

# **The Immigration Issue in the European Electoral Campaign in the UK: Text-Mining Public Debate from Newspapers and Social Media**

Paul Nulty

*London School of Economics and Political Science*

p.nulty@lse.ac.uk

Monica Poletti

*London School of Economics and Political Science & University of Milan*

m.poletti@lse.ac.uk

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In recent years, the issue of immigration has become increasingly salient in the UK political and media debate. Moreover, with the development and persistence of the economic and financial crisis within the EU, immigration has been linked to growing opposition and criticism towards the European Union. In a country in which Euroscepticism has historically been high compared to countries in continental Europe, EU immigration-related statements connected to EU free-border agreements became more widespread. For this reason, we expect immigration to be a prominent issue in the electoral campaign of the upcoming 2014 European Parliament elections in the media. By covering (potential) EU immigrants and EU immigration issues in a certain way, media tend to promote or restrain certain ideas of immigration, that might eventually affect public's views. In fact, we know from previous studies that immigrations, particularly in time of economic crisis, is a challenge for society that can be framed not only in positive or negative terms, but also in economic or cultural terms.

By looking at the news coverage of several newspapers, selected according to their political orientations and including both broadsheets and tabloids, this study first considers the salience of coverage of EU immigrants and EU immigration issues in UK newspapers in the three months preceding the EU elections of May 2014. It further explores whether news coverage of different newspapers is framed in terms of economic (e.g. jobs) or cultural (e.g. identity) terms. In addition, we mine information from social media sources (twitter and wikipedia) to discover how the immigration debate is framed by politically engaged members of the public on these platforms. Although inferring public opinion from social media can be problematic, it is a rewarding approach given the volume of public text available, and the ability to identify political affiliations through network connections. Understanding representation of immigration and its connections with public opinion is crucial not only in order to contribute to the scholarly debate on anti-immigration and Euroscepticism attitudes, but also to better inform public policy decisions.

In addition to these substantive contributions, this study employs advanced text-mining methods for data collection and data analysis. Text from politically engaged twitter users is collected using a novel iterative keyword-learning approach that allows high precision and recall when the aim is to discover only tweets relevant to a particular issue. This text, and the text from newspaper articles, is analysed using topic modelling to investigate the salience of sub-issues in the immigration debate. In addition, weighted log-odds ratios are used to measure linguistic differences across newspapers and social media users from different sides of the ideological spectrum in the UK.