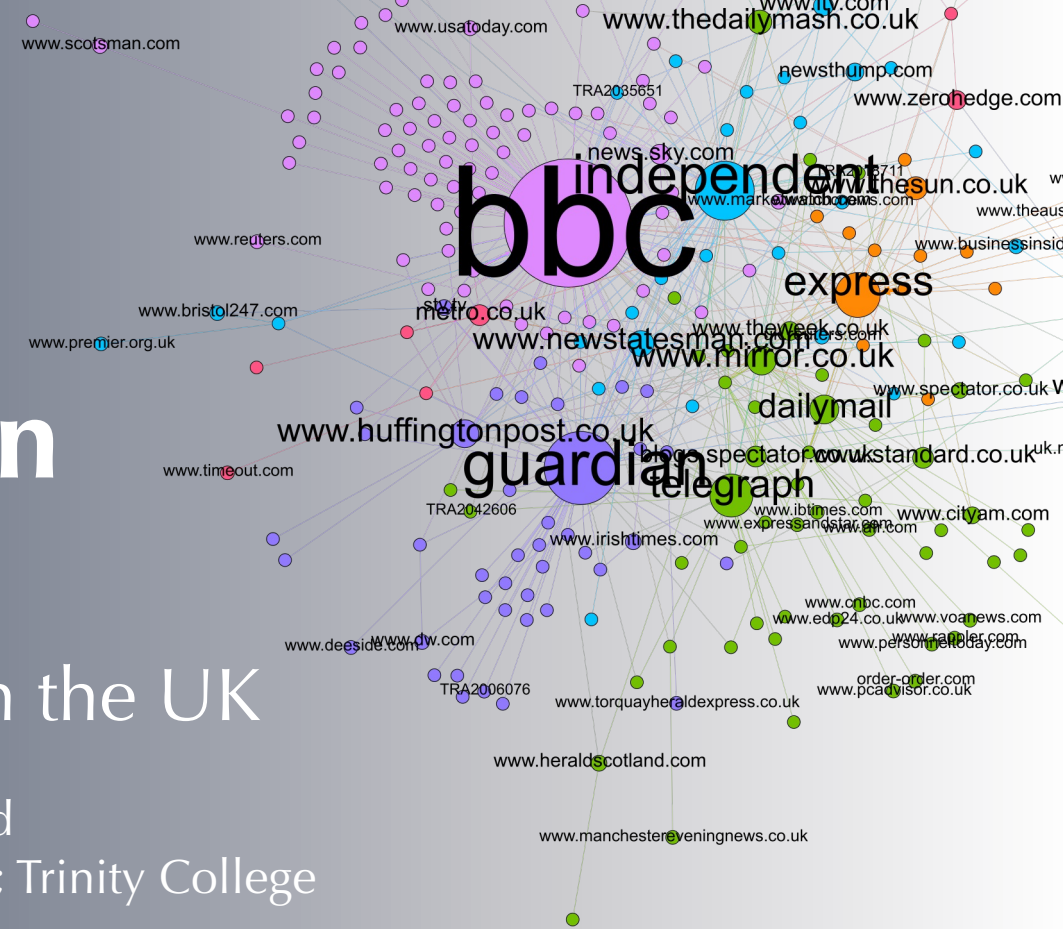


# The Role of News Media in Shaping Voter Decisions: A Study of the 2016 Brexit Referendum in the UK

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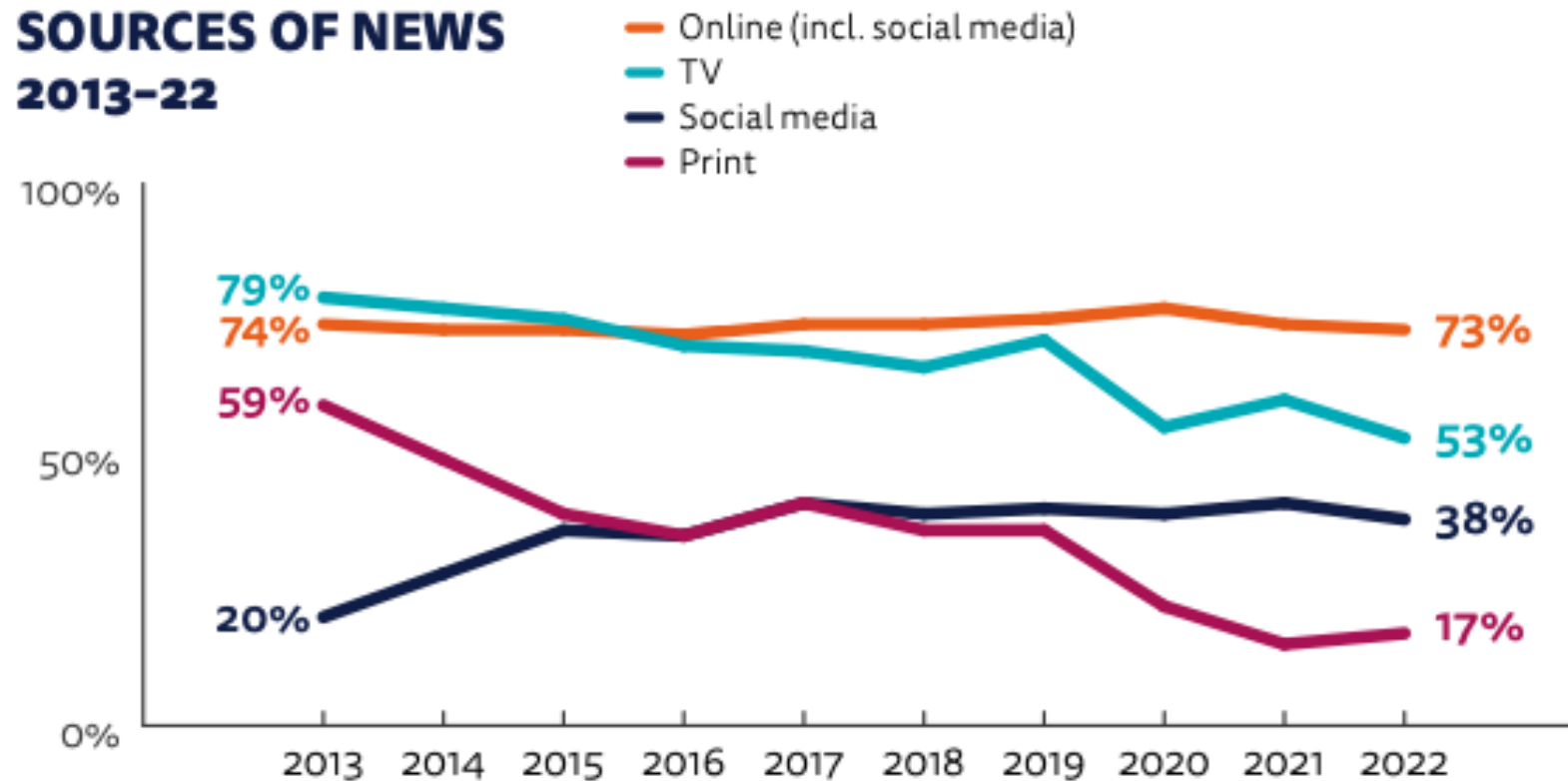
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# Objective

- Examine political news consumption behaviour in Britain and its role in political opinion formation and voting behaviour
- Focus: 2016 EU Referendum in UK

# Sources of News in the UK



Source: Newman et al., 2022

# Motivation

- Media landscape is changing
- Concerns about voters being increasingly ideologically segregated and isolated due to digital media
- Debate whether voters, particularly Leave-Voters, had received sufficient, unbiased information before casting their votes
- Does political news consumption affect voting intentions?
- Does the source of political information influence voting behaviour?

# Research Question

- To what extent did the **sources** and **volume** of political information consumed during the 2016 EU Referendum campaign influence **changes** between UK citizens' voting intentions and subsequent vote cast?

# Theoretical background

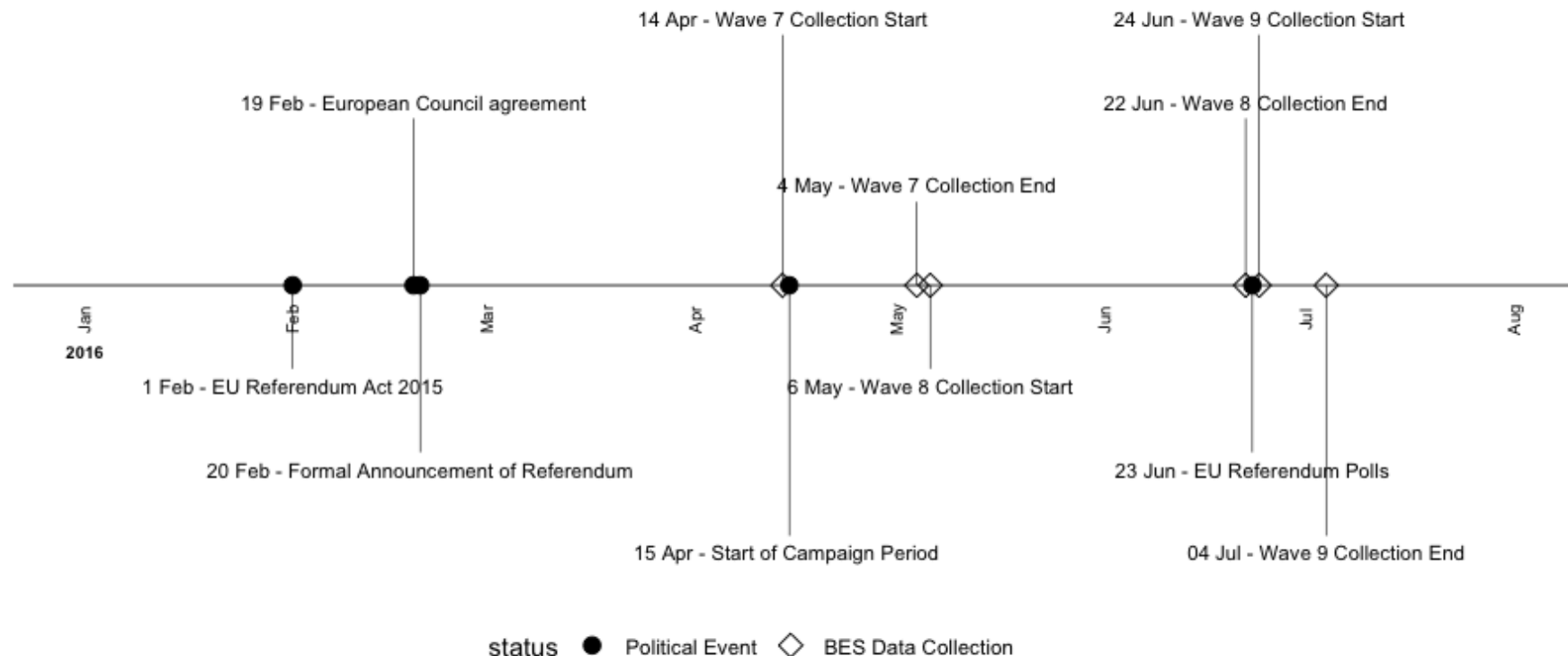
- Relationship between mass communication and public opinion (Dahl, 1989; Habermas, 1989; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948)
- Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1962)
- Selective Exposure theory (Klapper, 1960)
- Motivated Reasoning (Kunda, 1990),

# Hypotheses

- H1: Television news consumption during the 2016 EU Referendum campaign had a positive effect on UK citizens' likelihood to vote for Leave.
- H2: Internet news consumption (not including online newspapers) during the 2016 EU Referendum campaign had a positive effect on UK citizens' likelihood to vote for Leave.
- H3: Radio news consumption during the 2016 EU Referendum campaign had a positive effect on UK citizens' likelihood to vote for Leave.
- H4: Consumption of pro-Leave newspapers (including online newspapers) during the 2016 EU Referendum campaign had a positive effect on UK citizens' likelihood to vote for Leave, and pro-Remain newspapers had a negative effect on the likelihood of voting Leave, and vice versa.
- H5: Talking to other people about politics or current affairs during the 2016 EU Referendum campaign had no effect on UK citizens' likelihood to vote for either Leave or Remain.

# Data

- YouGov-administered British Election Study (BES) 2014-2023 internet panel data. Waves 7 to 9.





# Data II

- to separate the time of cause and effect:
  - data from wave 9 => dependent variable
  - and data from waves 7 and 8 => explanatory variables
- sample size = 20,918 participants
- Use of cumulative panel weights for this sample to achieve results that are representative of the general population.

# Method

- Quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design with observational data and inferential statistical analysis using logistic regression models
- Dependent variable: EU Referendum Vote Intention / Vote
- Explanatory variables of interest: political news consumption sources and volume
  - Internet (not including online newspapers)
  - Television
  - Newspaper (including online)
  - Radio
  - talking to other people.

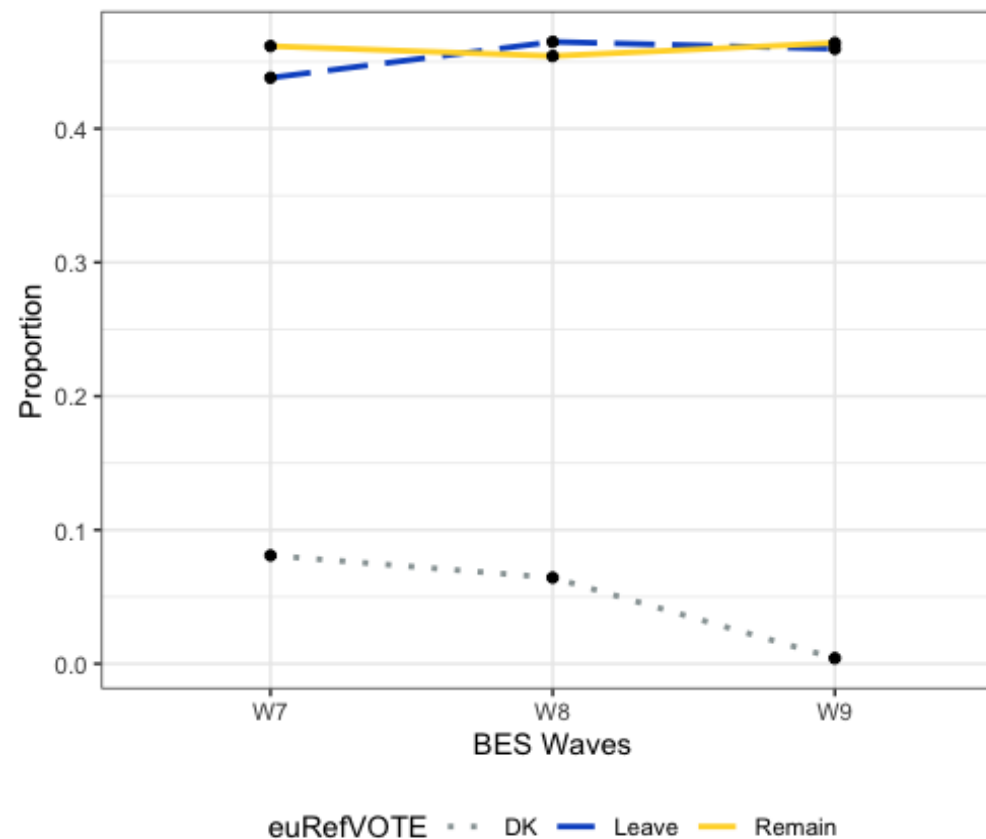
# Results

**Table 1:** EU-Referendum Vote Intention (%)

euRefVoteWAVE	Leave	Remain	DK
W7	45	47	8
W8	47	46	6
W9	50	50	0

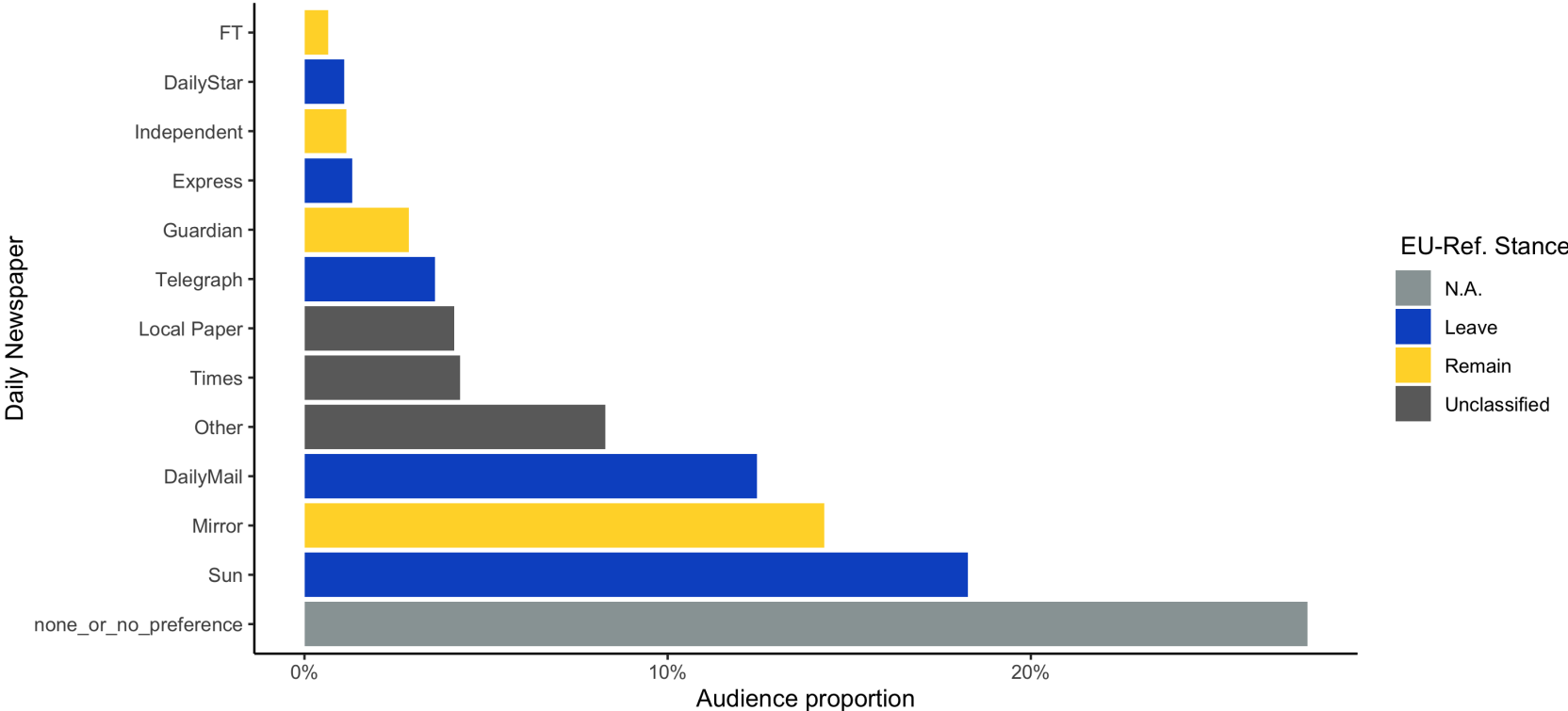
*Source:* British Election Study internet panel; wave 7-9; weighted; 14th April to 4th July 2016; n = 20,918

**Figure 1:** EU-Referendum Vote Intention



n=20918; weighted: Data collection: 14th April to 4th July 2016

**Figure 2: Popularity and EU-Referendum Stance of Daily Newspapers in the UK (April 2016; W7)**



Source: British Election Study internet panel; wave 7-9; n=20918; weighted

**Table 2:** Contingency table showing pre-campaign referendum voting intentions (w7) and EU-Referendum stance of preferred daily newspaper (w7); given in row-%

	Remain_Paper	Leave_Paper	Unclassified_Paper	N.A.
RemainW7	31	31	27	38
LeaveW7	15	59	13	26
DKW7	10	33	10	57

*Source:* British Election Study internet panel; wave 7; weighted; 14th April to 4th July 2016; n = 20,918

Table 6: Series of Logistic regression models of Leave vote with isolated Media variables

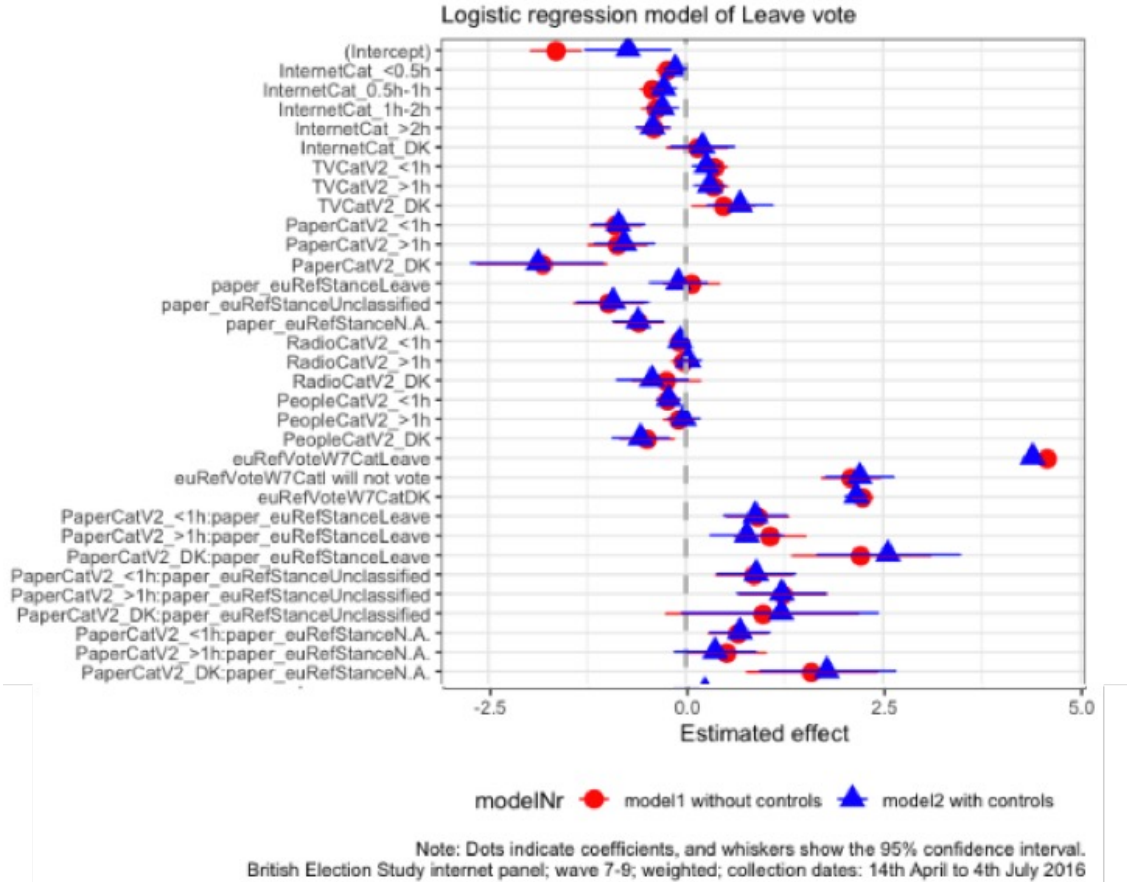
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	euRefVoteW9				
	(1) Internet	(2) TV	(3) Newspaper	(4) Radio	(5) People
Internet (ref. = None)					
0<0.5h	-0.212*** (0.068)				
0.5h-1h	-0.349*** (0.079)				
1h-2h	-0.282*** (0.095)				
>2h	-0.358*** (0.098)				
DK	-0.029 (0.133)				
TV (ref. = None)					
<1h		0.151* (0.085)			
>1h		0.216** (0.095)			
DK		0.353** (0.146)			
Newspaper (ref. = None)					
<1h			-0.893*** (0.167)		
>1h			-0.817*** (0.192)		
DK			-1.808*** (0.396)		
Newspaper EU-Ref.Stance (ref.= Remain)					
Leave			-0.100 (0.186)		
Unclassified			-0.937*** (0.231)		
N.A.			-0.627*** (0.163)		
Newspaper * Newspaper EU-Ref.Stance (ref.= None*Remain)					
<1h * Leave			0.884*** (0.205)		
>1h * Leave			0.782*** (0.236)		
DK * Leave			2.531*** (0.460)		
<1h * Unclassified			0.895*** (0.253)		
>1h * Unclassified			1.207*** (0.288)		
DK * Unclassified			1.093* (0.636)		
<1h * N.A.			0.666*** (0.195)		
>1h * N.A.			0.405 (0.262)		
DK * N.A.			1.707*** (0.436)		
Radio (ref. = None)					
<1h				-0.050 (0.056)	
>1h				-0.098 (0.078)	
DK				0.147 (0.132)	
People (ref. = None)					
<1h					-0.265*** (0.071)
>1h					-0.122 (0.092)
DK					-0.273** (0.133)
Constant	-1.012*** (0.233)	-1.160*** (0.235)	-0.766*** (0.275)	-1.114*** (0.233)	-1.025*** (0.232)
Pseudo R-sq (McF):	0.56	0.559	0.568	0.559	0.559
Observations	19,464	19,464	19,464	19,464	19,464

Note:

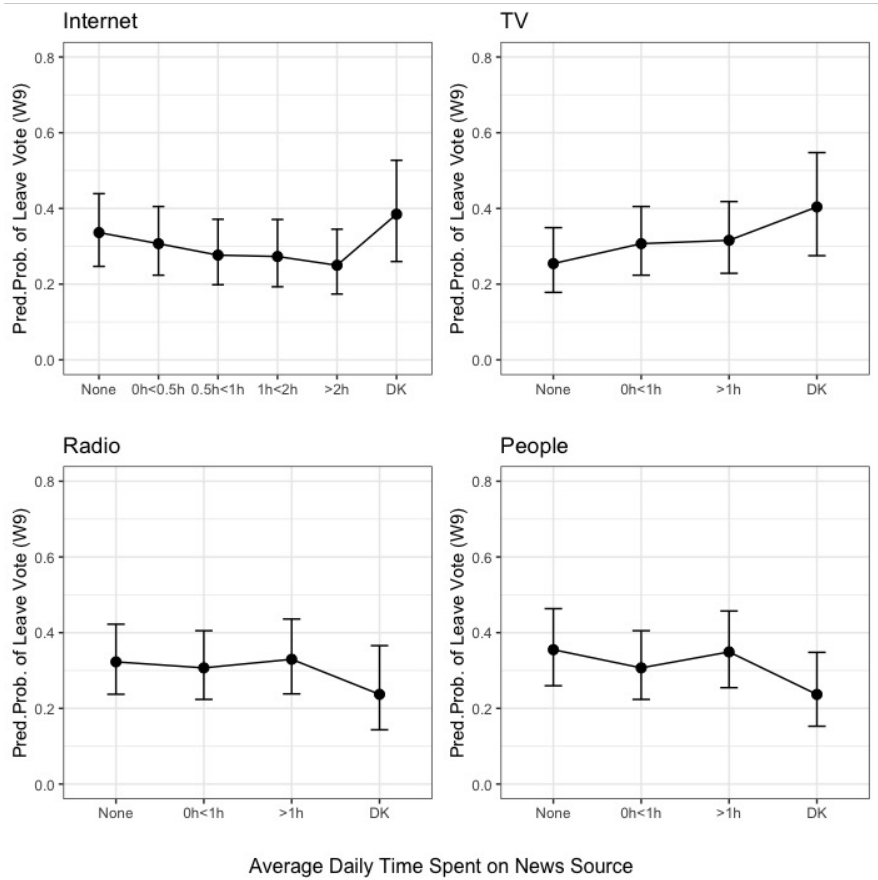
\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Source: British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 7 to 9. Dependent variable: Leave=1, Remain=0, undecided and refusals excluded. DK = don't know. Although the coefficients for some controls are not shown in this table, all models 1-5 include controls for age, sex, education (No cert., GCSE, A-level, degree, DK), work status (full-time, part-time, student, retired, unemployed, other), household income (as a factor variable with DK and and refusals as separate categories), seven-point British and European identity scales, party identity and political attention.

**Figure 3:** Coefficients of Logistic Regression Model 1 & 2

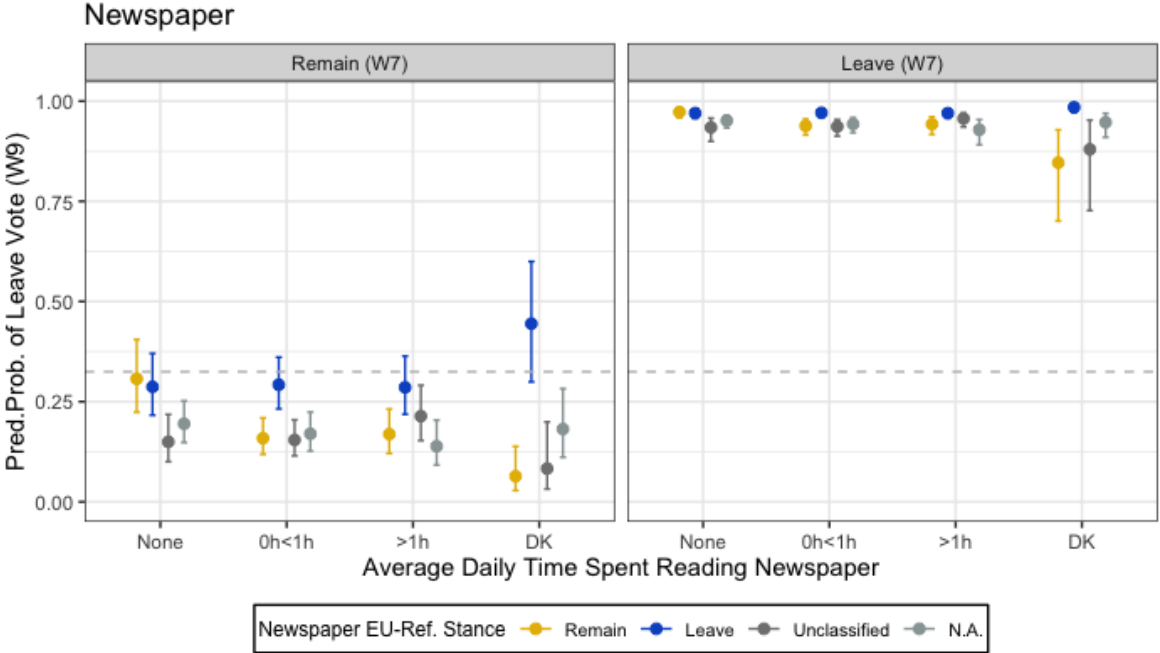


**Figure 4:** Predicted Probabilities for a Leave Vote in the EU-Referendum by Level of News Consumption and Media Type





**Figure 5:** Predicted Probabilities of Voting Leave in the EU-Referendum based on Newspaper Consumption and Newspaper Brexit Stance, split by Pre-Treatment Voting Intention.



# Conclusion

- Results of the study show a clear link between news consumption and the EU Referendum vote.
- News consumption during the lead-up to the referendum (consumption levels and choice of media) significantly influenced individuals' vote choices.
- The impact of media consumption on opinions depends on the specific medium used for obtaining political news.
- Generally, the influence of media on voting behaviour slightly increases with more time spent using a particular news medium.

# Conclusion II

- **Online** political content consumption (excluding newspapers) decreased the likelihood of choosing a Leave vote, with the probability declining as Internet usage increased.
- Watching **television** news inclined individuals towards voting for Leave.
- **Radio** news consumption had no significant impact on voting intentions.
- Engaging in **discussions with others** discouraged voting for Leave if they lasted less than an hour daily.
- **Newspaper** readership, including online newspapers, showed signs of selective exposure, with most readers favouring publications aligned with their political beliefs.
- Even-handed news coverage did not guarantee even influence on voters.
- Television news, primarily led by supposedly neutral news providers like the BBC, may have unintentionally favoured the Leave campaign by providing impartial coverage.

# Next Steps

- Investigate mechanism behind TV consumption favouring Leave vote
- Closer look at media consumption interactions and media networks
- Investigate more cases of 'even-handed' public broadcasters influencing public opinion in a real-world context, such as the EU Referendum and future democratic events.
- Further research on potential impact of 'impartiality fraud', where news is presented under the assumption of being neutral and impartial yet systematically favours one political side over the other.

# Thank You!

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