through forged EU documents, and referred to current policies as “a ‘real and present danger’ that ‘abets terrorists’” (Gove and Raab 2016). The association of immigrants with extremism and criminality thus defines the problems of immigration in terms of security risks and the possibility of increased crime or even terrorist activity.

UK Government Performance

The last prominent frame for the Leave campaign is that the British government has been unable to successfully enact policies or address immigration concerns (“*UK government performance*”). A briefing on immigration reported that “the Government has no meaningful plan” to deal with the consequences of high levels of immigration (Vote Leave n.d.). Another news post said that David Cameron “failed to meet his manifesto promises” on reducing social benefits available to immigrants (Vote Leave 2016a). A common refrain was how the UK government had failed to meet past immigration targets: “It is deeply corrosive of popular trust in democracy that every year UK politicians tell the public that they can cut immigration to the tens of thousands – and then find that they miss their targets by hundreds of thousands” (Johnson 2016a). Here, part of the problem of immigration is governmental failure to deal properly with

its effects. The inability of past governments to act on immigration by meeting targets or reducing benefits therefore contributes to the problem's continued existence.

Co-Appearances

Several of the frames the Leave campaign used tended to appear together and reinforce one another, such as “numbers” and “social/economic burden.” One statement read: “Our membership of the EU means we don't have control. ... we are adding a population the size of Oxford to the UK every year just from EU migration. This puts particular strain on public services. Class sizes will rise and waiting lists will lengthen if we don't tackle free movement” (Gove et al. 2016). These co-appearing frames became a broader causal argument that Leave made: because we lack control over immigration policy, numbers are too high; because numbers are too high, our social services are under strain. However, each element of this argument could and did appear separately. For example, a speech by Gisela Stuart merely states that “immigration is placing the NHS under huge strain” without explicitly mentioning the number of people entering the country (Stuart 2016). The causes were implicit even while the effects were openly discussed. As such, distinguishing between these frames captures different aspects of the broader argument, while also allowing for cases where only one of these frames is present.

As the volume of associated frames demonstrates, Leave clearly had multiple arguments to make on the subject of immigration, many of which dovetail neatly into one another. The backbone of this argument – a lack of control – positions leaving as necessary to taking real action to solve the problems posed by immigration, such as pressures on services or potential threats. Also consistent is the separation between immigrants and native Brits, a constant “othering” where immigrants are cast as undeserving and even criminal despite having the right to migrate under EU law. While Leave may have made nods to the benefits of immigration, as

Boris Johnson did in his immigration-focused speech, the next sentence almost always discussed the negative effects of immigrants on British society, whether it is a social burden or a potential threat (Johnson 2016b). There is also an undercurrent of racialized language in many of these frames, especially “numbers” and “security/threat.” The use of language like “stampedes” to refer to immigration flows, for example, or the association of immigrants with “terrorists” evokes certain images or tropes that reinforces the othering of immigrants as inherently different from British people. This negative and often racialized framing ensured that immigrants are always conceptualized as inherently distinct from native British citizens and therefore easier to blame for social ills.

4.4 SUMMARY

The above analysis shows a clear difference in how each campaign discussed immigration. First, the two campaigns had very different prioritizations of the topic. The Remain campaign did not highlight immigration as one of its key subtopics, while Leave on the other hand made controlling immigration one of its top three priorities. Second, the two campaigns varied in the number of frames that they “owned.” Remain had only two major positive frames: that accepting high levels of immigration was a necessary trade-off for economic stability, and that immigrants were (economically) beneficial to the UK. Leave, on the other hand, had five major frames, ranging from the lack of government control over EU migration to the potential threat of terrorism. Of course, these positive frames are not all there is. Each campaign also engaged with the other’s arguments, doing their best to demonstrate how they were misrepresentations of the facts or otherwise unworkable. However, in terms of deciding how the “problem” of immigration would be defined throughout the referendum, Leave had more arguments at its disposal and was much better situated to ensure that *their* way of framing the situation would win out. By

presenting so many frames and making the issue key to their campaign, Leave effectively “owned” the issue of immigration, and was well positioned to ensure that future discussions and coverage would be done on their terms, rather than engaging in the frames that Remain put forward.

Beyond the sheer volume of frames that Leave promoted, there is also the question of resonance. As Wettstein (2012) discussed in his summary of frame adoption research, individuals are more likely to use a given frame if it is “in *accordance* with the recipient’s beliefs and preferences” (320). That is, voters will recall and use a given framing of a problem if it resonates with ideas they already have, but are less receptive to frames that do not align with prior beliefs. Thus, a frame that aligns with previous political or public convictions is more likely to be effective than one that is not in alignment.

I would argue that the frames Leave used were, in general, aligned with certain previously-held beliefs on immigration. As my review of historical policies notes, the ideas of controlling or managing migration, concerns about overcrowding or “too many” immigrants, and potential threats to jobs and social benefits were all a part of the policy landscape since the late 1960s. Each of these ideas is reproduced in one of Leave’s frames – from the “social/economic burden” that immigrants place on British society, to the threat of “numbers,” to the idea of taking back “sovereignty/control” from the EU over immigration. Leave’s frames correspond to several ideas or concepts that have been a major part of immigration policy and public anxieties for decades. As such, throughout the campaign period, Leave not only had the advantage of more frames at their disposal, but had also chosen “pre-existing” frames that were more likely to resonate with the public.

Thus, during the Brexit campaign, the Leave side clearly had a major advantage over Remain in their prioritization of immigration and how they had framed it. The greater overall focus on the issue, the number of frames, and the historical resonance of those arguments all made it more likely that the public would respond to and recall Leave's frames when they thought about immigration. However, this advantage means nothing without media coverage bringing the issue to the attention of the voting public. As such, the next chapter will discuss how the (print) media discussed immigration throughout its Brexit coverage, including immigration's relative placement on the "news agenda," and which campaign was more successful at ensuring that its framing of the issue was used the most.

Chapter 5. ANALYSIS OF NEWS ARTICLES

The second portion of my analysis focuses on how British national newspapers discussed immigration in their coverage of the Brexit referendum. As political communications scholars generally agree that the media is a key player in both agenda-setting and framing, we must look to the media to understand these effects and their potential impact. For this analysis, I sampled three national daily newspapers who represent a variety of political affiliations and viewpoints on the EU. By looking at how much each paper’s Brexit coverage featured immigration, and which frames each source used to characterize the issue, we can see how highly immigration was placed on the news “agenda” and whether one campaign was more successful in spreading their messaging than the other – and thus better understand how immigration became a key issue, especially for Leave and undecided voters.

5.1 METHODS

To analyze how immigration was framed within the British print media, I selected a sample of three daily national newspapers or tabloids and their Sunday counterparts: *The Daily Mail/The Mail on Sunday*, *The Guardian*, and *The Times/The Sunday Times*. *The Guardian* does have a sister Sunday magazine, *The Observer*; however, because the *Guardian* provides its own Sunday coverage (unlike the *Daily Mail* or the *Times*), I did not include the *Observer* in my sample. The following table shows each newspaper’s political alignment (as perceived by the public), pro- or anti-EU position, eventual referendum endorsement, monthly circulation, and daily online views.

Table 5.3. Alignment and Circulation of Daily Newspapers (M. Smith 2017; Daddow 2015b; Ponsford 2016)

Source	Type	Perceived Political Alignment	EU Alignment	Referendum Endorsement	Avg. Monthly Circulation (June 2016)	Daily Online Views (June 2016)
<i>The Daily Mail</i>	Daily	Very Right-wing	Eurosceptic	Leave	1,548,349	15,053,614
<i>The Mail on Sunday</i>	Sunday	*	*	Remain	1,361,228	*
<i>The Guardian</i>	Daily	Left / Center-Left	Pro-EU	Remain	171,723	10,304,181
<i>The Times</i>	Daily	Center-Right	Mixed	Remain	449,151	*
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	Sunday	*	*	Leave	806,375	*

As this table shows, I deliberately chose a sample of national newspapers that spans a range of ideological positions, both in national UK politics and in their positions on EU membership, rather than based on circulation numbers. Unlike TV-based news sources such as the BBC, which according to broadcasting regulations must conduct reporting with “due impartiality,” UK newspapers have a long-standing culture of “amateurism” that has resisted similar standards and developed a “pugnacious character” (Sambrook 2012, 9). As such, every newspaper has a generally accepted and identifiable ideological slant (M. Smith 2017; Wilks-Heeg, Blick, and Crone 2013). In addition to strong associations with certain political parties, newspapers also generally have a recognizable pro- or anti-EU stance (Daddow 2015b). Thus, my primary criteria for choosing sources was ensuring that my overall sample represented the spectrum of political positions, so that I could gauge whether the campaigns were more successful with left, right, or centrist papers. While the distribution is weighted slightly more to the center-right/right-wing side, this aligns with the overall proportion of center-right/right-wing national papers to

center/center-left/left-wing national papers in the UK (Wilks-Heeg, Blick, and Crone 2013). Keeping these political alignments in mind, I expected to see higher proportions of Brexit coverage discussing immigration the more Eurosceptic and right-wing a paper was, and vice versa for a more pro-EU, liberal source. I also only decided to look at national newspapers, as I am examining the national rather than regional salience of immigration.

To determine the total number of articles about the EU Referendum, for each paper I searched the database *Lexis Nexis* for articles published between May 7, 2015 and June 23, 2016 using the terms “EU Referendum” and “Brexit” and downloaded metadata for each search, which included information such as headlines, bylines, and dates. I chose this date range because, as discussed in Chapter 2, May 7, 2015 was the date that David Cameron and the Conservatives won the general parliamentary election, thus making a referendum on EU more certain, while June 23 was the actual referendum date and therefore the end of the campaign period. After collecting these lists of identifying information, I then reviewed my article lists to remove duplicates. For example, an article published in both the Scottish and National editions of a paper would be counted once. After removing duplicates, I arrived at my total articles on the EU Referendum for each paper.

Next, to collect articles focused specifically on immigration, I searched within my previous results for articles on the EU Referendum or Brexit for the following keywords: “immigration,” “immigrant,” “migration,” “migrant,” and “free movement.” These terms ensured I collected as many relevant articles as possible. I then reviewed each article to determine its relevance and remove articles that did not fit my criteria. Example criteria for non-relevance include using “immigrant” as a descriptor, discussing British emigrants to the EU, or discussing migration and the EU referendum separately and without clearly connecting the two issues (for

example, discussing the upcoming EU referendum and then separately noting the impact of the migrant crisis on Greece). After reviewing my sample, I then began coding my news articles using the codes I developed for the campaign materials organized into a coding protocol (see Altheide and Schneider 2013), where each mention of immigration, migration, etc. was coded within an article. The coding process included periodically reviewing code definitions, adding new codes when consistent patterns emerged, and taking regular memos to note my thoughts and reflections on the material. While the coding process focused primarily on frames, I once again coded for descriptors (such as “refugee”) and mentions of specific events or policy proposals, as I did for the campaigns.

While coding, I recorded the use of frames and other codes per article in a master spreadsheet. Like Dekavalla (2016), I recorded frames once even if they appeared multiple times in every article, while also noting each distinct frame that appeared. Using this method, I could code for multiple frames in a single unit of analysis, thus allowing for the “co-existence” of multiple frames in a single article or editorial. I also noted the directionality of each frame (see Jerit 2008), such as whether the use of a frame was affirmative or responsive. For example, describing immigrants as “straining” hospitals would be an affirmative use of the “social/economic burden” frame, while saying that immigrants do not strain hospitals would be a response to that frame. If a frame appeared both affirmatively and responsively, then the article was coded as multi-directional.

The following sections discuss how the papers in my sample covered immigration in the context of the Brexit campaign, both in terms of the scale of coverage (*agenda-setting*) and the tone of coverage (*framing*).

5.2 AGENDA SETTING

As previous chapters have discussed, immigration has historically been a salient topic among the British public and for policymakers, although *which* immigrants are under discussion has varied since the 1950s. To more accurately understand why immigration, specifically from the EU, was salient in the specific context of the Brexit campaign, it is useful to look at how heavily different news sources emphasized the issue. By examining how frequently three national newspapers discussed immigration in the referendum context, we can more clearly see if immigration was an issue that the media told voters to “think about” (Sheafer 2007, 22).

Table 5.4. News Coverage of the EU Referendum and Immigration (I) by source, May 7 2015 – June 23 2016

Source	Pre-Campaign (May 7 2015 - Feb 19 2016)			Campaign (Feb 20 2016 - June 23 2016)			Total (May 7 2015 - June 23 2016)		
	Total	I	I %	Total	I	I %	Total	I	I %
<i>Daily Mail</i>	408	127	31.1	1199	348	29.0	1607	475	29.6
<i>Guardian</i>	903	273	30.2	2806	753	26.8	3709	1026	27.7
<i>Times</i>	805	169	21.0	2457	421	17.1	3262	590	18.1

As seen in Table 5.4, the prominence of immigration in the Brexit context varied across newspapers, ranging from 18.1% to 29.6% of overall referendum coverage. These percentages broadly suggest that immigration accounted for a relatively significant portion of news coverage, though not to the point of dominating the narrative. However, to gain a more nuanced understanding of immigration’s salience, it is instructive to look at how that salience fluctuated over time.

Looking at the discussion of immigration in the pre-campaign and campaign periods, we see that while the coverage of immigration across newspapers increased in absolute terms over time, it decreased in terms of relative coverage. This shift in relative prominence can be

attributed in part to a spike in EU coverage that corresponded with the period when David Cameron was embarking on his membership renegotiations with the EU between roughly November 2015 to February 2016. The results of these renegotiations would supposedly determine whether Cameron and other key government figures would campaign to stay in or leave the union, though some commentators believed Cameron's position was already set before negotiations concluded (Slack 2016). As one of Cameron's key demands was to curb access to social benefits for recent EU migrants to the UK (Shipman 2016), coverage of these negotiations focused heavily on this aspect of EU migration, making migration a highly salient sub-topic in the months leading up to the conclusion of negotiations and the selection of a referendum date.

This is not to say that immigration became less salient of an issue when the referendum campaign began. While in proportional terms coverage decreased, this is primarily because the number of articles about Brexit increased dramatically in February, when Cameron officially set the date of the referendum. As the possibility of a referendum shifted from the theoretical to the actual, news coverage began in earnest. Thus, even though the relative percentage of coverage decreased, the number of articles about the referendum, and immigration within that context, increased dramatically.

The following three graphs more clearly illustrate this shift in output by showing the number of articles about the referendum and about the sub-topic of immigration by month for each paper:

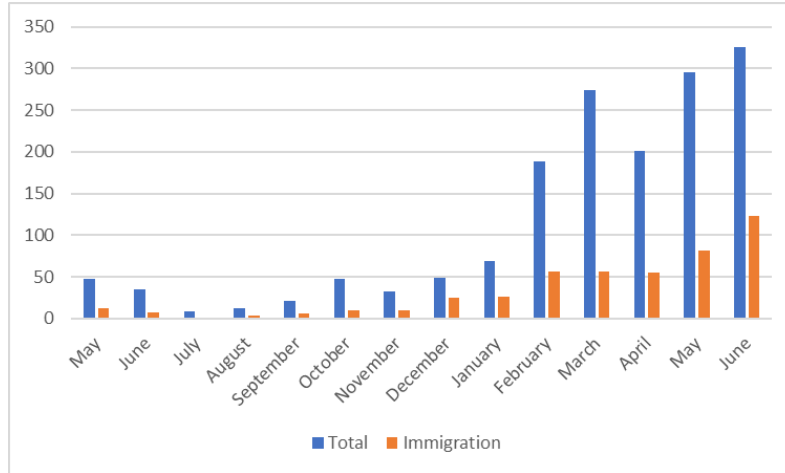


Figure 5.1. Number of Articles on the EU Referendum, *The Daily Mail*

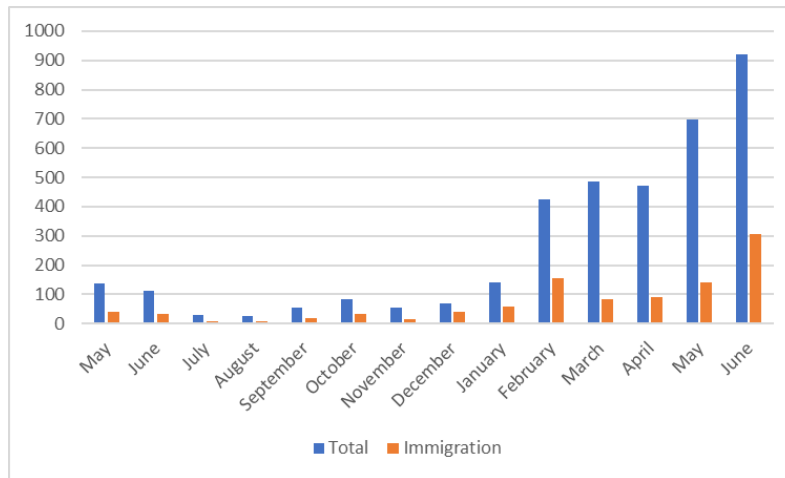


Figure 5.2. Number of Articles on the EU Referendum, *The Guardian*

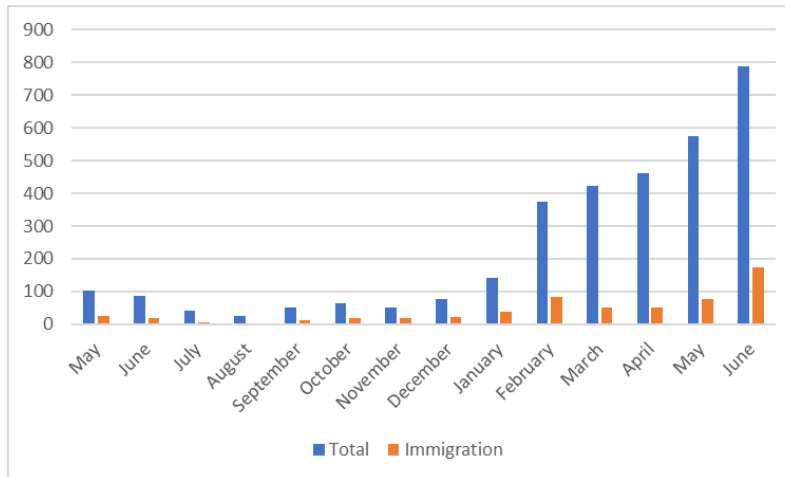


Figure 5.3. Number of Articles on the EU Referendum, *The Times*

Figures 5.1-5.3 show a relatively consistent pattern across newspapers in terms of both coverage of the EU referendum and the coverage of immigration. After the initial discussion of Cameron’s campaign promise of a referendum following his party’s victory in the May general elections, there were very few articles discussing a potential Brexit until February, when Cameron’s renegotiations with the EU concluded and a date for the referendum was set. After that point, coverage of the referendum increased from month to month to reach a high point in June during the final weeks of campaigning. The absolute number of articles discussing immigration in the Brexit context also increased in February, and then either plateaued in the case of the *Daily Mail* or decreased for the other papers until a second sharp increase in June.

The pattern during the campaign period of high coverage in February and June can also be seen in the relative prominence of immigration within the greater Brexit discussion. Table B shows the percentage of articles discussing immigration between February 20, 2016 and June 23, 2016.

Table 5.5. Proportion of News Articles on Immigration

Source	Feb 20 – Feb 29 2016	March 2016	April 2016	May 2016	June 1 – June 23 2016
<i>Daily Mail</i>	29.8%	20.8%	27.4%	27.8%	37.8%
<i>Guardian</i>	58.3%	16.9%	19.6%	19.9%	33.2%
<i>Times</i>	33.5%	11.8%	11.0%	13.4%	21.9%

As Table 5.5 shows, the three papers all follow roughly the same pattern of highs in February (coinciding with discussion of Cameron’s deal on migrant benefit curbs), lows for several months, and an upswing in June. However, each dedicated a different percentage of its coverage to immigration, ranging from a low of 11% of a month’s coverage to a high of 58.3%. The *Daily Mail* consistently discussed immigration in more of its Brexit coverage than the other two

papers, and had the highest percentage of all three papers in the final weeks of the referendum. Considering the paper's strongly Eurosceptic position, this is unsurprising, as one would expect a Eurosceptic paper to focus on an issue highlighted by the anti-EU campaign. Interestingly, the *Guardian* had a higher initial percentage than the *Daily Mail* in February, where over half of its articles referenced immigration. Such a high percentage seems contrary to expectations for a generally pro-EU paper; however, the decrease in immigration coverage immediately afterwards is more consistent with the expectation that a pro-EU paper would focus somewhat less on an issue central to the Leave campaign. Finally, after the February spike, the *Times* had the lowest proportions of immigration coverage compared to the other papers. This is interesting considering the *Times* reputation as being between the pro- and anti-EU poles, as one would expect the paper's coverage to lie between the *Daily Mail* and the *Guardian*.

These results demonstrate that the relative salience of immigration to each paper's Brexit coverage varied considerably both across time and in total. Some of these differences may be attributable to the paper's pro- or anti-EU position, while others may be due to the paper's overall prioritization of which issues to cover, as well as the fluctuations in immigration-related flashpoints. The exact cause or reasoning is uncertain. These fluctuations over time make it impossible to say that immigration was equally relatively accessible throughout the duration of the campaign (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 16). However, it is notable that especially at key points of the referendum campaign – the initial date setting, which coincided with political elites declaring their reasoning for going in or out, and the final weeks of the campaign – each newspaper dedicated a significant amount of coverage to immigration compared to other potential topics under the Brexit umbrella. The UK's EU membership impacted a wide variety of issues including the economy, trade, agriculture, travel and emigration, the roles of Scotland and

Northern Ireland within the UK, and more. Each of these issues could potentially impact the lives of voters as significantly as EU migration, and could conceivably have an equal claim to media attention. As such, discussing immigration in hundreds of articles during these critical points in the campaign put the issue relatively high on the news agenda, and therefore increased the likelihood that readers would find immigration to be important to them when making their decision on how to vote (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 11).

Furthermore, the relatively high attention paid to immigration also somewhat benefited the Leave campaign. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Leave campaign placed much more emphasis on immigration than the Remain campaign and campaigned heavily on the issue. By putting immigration relatively high on the “agenda,” news sources were thus dedicating space to a Leave-owned issue instead of a Remain-owned one. This is not to say, however, that a high percentage of news coverage dedicated to an owned issue necessarily means that the coverage repeated Leave’s arguments or inherently strengthened the connection between immigration’s importance and leaving the union. In order to determine if this increased salience of immigration strengthened the link between the issue and the Leave campaign, we must consider how the news *framed* immigration.

5.3 FRAMING

This section analyzes which frames each newspaper used in their coverage of immigration during the pre- and campaign periods, and how they used these frames. Examining these patterns illuminates which campaign’s framing appeared more often, thus potentially strengthening or weakening ownership, while also offering insight into how immigration was generally conceptualized by the media. The following figures show the use or appearance of campaign-associated frames within articles discussing immigration in the Brexit context:

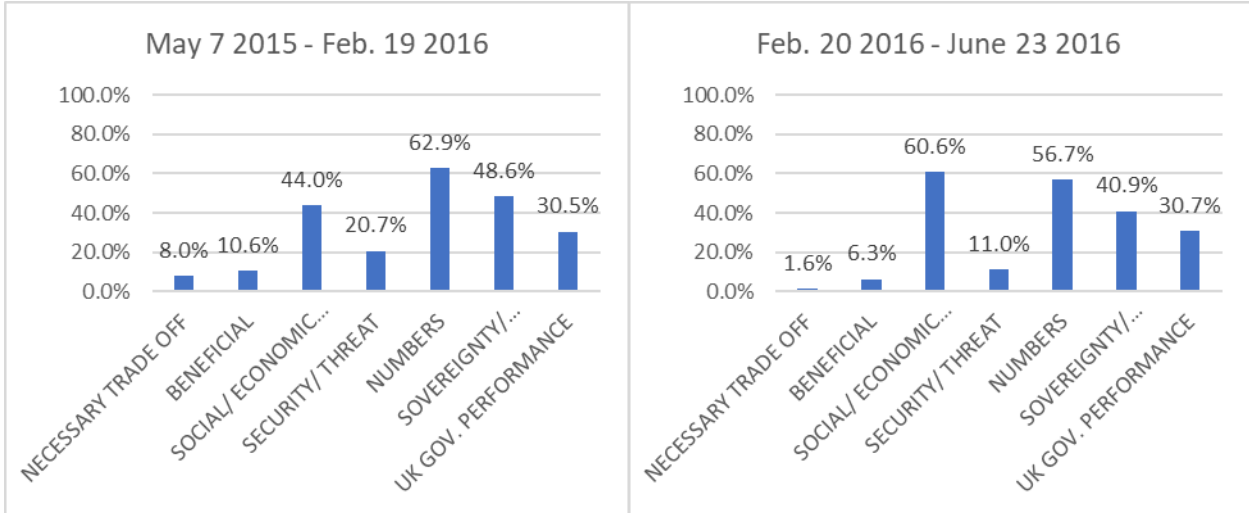


Figure 5.4. Use of Campaign Frames in Immigration-focused Articles in *The Daily Mail*, by date.

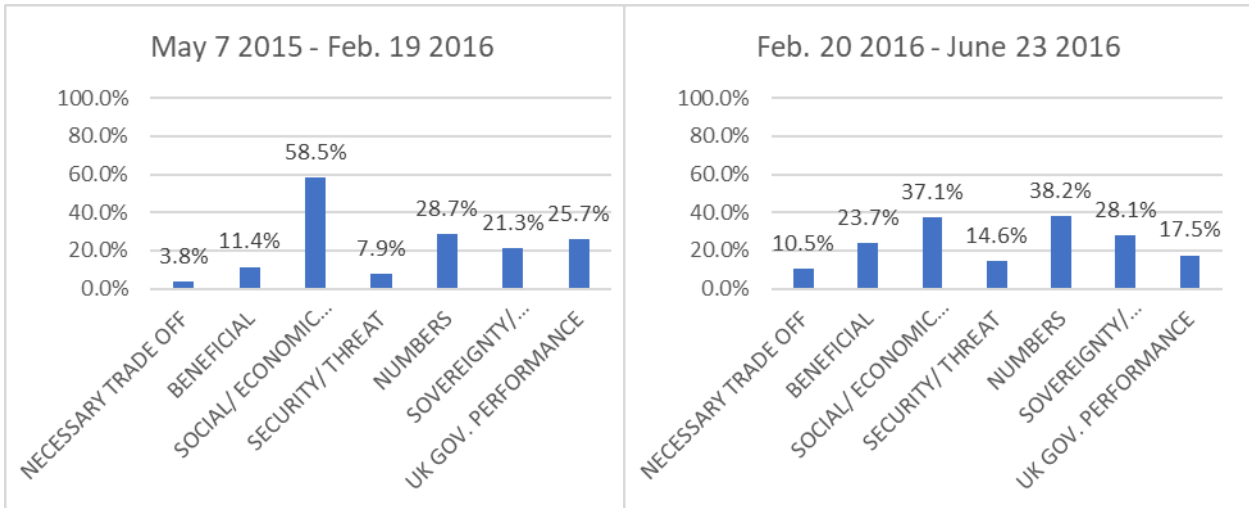


Figure 5.5. Use of Campaign Frames in Immigration-focused Articles in *The Guardian*, by date.

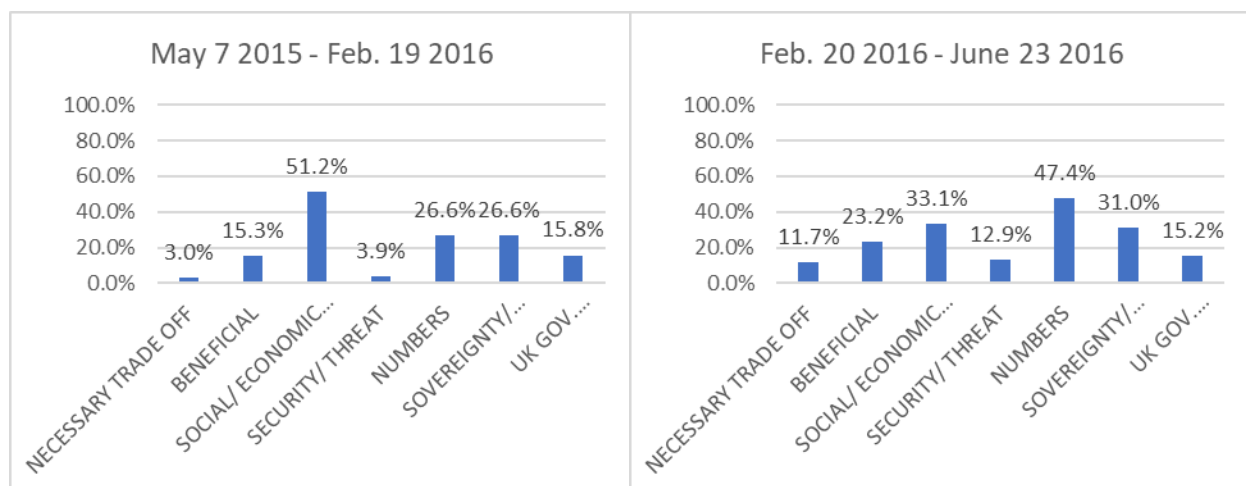


Figure 5.6. Use of Campaign Frames in Immigration-focused Articles in *The Times*, by date.

5.3.1 Framing over Time

Examining Figs. 5.4-5.6, we see two trends in the pre-campaign framing of immigration. First, the more centrist papers (*The Guardian* and *The Times*) used these frames relatively sparsely, with the prominent exception of the “social/economic burden” frame. As discussed previously, the prominence of migrant welfare benefits during the EU membership renegotiations taking place during the pre-campaign period naturally influenced the discussion of immigration during this period. Thus, it is impossible to attribute this frame’s prominence in the two centrist papers during the pre-campaign period solely to effective messaging by the Leave campaign. Excluding “social/economic burden,” we can see that in the *Guardian* and the *Times* that frame usage rarely and barely broke above 25% (see Figs. 5.5 and 5.6). However, those frames that did break that threshold – “numbers” for both, “sovereignty/control” in the *Times*, and “UK government performance” in the *Guardian* – were Leave frames.

Second, the *Daily Mail* was much more likely to use Leave frames during the pre-campaign, with the “numbers,” “sovereignty/control,” and “social/economic burden” frames dominating at 62.9%, 48.6%, and 44% of coverage respectively. While the use of these frames

during the pre-campaign period is striking, however, there is again some difficulty in establishing a causal relationship between Leave messaging and these frames' prominence, especially in light of the *Daily Mail*'s history of Euroscepticism. In fact, the strength of these frames in pre-campaign period hints at a "chicken or egg" question – did papers like the *Daily Mail* use these frames because Vote Leave did, or did Vote Leave use these frames because Eurosceptic outlets (like the *Daily Mail*) did?

Ultimately, I would argue that trying to determine causality is less important than discussing the impact of which frames were used. As noted in Chapter 4, Leave used frames that strongly corresponded to previous arguments about immigration – these ways of understanding the issue were not originally generated by Leave, so trying to say who first generated this frame isn't useful. Rather, the impact of the *Daily Mail* – alongside the *Guardian* and the *Times* – using these frames benefited Leave by encouraging readers to think about the issue in ways that aligned with Leave's position. Knowing what readers saw is more important than knowing who first promoted the idea.

Even with the confounding variable of the EU renegotiations, the use of Remain frames during the pre-campaign period among all three papers was quite low, though the disparity was much more pronounced in the *Daily Mail*. The causality of the generation of these frames aside, this suggests that the Remain campaign was operating at a media disadvantage, as their conceptions of the problem were much less prominent before campaigning began. As such, they would have to make up a significant amount of ground to ensure that any discussions would be held on terms favorable to them.

In the campaign period, we again see a convergence between the centrist papers and the outlier of the *Daily Mail* in their usage of Remain and Leave frames. Both the *Guardian* and the

Times used the “numbers” and “social/economic burden” frames most often, though not in a majority of immigration-focused articles, while the “sovereignty/control” frame came third. The campaign period also marked an increase in usage of Remain frames, particularly the “beneficial” framing. While it did not break the 25% threshold for either paper, the “beneficial” frame grew in usage by 8 to 10 percentage points, and also jumped up in the rankings to overtake the “UK gov. performance” frame for each paper. This growth suggests that during the campaign period, the Remain campaign was somewhat more successful in ensuring their messaging on immigration was reflected in at least centrist media sources. However, the continued relative prominence of the triad of Leave campaign frames indicates that the Leave campaign was more successful at pushing their preferred framing.

Once again, the *Daily Mail* was an outlier compared to the more centrist papers. Though it too used the “social/economic burden” and “numbers” frames the most, these frames did dominate the *Mail*’s coverage, with each appearing in over 50% of all immigration-related articles. “Sovereignty/control” was the third most prominent at 40.9% of coverage, while “UK gov. performance” came in fourth at 30.7%. Unlike in the centrist papers, neither Remain frame appeared in more *Mail* articles than any of the Leave frames, and neither Remain frame broke 10% of coverage, let alone 25%. This paucity of Remain frames is not unexpected; the *Daily Mail*’s long-held Euroscepticism made it unlikely that any Remain messaging would carry over into its coverage.

These results show that the comparative dominance of Leave frames continued during the campaign period for all three papers. However, this dominance was much more pronounced in the *Daily Mail* than in either centrist paper, where the variance was less extreme. The difference in usage between the top Leave frame and top Remain frame was 14.5 percentage points in the

Guardian and 24.2 percentage points in the *Times*, compared to 54.3 percentage points in the *Daily Mail*. There were also more gains in Remain frame usage in the centrist papers between the pre-campaign and campaign periods. However, these gains were not enough to put the two campaigns on even footing. As such, while Remain did make up ground during the campaign period, all three newspapers still used Leave frames more frequently in their articles discussing immigration, thus strengthening the sense that the Leave campaign “owned” the issue overall.

While all three papers were more likely to use Leave frames in their coverage, *how* they used those frames could vary considerably. Generally, the use of campaign frames by newspapers was either actively affirming or neutral. Using the example of the “social/economic burden” frame, we find many examples of how this frame was utilized. The *Times* reported on voter perceptions around migration as follows: “Most voters believe that recent EU migration has been bad for the NHS, schools, housing and national security” (Savage 2016). Similarly, in an article on school placements titled “Schools at Breaking Point,” the *Daily Mail* reported, “the influx of migrants – and a baby boom fueled in part by new arrivals – have left many councils struggling to find enough [school] places” (Doyle 2016). These articles are both perfect examples of how the “social/economic burden” frame was affirmatively integrated into Brexit coverage and cast immigration as hurting the economy and social services.

However, not every use of a frame was affirming, as newspapers also cited frames in order to rebut or refute them. Once again using the example of “social/economic burden,” in an article on voter sentiments, the *Guardian* quoted an English construction worker as saying, “People say [immigrants] are taking our jobs. But they’re not. They are taking the jobs that you can’t get off your arse to do” (Leonard 2016). In an editorial discussing the possible introduction of another points system for immigration, the *Times* said, “While concerns about welfare and

health tourism are understandable, the number of immigrants who abuse UK hospitality are small” (Editorial Board 2016). These examples demonstrate another way newspapers used frames – as a jumping off point to correct inaccuracies or misperceptions. Here, the goal is not to lean into this characterization, but to dismantle it.

Of course, making corrections or combatting inaccuracy is important, especially on a subject where stereotypes abound and numbers are easy to falsify. However, even trying to correct a certain framing of the “problem” is validating that approach. By trying to parse out whether immigrants are burdening society or not, or if there really are a certain number of migrants to the country, the given frame is being reinforced as a useful way of understanding the issue. The terms of debate thus become numbers or usefulness, rather than some other way of conceiving of immigration altogether. As such, even the responsive use of a frame still contributes to its overall potency, and the prominence of Leave frames across the board remained undiminished.

5.3.2 *Cultural or Economic?*

By looking at which frames were deployed in the news media, we not only gain insight into why immigration became an issue “owned” by Leave, but also understand why this issue became so significant to the overall Brexit debate, and potentially tipped the overall vote in Leave’s favor. One of the clearest and most interesting patterns across news coverage is the intersections of economic and cultural concerns that sit at the heart of the migration debate. Examining this pattern in depth can help explain how immigration rose to prominence and became a key issue for many voters, despite its surface-level appearance as only a cultural concern.

The interplay between economics and culture is apparent even when looking at which frames were used the most. “Social/economic burden” has economics at its heart, while

“numbers” reflects concerns about who is coming in, and what those numbers represent in terms of the British way of life and social cohesion. “Sovereignty/control” meanwhile reflects decades of discussions about who is a “good” or “bad” migrant, where economic potential and cultural character both play a significant role. However, to truly understand where immigration falls on the economics/culture divide, we must go deeper than a broad overview, and look at how these frames were implemented in practice.

One of the first and most important ideas that emerges in the Brexit news coverage is that immigration is not just a cultural policy issue. Significantly, all three papers explicitly made the case that immigration mattered to voters not instead of economic issues, but *because immigration itself* is an economic issue. The *Guardian’s* economics editor stated “the obvious point: many voters are worried about immigration not because they are xenophobes but because, for them, it is an economic issue” (Elliott 2016). The *Daily Mail*, in a profile of voters in the North, described voters as “[seeing] an ivory-towered elite telling them that the debate should be about the economy and not immigration on pain of being labelled racist... when the voters themselves regard these key issues as one and the same thing” (Hardman 2016). An editorial in the *Times* declared:

It’s not a question of prioritising immigration over the economy, or vice versa. Immigration is an economic issue, much more than it is a cultural or racial one. The suggestion from Remain that wanting to control who comes to work in Britain is somehow backward-looking or socially unacceptable is fantastically out of touch. To use the politicians’ favourite cliché, “hard-working people” are not worried about immigration because they’re racists. They’re worried about it for economic reasons – their jobs and living standards. (Hilton 2016)

These quotes not only demonstrate why the social/economic burden frame is so consistently used, but also help illustrate why immigration became so prominent in the referendum discussion. As seen in Curtice’s 2016 paper, the prevailing pre-referendum theory was that

voters would make their choice based on economic concerns. If, as these authors argued, immigration should be considered an economic issue, then immigration's rising salience is not a surprise, but to be expected.

Despite these bold statements in newspaper editorials, however, the cultural aspects of immigration should not be dismissed so easily. In fact, the articles cited are somewhat disingenuous for signaling voter's concerns as only about jobs and welfare. The prominence of frames such as "numbers" and "security/threat" highlight how cultural and identity anxiety, often with a racialized edge, played a role in the framing and understanding of immigration. Some concerns focused on EU migrants. A *Daily Mail* article titled "Deadly Cost of Our Open Borders" opened with the line, "EU free movement rules have let dozens of foreign criminals commit horrific offenses in Britain" (Doyle and Drury 2016). In a "left-wing" case for Brexit, a *Times* commentator declared:

Moreover these voters have experienced huge and rapid changes in their streets and GP surgeries and kids' schools. These are not global but rooted citizens.... Islington lawyers and Shoreditch dotcom millionaires will not, like the people of Hexthorpe, in my home town of Doncaster, have 500 Slovak Roma move into their village in the space of months, bringing every kind of social problem from fly-tipping to knife fights. The well-off transcend community so care nothing for cohesion. They remain untouched by culture clash, overcrowding or fights for limited resources. Yet they condemn those affected – if they dare to complain – as bigots. (Turner 2016)

These quotes show an anxiety about immigration that cannot be purely attributed to job prospects or wages. Here, EU migrants – especially from Eastern European countries – represent a threat both real and existential. The potential for cultural clashes and lack of cohesion focus the discussion not on immigration's economic impacts, but also about whether the British way of life is under siege by these migration flows.

Another aspect of the cultural dimension of immigration is the invocation of the specter of Middle Eastern or African refugees and migrants taking advantage of EU free movement

rules. A memorable editorial in the *Times* said, “Remember, Germany’s 1m Arab immigrants today might be our German immigrants tomorrow, arriving with their mosques, burqas and gender-apartheid, and with their traditional Alpine yodel now a muezzin-call” (Myers 2016). A profile of a Labour stronghold in the *Guardian* quoted a voter saying, “We’re being taken over by foreigners... People from Israel, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria – they all end up living here,” and who held his conviction even when the reporter informed him that these countries are not in the EU (Pidd 2016). Again, the concerns identified are less economic than existential. The threat is that dangerous migrants may come to Britain and fundamentally change its social and cultural fabric, only with the added dimension of even greater cultural disparities between white, Protestant Britain and brown, Muslim migrants. Not only does this language show a strong undercurrent of Islamophobia, but it also points to a conflation of EU and non-EU populations into a single group of “foreigners,” all of whom could potentially ruin Britain’s unique culture.

The analysis above discusses immigration along the economics/cultural binary, showing the ways that the issue is described on either side of the line. However, it is perhaps most useful to reject this binary thinking and look at how closely culture and economics are intertwined when it comes to immigration. An example of this interrelated quality comes from a line from a pro-Brexit *Times* op-ed: “As far as Brussels is concerned, a Romanian or Bulgarian has as much right to fill a job vacancy in Manchester or Cardiff as someone from Lancashire or the Welsh Valleys” (Montgomerie 2016). The author is simultaneously using two claims: first, that European immigrants will take jobs and wages away from Brits, and second, that by nature of their identity, these immigrants are not *deserving* of these positions and wages. Another example comes from the *Guardian*:

However invisible the immigrants, they were mentioned by every leaver, in language that I once thought had been dropped in the 80s. “I don’t want to offend you.” Or: “I’m not

racist.” Or: “I’ve got mates from Ghana.” Always followed by “but”. But we let too many in. But we need to look after our own. But I hear eastern Europeans turning up at the jobcentre are handed a grand. (Chakraborty 2016)

Again, there is a twofold claim: migrants are taking benefits, and they do not deserve them compared to “our own.” In these examples, we see echoes of Cook et al.’s study participants, who resented immigrants for using social services for which they believe they have a stronger claim as native citizens. We also see the difficulty in extracting economics from culture, or vice versa. It’s not just that migrants take jobs or benefits, but it is also the fact that these migrants, by the nature of their identity, do not *deserve* them in the same way that native Brits do.

As such, the most useful way to categorize immigration is not to do so. Immigration is both economic and cultural, and the ways in which newspapers framed the issue demonstrates how difficult it is to separate these twin anxieties. The prominence of frames like “social/economic burden” and “sovereignty/control,” and the ways in which these frames were deployed, show how immigration emerged as a multidimensional issue, resistant to strict categorization. As such, the dual nature of immigration as economic and cultural helps us understand why voters would see this issue as a key factor for their vote. If immigration was framed and understood in part as economic, then each campaign’s approach to that issue would naturally influence whether a voter finds staying or leaving to be more economically risky. Thus, immigration’s significance to the vote does not disprove Curtice’s point that economics would ultimately drive the referendum vote, but instead, complicates it.

5.4 SUMMARY

Reviewing my sample’s coverage of the Brexit campaign, there are several distinct trends. First, as discussed in the agenda-setting section, all three papers regardless of political affiliation or

Euroscepticism discussed immigration in a significant, if not dominant, percentage of coverage, although there was significant variation between papers. The number and percentage of articles discussing immigration increased over time as the campaign ramped up, and the issue was most prominent during the last month of the campaign for all three papers. This relatively high salience for a complex and multifaceted referendum meant that immigration, compared to other topics, was relatively more accessible than other policy issues and thus more likely to be thought about by voters.

Second, all newspapers in my sample, again across the political spectrum, were more likely to use Leave-owned framings of immigration than they were to use Remain-owned frames. While this effect was much more pronounced in the right-wing and Eurosceptic *Daily Mail*, both centrist papers were also more likely to discuss the issue in ways that reflected Leave's definition of the "problem," rather than Remain's. Thus, immigration was much more likely to be framed in ways that recalled or emphasized Leave's arguments, which strengthened the accessibility of Leave's frames at the expense of Remain frames. This also implies that voters across the political spectrum were more likely to be exposed to Leave's framing of immigration, increasing the chance that they would in turn recall that framing when considering the issue independently. It also may have strengthened Leave's ownership of the issue. If readers, already primed to see immigration as a significant issue within the Brexit debate, were more likely to read articles framing the issue in terms of overcrowding or threats to jobs and welfare, then they would also likely see leaving the Union as the better option for solving the problem *as defined* than staying in.

Finally, the prominence and usage of certain frames, such as "social/economic burden" and "numbers," shows that immigration was characterized as both an economic and cultural

concern. Immigration was conceived as both responsible for certain economic impacts and raising questions about deservingness and a changing national, cultural, and ethnic identity. Not only were immigrants positioned as threatening jobs and access to welfare benefits, but they were also seen as a threat to social cohesion and the continuance of a certain way of life through the use of “othering” and racialized language. Because the issue straddled the economic/cultural divide, it could be marshalled to appeal to voters on multiple levels, including the economic concerns that Curtice argued would ultimately sway the public one way or the other.

Chapter 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The questions driving this research have focused on why immigration was a key issue to voters in a complex and multifaceted referendum, and why the issue was so tied to leaving the EU. Looking at these trends in news coverage, as well as the ways each campaign framed the issue, I would argue the following points. First, immigration was *significant* to voters in part because it was relatively high on the news agenda throughout the campaign period. The increased discussion of immigration in the Brexit context made the topic more accessible to voters than other potential issues, and thus made it more likely that voters would think about immigration when making their decision. This significance was also in part due to immigration's position as both an economic and cultural issue. Because the framing and understanding of immigration encompassed both economic and cultural anxieties and concerns, if Curtice's (2016) assertion that voters would make their decision based on economics rather than culture is correct, then immigration would be more important to voters and their decision than a "purely" cultural issue. Thus, both the relative prominence of immigration in overall coverage, and immigration's position as simultaneously economic and cultural, increased immigration's overall significance to voters in the Brexit context.

Second, immigration was *tied to Leave* due to several reinforcing reasons. First, the Leave campaign prioritized immigration more highly than the Remain campaign, and also generated more positive arguments or frames about immigration than Remain. As such, Leave was in a better position to "own" the issue of immigration and be perceived as able to effectively solve it, and to ensure that its frames were propagated to the public through the media. Furthermore, the frames that Leave used corresponded to previously held attitudes and opinions about immigration. As the historical review in Chapter 4 showed, Leave's campaign frames

corresponded with themes about immigration from previous policy regimes, as well as public sentiment about immigrants and their impact. Finally, when newspapers discussed immigration in their Brexit coverage, they were more likely to use Leave's arguments and frames than Remain's. By using these frames more frequently, the papers reinforced the terms of debate that Leave had set, and strengthened the connection between Leave and immigration more generally. Therefore, when voters thought about immigration, they were more likely to think of it using Leave's frames, and conclude that leaving was a better solution to the "problem" than remaining. Thus, Leave started as well positioned to "own" the issue of immigration compared to the Remain campaign due to their prioritization and framing of the topic, and that perceived ownership was only strengthened when newspapers were more likely to use Leave frames than Remain ones.

In making my argument, I must note two major missteps that I believe contributed heavily to Remain's lack of success with immigration. First, the utter lack of prioritization of immigration put Remain at a real disadvantage. By choosing not to devote any significant amount of messaging to immigration – which, as the historical review in Chapter 4 demonstrated, has been of concern to the British public for decades – Remain missed a chance to challenge Leave on their framing of the problem and demonstrate their understanding of voter's concerns. In doing so, they essentially ceded the field to a characterization of the issue where effectively dealing with immigration could not occur while the UK remained a member of the Union. Furthermore, there was a notable absence of a certain kind of positive framing about immigration. As previously discussed, the Remain campaign's frames focused primarily on economic reasons to support or tolerate immigration. Indeed, the lack of value- or morality-based frames for wanting immigration – the enrichment that diversity brings, a society that values

tolerance, a humanitarian duty to accept vulnerable migrants – was profound. This kind of framing could have appealed to and motivated both certain liberal segments of the British population as well EU migrants themselves, who faced a great deal of intolerance and uncertainty. By missing these opportunities, Remain left the issue of immigration wide open, and Leave took advantage.

Of course, this study is by no means conclusive. There were some limitations in data collection that may have influenced which frames were most prominent among the campaigns; similarly, my sampling based on the ideologically diversity of news sources rather than circulation means that I may be under- or over-reporting the scale of immigration-related coverage in the larger print landscape. As such, the numbers and percentages that I report should be considered more as broad indicators of trends in coverage and framing, rather than precise findings. Furthermore, I do not wish to imply that the framing and coverage of immigration are the only explanatory variables at play. As Goodwin and Milazzo (2017) showed, regional demographic changes could and did have an impact on what voters thought about immigration, and in turn were strong predictors of a vote for Brexit. Furthermore, prominent frames may have only appealed to certain voting populations. For example, Curtice (2017) discusses how university-educated people were much more likely to vote for Remain, while people with little education were more likely to vote for Leave; similarly, the young were much more for Remain than the old (33). These strong social divisions, which Curtice describes as “young well-educated professionals” versus “older, less well-educated voters,” very likely aligned with certain attitudes towards immigration and free movement (Ibid., 34). Thus, I cannot claim that agenda-setting and framing were the only reasons that immigration became important to voters, or even the primary reason. It is more likely that these communication processes amplified and complemented other

explanatory variables, such as demographics and migratory changes. This being said, I do not believe a credible explanation of Leave's success, especially on the subject of immigration, can ignore the impact of these media messaging processes.

There are also aspects to immigration's framing that require further investigation. One area would be the overall coverage and discussion of the 2015/2016 Mediterranean migrant crisis. While this research primarily looked at immigration in the context of Brexit, and thus excluded much of the news coverage of the ongoing refugee crisis, the coverage that was included suggests that an in-depth look at how refugees and migrants were characterized could facilitate a greater understanding of how migration was framed in the British media. Another possibility would be a deeper examination of the roles racialization and xenophobia may have played both overall and in the treatment of different migrant populations (EU vs. refugees, Western vs. Eastern Europe, etc.). While some of my analysis noted this racialization element, a more thorough investigation of the role of xenophobic rhetoric could be very fruitful. Finally, further investigation of the comparisons between EU and Commonwealth immigrants and their experiences with the British immigration system could prove to be incredibly rich, especially considering the historical juxtaposition of these groups. While I lack the space to consider these questions, my data suggests that more study would be enlightening for other researchers interested in immigration's importance and characterization before and during the referendum.

In addition to the potential of this data for political communications and Brexit scholars, my research also has real implications for policy practitioners. My results reaffirm the conclusions of political communications scholarship on the importance of rhetoric and messaging in the political and policy arena. How an issue is framed and how that framing is received can have a significant influence on voter priorities and choices. Tapping into the

attitudes, beliefs, and values of a given section of the electorate can help current policy makers explain their decisions in ways that are more palatable, or allow future candidates to highlight their strengths and appeal. Failing to proactively consider the framing of an issue – especially one that is currently or likely to be significant – reveals a lack of foresight that can have major electoral consequences, as Remain unfortunately discovered. Messaging also influences which policy options can be considered effective solutions to a given political problem. If immigration is characterized as an issue of numbers, then the list of politically feasible policy options focuses much more heavily on options that focus on limiting or restricting the number of people allowed into the country, rather than options that maintain open borders. Policy makers and politicians would do well to take advantage of the impact of framing on feasibility, rather than be blindsided by it. Finally, current policy makers should recognize and acknowledge how messaging can emphasize or mitigate strengths and vulnerabilities. If, for example, the British government had openly acknowledged their inability to control EU migration and instead focused on migration levels they could control, then their inability to live up to their impossible promises may not have become such a prominent framing of the problem during the referendum. Of course, there is always the tension between spin and authenticity, between appearing honest and dealing with political realities. However, the potential impacts of framing or agenda-setting are too great for a candidate or government not to engage. Narratives influence how all of us understand the world in which we live, and it would behoove practitioners to remember that fact.

In light of these implications for policy practitioners, it is instructive to look at the current state of affairs of immigration policy in the UK, where the power of frames, including the anti-immigrant ones used throughout the referendum, can still be seen. As of this writing in 2018, the UK is both midway through their negotiations with the EU and embroiled in an immigration

scandal of their own making. The treatment of the Windrush generation – children of Caribbean migrants who legally entered the UK in the 50s on their parents’ passports, who now cannot meet new documentation requirements and are vulnerable to deportation – has sparked a national outcry over policies meant to crack down on illegal immigration that are targeting elderly “pillars of the community” (Gentleman 2018). Not only has the scandal raised debate over the treatment of Commonwealth and other migrant populations under the UK’s immigration policies, but it has also highlighted the uncertain fate of the millions of EU citizens still living in the UK (Pérez-Peña 2018). Through the Windrush scandal and the question mark hanging over the heads of EU citizens in Britain, the anti-immigrant sentiments of the Brexit campaign have clearly maintained their strength even after two years have passed. If the government wishes to reassure immigrants (not to mention the EU) that they will be treated with fairness and humanity, perhaps a new narrative is required.

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APPENDIX A

Codebook developed and revised during coding of campaign and news materials.

<i>Code</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
Economic Migrant	Explicitly references economic migrants	“Economic migrants from the EU”
Refugee	Explicitly references refugees	“Refugees who arrive in Europe cannot simply hop on a bus and come to the UK”
Migration Crisis	Refers to Mediterranean migration or migrant crisis	“The migration crisis has shown that the UK has control of its own migration policy”
Social/Economic Burden	Discussion of strain on social services (NHS, schools, etc.) or on economic opportunities (jobs, wages, etc.)	“This puts huge pressure on schools, hospitals, and housing.”
Beneficial	Immigrants benefit society by being hard-working, “paying into the system,” or adding diversity	“EU citizens have contributed £20 billion more in taxes than they have taken out in benefits”
Security/threat	Migration poses a security threat such as criminality or terrorism	“The right to deport people the Home Office believes are a threat to our security”
Significant	Immigration is acknowledged as significant to the public or the overall debate	“Voter’s widely held concerns over immigration”
Legitimate Concern	Voters’ concerns or anxieties about immigration are considered legitimate, genuine, understandable, etc.	“People... are genuinely concerned about uncontrolled immigration”
Leave Ownership	Leave is specifically cited as campaigning on immigration or having superior arguments on immigration	“The leave campaign will focus on immigration”
Xenophobia	The reporter or person quoted accuses another person of being xenophobic, racist, anti-immigrant, etc.	“Nigel Farage was meanwhile accused yesterday of ‘blatant scaremongering’... after he said women were at risk of rape by migrants”
Non-EU Migration	Non-EU migrants are compared to EU migrants	“[We] would end the discrimination against non-EU citizens”

Necessary Trade-off	Accepting free movement is a necessary trade-off for membership in the EU single market	“If you want [full access to the Single Market] you must pay into the EU and accept complete freedom of movement”
Numbers	Discussion of volume of past, current, or potential future immigration	“We are adding a population the size of Oxford to the UK every year just from EU migration”
Need for Restrictions	Explicitly discusses the need to curb or limit immigration; often paired with “numbers”	“Britain seeks to limit EU migration”
Sovereignty/Control	The UK cannot internally control immigration levels or its borders	“We will take back control of migration policy”
UK Government Performance	The UK government is not dealing with immigration adequately	“Every year UK politicians tell the public they can cut immigration... and then they find they miss their targets”
EU Government Performance	The EU is not dealing with immigration adequately or is preventing the UK from addressing the issue	“[T]he Prime Minister tried to regain powers over deportation during his renegotiation, but he was rebuffed by EU leaders”
Status Quo	Proposal to maintain the status quo	“Britain is in the EU while retaining control of our borders”
Points System	Proposal to use a points system	“[We would] create a genuine points-based immigration system”
Country Deal	Proposal to enter into a trade deal similar to other non-EU countries	“He pointed to the success of Norway and Switzerland”
Other	For arguments not included above. Introduced during coding of news materials.	