



Loughborough
University

Centre for Research in
Communication & Culture

ΚΟΜΜΥΝΙΚΑΤΙΟΝ & ΚΟΥΛΤΕΡΑ
COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN

UK News Coverage of the 2016 EU REFERENDUM

Report 2 (19 May – 1 June 2016)

David Deacon, Emily Harmer, John Downey, James Stanyer & Dominic Wring

Introduction

This is the second report by the Loughborough University Centre for Research in Communication and Culture on national news reporting of the 2016 EU Referendum. See our blog for more details about this project (<http://blog.lboro.ac.uk/crcc/eu-referendum/> .)

The results in this report are derived from detailed content analysis of news coverage of the EU Referendum produced on the weekdays (i.e. Monday to Friday inclusive) from two sample periods, 6 May – 18 May & 19 May – 1 June 2016, from the following news outlets:

Television: *Channel 4 News (7pm)*, *Channel 5 News Tonight (6.30pm)*, *BBC1 News at 10*, *ITV1 News at 10*, *Sky News 8-8.30pm*.

Press: *The Guardian*, *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Mirror*, *Sun*, *Star* and the *I*.

We analysed all EU Referendum related news found in the entire duration of all the above named television programmes. For the press, we included referendum news found on the front page, the first two pages of the domestic news section, the first two pages of any specialist election section and the page containing and facing the papers' leader editorials. Two inter-coder reliability tests were conducted to check the robustness and consistency of these measures.

Regarding our terminology and coding protocols: we use the term 'IN' to indicate individuals and organisations supporting the case for the UK to remain in the European Union. We use the term 'OUT' for those advocating the UK's departure from the EU. We do not categorise people or organisations according to our prior knowledge of their political viewpoints. Rather, individuals or organisations are only assigned to these categories when their affiliations are manifestly stated in editorial content and/or they articulate support for one of these positions.

The report has four sections, assessing:

1. Issue Balance – what topics received most coverage?
2. Stopwatch Balance – which individuals or institutions featured most frequently?
3. Gender Balance – what is the proportional coverage of women and men in coverage?
4. Directional Balance – did news coverage tend to favour proponents or opponents of continued UK membership of the European Union?

Executive summary

This report both compares differences between our two sample periods (6 May – 18 May & 19 May – 1 June) and examines overall trends in coverage for the entire sample period. In terms of the former, our results show:

- The implications of the referendum vote for the economy still remains the most prominent substantive issue in press and TV reporting.
- However, coverage of immigration issues has increased over the second period, both in proportionate and actual terms.
- There has been some fluctuation in the politicians most frequently featured. David Cameron was most widely reported in the second sample period, overtaking Boris Johnson (who gained most coverage in the first sample period).
- The views of citizens and the direction of public opinion has been the subject of increasing commentary in the second sample period. Attention to this matter has been appreciably greater in TV than press coverage.
- Nicola Sturgeon and Priti Patel made their first appearance in the top ten list and there has been a modest increase in the relative prominence of women across all coverage during the second sample period. Nevertheless, women remain significantly marginalised, as politicians, business representatives and experts.
- Concerns expressed by some about the failure of the Labour leadership to communicate a 'Labour agenda' in the campaign gain resonance in this analysis of media reporting. The issue agenda has remained tightly focused around the economy and immigration, marginalising discussion of workers' rights, the environment and social security (which have all been flagged as important matters in Labour's case for remaining in the EU). Business sources have commanded far greater prominence than trade unions. Labour's overall presence has reduced and Jeremy Corbyn disappeared from the top ten most reported individuals in the second sample period.

These changes in the coverage should not be overstated. One of the most noticeable finding from this further analysis is the stability of the trends noted in our first report. In both press and TV, this remains a narrowly constructed and sparsely populated debate, dominated by Conservative party sources and disagreements. Thus far, the EU media referendum is as much about 'blue on blue' as it is about 'leave' or 'remain'.

Section 1: Issue balance

This section examines the issue agenda in the reporting of the referendum during the sample period. What issues have dominated coverage so far, and what have failed to attract much attention? And has there been any shift in the media agenda in the period covered in our first sample report (6 – 18 May) and this second report (19 May – 1 June).

Table 1.1 shows the most prominent issues reported across the entire sample period in TV and press coverage.

Table 1.1 Ten most prominent issues (6 May – 1 June 2016)

		TV	Press	All sample
1	Referendum process and conduct	25.1%	30.3%	29.1%
2	Business/economy/trade	20.8%	19.9%	20.1%
3	Immigration/border controls	14.9%	12%	12.7%
4	Constitutional/legal/judicial issues	4.2%	7.6%	6.9%
5	Opinion polls/citizen engagement	8.9%	6.1%	6.7%
6	Defence/military/security	4.7%	5.5%	5.4%
7	Employment	4.7%	3.5%	3.8%
8	Standards/sleaze/corruption	0.7%	3.1%	2.5%
9	Health and health care provision	1.2%	2.5%	2.2%
10	European Union bodies/history/activities	2.5%	1.4%	1.7%
11	All other issues	12.3%	8.1%	8.9%

Note: Only the top ten most frequently covered issues are included in this table. Up to three issues could be coded per news item. To be coded, an issue reference needed to occupy at least THREE FULL SENTENCES in an article, or 10 SECONDS of broadcast time. Where more than three issues were addressed, the most prominent were coded.

Key findings

- Three areas of discussion – the campaign conduct/ process, the economy and immigration - have dominated media coverage so far.
- Coverage of public opinion, constitutional issues, defence/ military and employment also gained a degree of presence, albeit at a significantly lower level than the top three issues.
- Issues such as the implications of the referendum for the environment, taxation, social security, travel, agriculture housing were either absent or marginalised.

- There is a considerable degree of consistency of coverage of the main issues across press and television news.
- There is some degree of disparity in press and TV agendas at the margins. (For example, the press have given more attention to issues concerning standards and corruption in the EU and issues concerning health and healthcare provision. TV coverage has given greater emphasis upon matters concerning public engagement with the campaign and the activities of the EU itself.)

Table 1.2: Comparison of the ten most prominent issues by sample period

		TV and Press (May 6-18 May)	TV and Press (May 19 May – June 1)	Difference
1	Referendum conduct	33.4%	25.6%	-7.8%
2	Business/economy/trade	20.6%	19.6%	-1.0%
3	Immigration/border controls	11.1%	14%	+3.9%
4	Constitutional/legal/judicial issues	5.9%	7.5%	+1.6%
5	Opinion polls/citizen engagement	4.4%	8.7%	+4.3%
6	Defence/military/security	8.3%	3.0%	-5.3%
7	Employment	4.0%	3.7%	-0.3%
8	Standards/sleaze/corruption	1.8%	3.1%	+1.3%
9	Health and health care provision	0.8%	3.3%	+2.5%
10	European Union bodies/history/activities	1.7%	1.6%	-1.1%

Key findings

- In the second period there has been less focus on referendum process, but more interest in measures of, and discussions about, citizen opinion.
- The issues of immigration, sovereignty, corruption/sleaze and health care have all become more prominent. The issue of defence and security has become less prominent.
- Economic issues have more or less retained their news prominence.

Commentary:

Three issues – referendum process, economy, and immigration - continue to dominate referendum coverage, accounting for around 60% of all coverage. The

prominence of these issues, in particular immigration, has also influenced the relative prominence of other issues. For example, the increase in discussion of health and health care provision is partly explained by discussions about what impact migration trends will have upon the NHS.

Over recent days, concerns have been expressed within the Labour party that its 'distinct agenda' on membership of the EU is failing to gain much public visibility. In media terms, it is clear that many of the issues foregrounded within this agenda, such as the environment, employment rights, women's rights and social security are either absent or marginal. These patterns are consistent across TV and press coverage.

This is clearly a campaign fought on a very limited number of issues and it is difficult to see this changing in the last weeks of the campaign with the IN campaign stressing economic grounds for remaining and the OUT campaign emphasizing the issue of immigration.

Analysis of changes in the issue agenda during the two sample periods, suggest the OUT campaign has gained some momentum over the recent period. Several issues upon which they enjoy a lead over the IN campaign (according to opinion polls) have become more prominent in media coverage such as immigration, UK sovereignty, EU corruption, and health care provision. Having said this, coverage of business and economy issues has retained a steady position as the most prominent substantive issues reported on TV and in the press

As the referendum poll approaches, more news coverage is being apportioned towards public opinion and the attempt to ascertain what citizens are really thinking.

Section 2: Stopwatch balance:

This section examines which individuals, organisations and institutions received most media coverage for the sample period. Table 2.1 shows the top ten most frequently reported individuals for the second sample period.

Table 2.1: ‘Top Ten’ by frequency of appearance (19 May - 1 June)

Ranking (19 May – 1 June)	Actor (Party/position)	%	Previous Ranking
1	David Cameron (Con IN)	9.9	2nd
2	Boris Johnson (Con OUT)	5.3	1st
3	George Osborne (Con IN)	4.6	3rd
4	Iain Duncan Smith (Con OUT)	2.7	4th
5	Nigel Farage (UKIP OUT)	2.1	5th
6	Michael Gove (Con OUT)	1.8	6th
7	Chris Grayling (Con OUT)	1.2	N/A
8	Jean-Claude Juncker (EU IN)	0.9	N/A
9=	Priti Patel (Con OUT)	0.8	N/A
9=	Nicola Sturgeon (SNP IN)	0.8	N/A

Key findings

- There is marked similarity between those appearing in the top six for this and the first report. The significant change at the top comes with David Cameron replacing Boris Johnson and establishing a more commanding lead in this sample period.
- The debate continues to be dominated by Conservative representatives from both camps. The IN cause is heavily dependent on the Prime Minister and Chancellor as its main media spokespeople.
- Female campaigners appear in the list for the first time, albeit in joint ninth place
- There is a dearth of representatives from the non-Conservative parties in the top ten with Nigel Farage retaining his slot and Nicola Sturgeon making the list on behalf of the SNP. Labour politicians do not feature at all.
- An individual non-party spokesperson, President of the European Commission Juncker, enters the top ten for the first time.

Commentary

The Referendum debate continues to be dominated by Conservative politicians with David Cameron and Boris Johnson switching places for this sample period. Johnson’s slight edge over Cameron last time has been replaced with a more substantial gap in favour of the Prime Minister. The debate remains very much an internal party battle. George Osborne retains third place in the rankings reflecting the significance IN strategists attach to the economic arguments for the UK staying within the EU. But apart from Cameron and two of his potential successors it is

noticeable that all of their other party colleagues who appear in the list are OUT advocates. Aside from the Prime Minister and Chancellor the only IN supporters in the rankings are the President of the European Commission and Scottish First Minister. Nicola Sturgeon's appearance and that of OUT campaigner Priti Patel ensure women representatives appear in the top ten for the first time, albeit at the bottom of the list. Retaining his fifth place Nigel Farage continues to receive some media attention, particularly when compared with his own UKIP colleagues. Farage's coverage outstrips that of rival opposition party leaders such as Jeremy Corbyn who drops out of the top ten. Other party representatives continue to be pretty much ignored.

Table 2.2 aggregates individuals and groups by wider categories (e.g. by political party).

Table 2.2: News presence of groups/organisations/institutions.

	TV		Press	
	6 May – 18 May	19 May – 1 June	6 May – 18 May	19 May – 1 June
	%	%	%	%
Conservative	38.4	30.3	45.4	44.6
Labour	6.6	3.9	9.2	8.0
Lib Dem	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.9
UKIP	2.1	3.3	3.2	0.2
SNP	-	1.6	0.1	1.1
Other party	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.4
Business	4.5	5.9	7.8	4.6
Experts	6.6	6.6	2.8	5.6
Citizens	15.3	30.3	1.1	4.0
Public sector	-	0.3	2.3	0.8
Media	2.1	5.6	1.9	1.1
Other referendum pressure group	4.1	4.3	9.2	8.2
Govt dep't/ agencies	7.4	3.3	7.5	9.8
Trade unions	-	0.7	0.4	0.4
NGOs	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.6
EU organisations	-	-	0.8	2.9
International organisations	4.1	0.7	0.5	0.7
People/ organisations from other EU states	1.7	1.0	1.3	0.6
People/ organisations from other non EU states	3.7	1.3	0.3	0.4
All other actors	3.2	-	5.0	5.1

(Note: Up to five actors could be coded per item. Where more than five were featured, the most prominently quoted and positioned were coded. Percentages have been rounded and totals may exceed 100)

Key findings:

- Although there has been a reduction in their broadcast appearances Conservative politicians continue to dominate this campaign.
- TV coverage featuring citizens is a marked feature of the second sample period. Newspapers, in comparison, are not so attentive to this group.

- Labour and UKIP representatives continue to enjoy modest coverage. Labour's broadcast presence dropped in the second sampling period.
- Reporting of SNP representatives is up, albeit from a very negligible figure in the first sample period.
- Business and expert commentators continue to receive similar levels of attention.
- Media sources (including celebrities) have become more prominent in the second sample period.
- Spokespeople from additional pressure groups associated with the rival IN and OUT campaigns attract similar levels of coverage as in the previous study and are once again more likely to feature in print rather than broadcast reports.

Commentary

The dominance of the Conservative party in providing rival spokespeople to promote the IN and OUT causes is only partially matched by the appearance of other protagonists in the guise of representatives of the public, albeit on TV rather than in the print media. This development reflects what appears to have been a concerted attempt by the major broadcasters to report the views of citizens in news bulletins who feature far more prominently than they did in the first report. Consequently the coverage afforded Conservatives and members of the public dwarves that devoted to representatives from all other parties combined. Labour's presence has flatlined in the press and faltered in TV coverage. Although UKIP is a presence in the campaign it is marginal when compared with that of OUT campaigners from the Conservatives. Similarly longstanding advocates of the IN position from parties other than Cameron and Osborne's are largely marginalised figures. Media appearances by famous individuals including Sir Ian Botham underscore the jump in coverage of celebrities. By comparison business and expert commentators continue to attract some attention and presence in the news.

Other public and private sources are also struggling to make much of an impression on coverage. Business sources and experts/ think tanks have sustained a significant minority presence, but commentators from trade unions, NGOs and the public sector received little attention.

Section 3: Gender Balance:

Table 3.1 compares the relative prominence of women to men across all coverage from the first sample period with the second sample period. The results show there has been a modest increase in the coverage afforded to women (see also the first appearance of women in the ten most featured figures in coverage). Nevertheless, they continue to be peripheral to media reporting of the campaign.

Table 3.1: Relative prominence of women to men across time

	TV and Press May 6-18 May	TV and Press May 19 May – June 1
	%	%
Female	12	18
Male	88	82

Table 3.2 compares gender differences according to particular professional, political or public categorisations.

Table 3.2: Relative prominence of women to men by group

	TV		Press	
	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %
Politician	11	89	13	87
Business	18	82	19	81
Expert	24	76	16	84
Citizen	48	52	29	71

Key findings:

- Female citizens were the most visible group, particularly on television where they appeared in almost equal proportions to men. Male citizens dominated the press by 2:1.
- Business appearances were dominated by men in broadly the same proportions in television and press coverage. Fewer than one in five of the business sources featured were women.
- Women experts accounted for a quarter of all experts in television coverage but were much more marginal in the press. The most marginal group were women politicians who were outnumbered by their male counterparts by almost 10:1.

Commentary

After much discussion on the marginalisation of women by both campaigns in the aftermath of Harriet Harman's complaint to Ofcom on 23 May, there has been a small increase in the prominence of women in the campaign. At least part of this increase was the result of the 'process coverage' generated by the reporting of Harman's intervention and the wider debate it stimulated. Whilst not denying the importance and value of discussing this issue, it also demonstrates the scale of gender inequality in routine coverage, as it contains the implication that women are more likely to be considered relevant when talking about themselves rather than the wider issues. This point is reinforced by the findings in table 3.2, which show business sources and experts are overwhelmingly male. TV news coverage manages near gender parity in the presentation of citizens, but this is not replicated in press coverage.

It is in the party political sphere where the gender differences are most extreme. Priti Patel and Nicola Sturgeon may have scraped into the top ten most featured politicians, but these were exceptions in what remains, in the main, a debate between men.

Section 4: Directional balance

Directional balance assesses the favourability of coverage towards different campaigns and campaigners. We have developed several measures for this aspect of coverage, the first of which quantifies the balance between different stances of the individuals and organisations engaged in the debate.

Party politics

Figures 4.1 & 4.2 compare the divisions of opinion within parties about the referendum vote, in press and television coverage respectively.

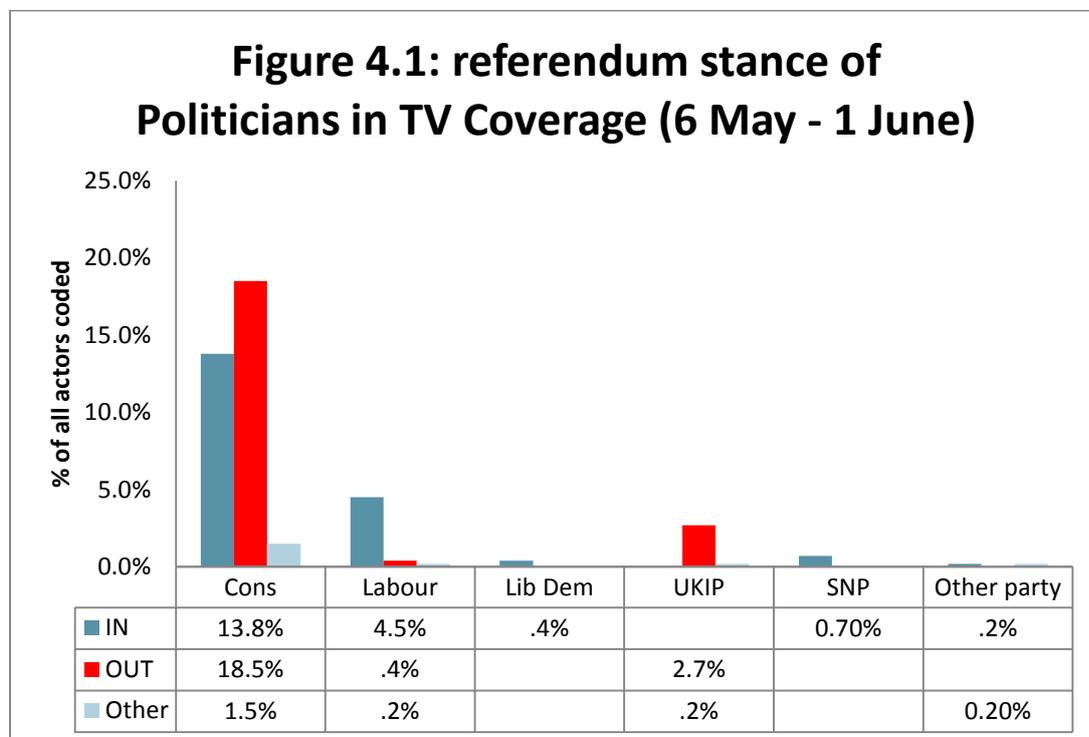
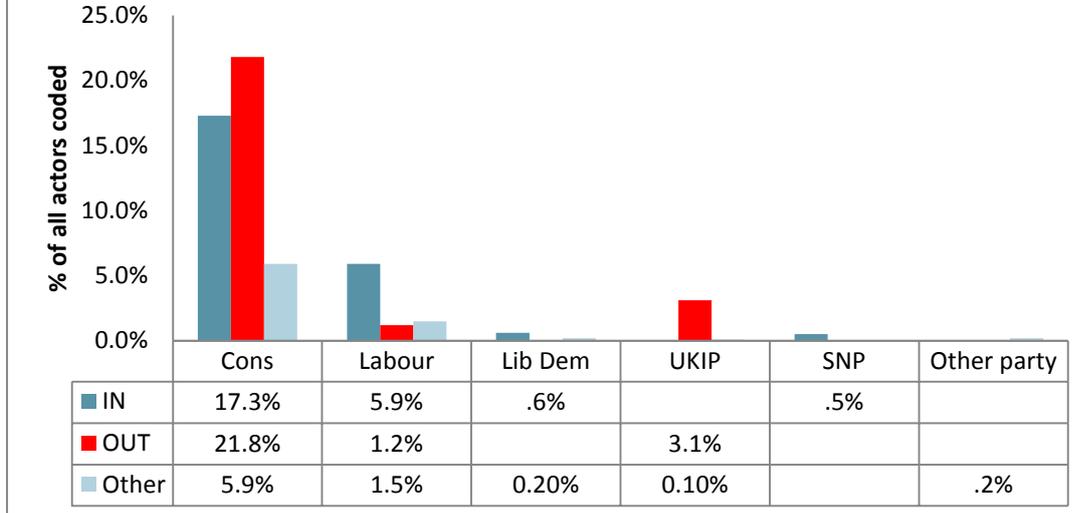


Figure 4.2: referendum stance of politicians in Press coverage (6 May - 1 June)



Key points

- Conservative OUT supporters received more coverage than Conservative IN supporters across both TV and press.
- The number of Labour IN supporters exceeded Labour OUT campaigners.

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 compare the respective stances of a selection of institutions, individuals and organisations beyond the party political sphere.

Figure 4.3: referendum stance of other individuals/organisations in TV coverage (6 May - 1 June)

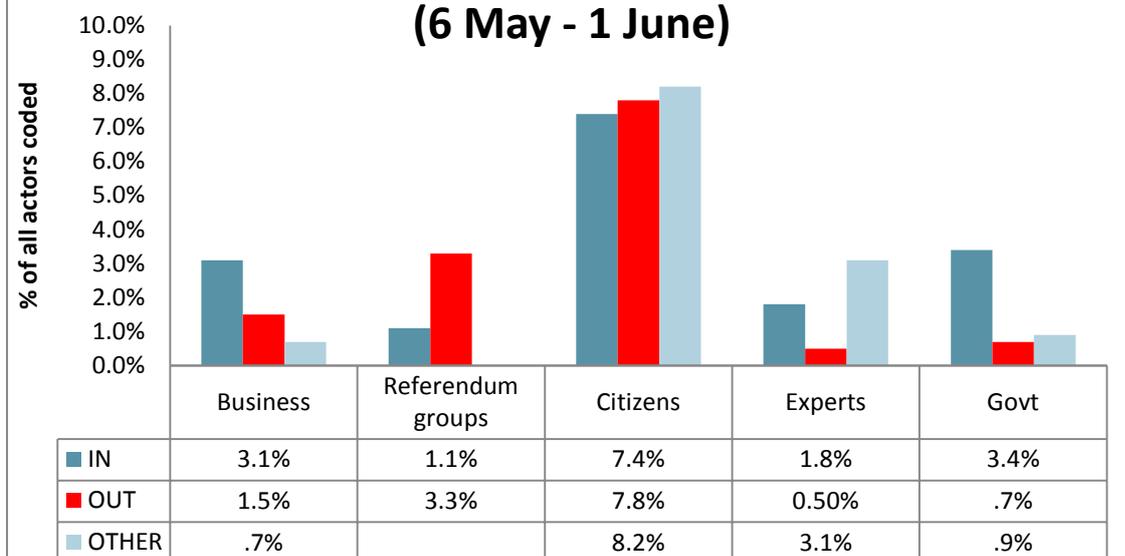
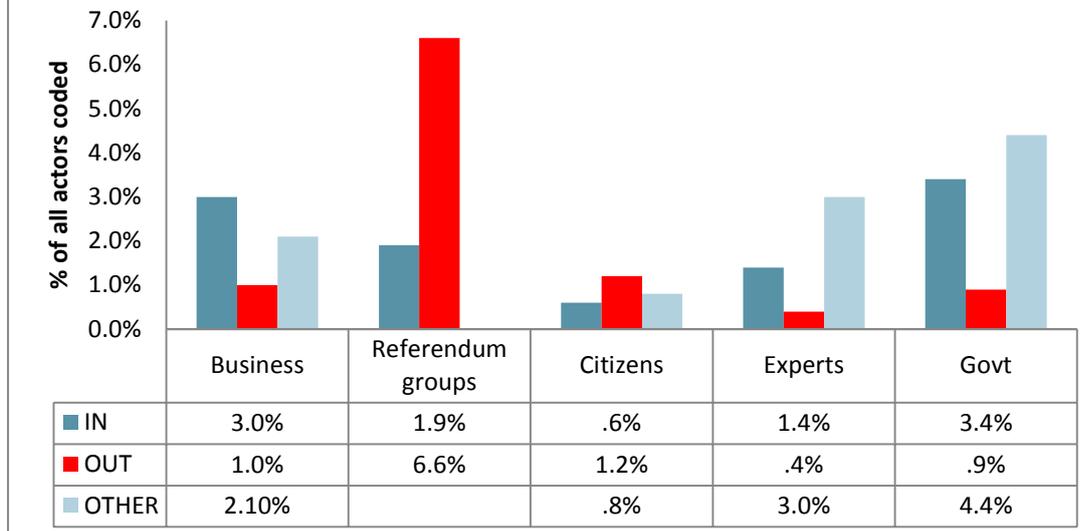


Figure 4.4: referendum stance of other individuals in Press coverage (6 May - 1 June)

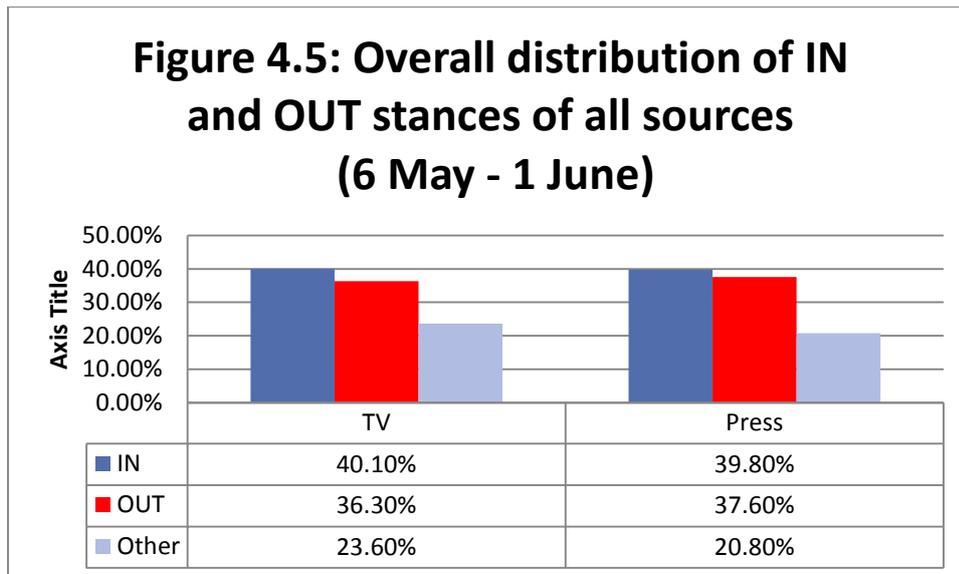


Key findings

- Over the period of the analysis business sources supporting IN exceeded those supporting OUT in both press and TV coverage by a ratio of around 3:1.
- The experts that appeared were mainly neutral although those that spoke in favour of staying IN outnumbered those that wanted to leave across TV and Press.
- Government sources (i.e. departments, appointed bodies, government agencies) were mainly featured as supporting the case for remaining in the EU.
- The citizens that did appear were confined to TV and there was virtually no difference between those supporting OUT or IN.
- Referendum groups supporting OUT gained more prominence in press than TV coverage.

Overall patterns of IN and OUT stances

Figure 4.5 provides an aggregation of the stances of all individuals and organisations featured for the entire sample period.



Findings:

- Individuals or organisations articulating the IN position were marginally more frequently reported than those supporting OUT.
- The margin of difference was greatest with TV coverage (3.8% compared with 1.2%).
- In both press and TV, 1 in 5 of featured sources either did not express a position on the Referendum or voiced mixed views.

Overall story evaluations

As a further measure, we made an ‘in-the-round’ assessment of the extent to which the evaluative implications of each news item tended to support either IN or OUT positions (in assessing this we considered the dominance of particular news stories and the relative positioning and accessing of political actors within the item.)

The results of this analysis are set out in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Percentage of items favouring IN or OUT

	TV	Press
	%	%
Favouring IN	17.2	26.3
Favouring OUT	9.8	32.4
Mixed/ No Evaluations	73.1	41.3

Key findings:

- The majority of TV news report had no clear evaluations that benefitted particular campaign positions.

- Where evaluations were evident in TV news, those supporting arguments to remain in the EU exceeded those supporting the UK's departure.
- In the press, the majority of items were seen as good news for the leave campaign, with almost as many mixed evaluations as positive stories for remaining.

Commentary: plus ça change?

Overall individuals or organisations articulating the IN position remained marginally more frequently reported than those supporting OUT across press and TV. TV news coverage remained more favourable to the IN campaign, according to a range of measures. Press coverage remained more favourable to the OUT campaign. The conclusion we made in the first report remains: there are no strong grounds for arguing that any side is 'winning' the media war yet in terms of favourability of treatment between 6 May and 1 June.