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Framing the European Union: A Qualitative Framing Analysis of British Tabloids' Coverage of the EU and European Integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994)

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Framing the European Union: A Qualitative Framing Analysis of British Tabloids' Coverage of the EU and European Integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994)

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1. Introduction

On 23 June 2016, the citizens of the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the EU with a vote of 52% to 48% (BBC News, 2016). Recent literature has focused on the role and influence the British tabloids had over this important period in both European integration history and Euroscepticism (Simpson & Startin, 2023; Zečić, 2022; Zappettini, 2021). The literature describes these tabloids as ‘agenda-setters’ in shaping Eurosceptic narratives (Simpson & Startin, 2023, p. 302). More broadly, there is evidence that media can influence public attitudes towards the EU (Vliegthart et al., 2008; De Vreese, 2007), and that Eurosceptic media frames can also affect these attitudes (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Given this evidence of the role and influence of media, and specifically UK tabloids, on attitudes towards the EU and European integration, it is relevant to understand how the tabloids framed the EU in another important period in both European integration history and Euroscepticism: the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994). This period in European integration has become known in the literature as the ‘tipping point’ regarding the rise of Euroscepticism, specifically for British tabloids (e.g. Daddow, 2012; Simpson & Startin, 2023). It marked “a turning point in the causal underpinnings of European integration” as Maastricht indicated a politicisation of the European Community by its renaming to the European Union (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 21; Startin, 2015). Understanding how the British tabloids framed the EU and European integration during this ‘tipping’ point in European integration history could provide valuable insights into the roots and development of UK Euroscepticism and Eurosceptic narratives.

Therefore, the research question that this study aims to answer is: "How did British tabloids frame the EU and European integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994)?" While earlier studies have researched the framing of quality newspapers, there is limited knowledge on how tabloids, known for their significant contribution to Eurosceptic narratives and different framing compared to quality newspapers, framed the EU and European integration during this important period (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; Simpson & Startin, 2023). This study attempts to fill in the gaps by offering a qualitative framing analysis of tabloid coverage, thereby advancing knowledge of the roles they play in the narrative and impact on Euroscepticism at that period. To do so, this research will use a qualitative framing analysis to capture the subtleties of language, tone, and presentation in tabloid coverage of the EU. Knowing how British tabloids characterised the EU and European integration at crucial periods provides insights with wider implications for future research, policy-making, and better comprehending the framing strategies used by tabloids and their

influence. This study aims to contribute to the debate within the literature on how British tabloids frame the EU and European integration. First, this thesis will start with a literature review that will provide the necessary background and context, followed by the research design, an analysis of the research outcomes, and a conclusion.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

This study's research question is: "How did British tabloids frame the EU and European integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period 1990-1994?" This literature review covers a number of important topics to give the necessary background and context for the research question. First, the significance of news framing and the theoretical frameworks of news framing will be outlined. Then, existing research on how the EU and European integration have been framed in British newspapers will be discussed. Afterwards, the historical background of the Maastricht Treaty as an important moment in both European integration history and UK Euroscepticism is covered. Finally, it will highlight the different characteristics of British tabloids compared to quality newspapers and identify gaps in the existing literature that this study aims to fill. The review addresses the discussion on how British newspapers, particularly British tabloids, frame the EU and European integration. After reviewing the literature, it becomes evident that the role of tabloids in framing the EU and European integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994) is underexplored. While earlier studies have researched framing in quality newspapers, there is limited knowledge on how tabloids, known for their significant contribution to Eurosceptic narratives in the UK, framed the EU and European integration during this transformative period (Simpson & Startin, 2023). This study aims to provide a qualitative framing analysis of tabloid coverage, contributing to a deeper understanding of their role in the Euroscepticism narrative. Understanding their framing strategies before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period provides relevant insights into the roots and development of UK Euroscepticism and Eurosceptic narratives.

2.2. Theoretical framework of news framing

According to Entman (1993, p. 52), framing "*essentially involves selection and salience. 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 for the item described.*" Often credited with establishing the concept of framing is Goffman (1974) through his work on frame analysis, which looks at how people and groups create reality. Tuchman (1978) built on this within the field of media studies by looking at how news media frame stories to shape public understanding. The theory was advanced by Entman's (1993) influential work, which

described how frames function in news texts. Entman (1993) argues that framing directs audience attention and interpretation by emphasising some elements and downplaying others. Framing is closely related to the concept of agenda setting. Agenda setting, as described by McCombs and Shaw (1972), refers to the news media's ability to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda. By framing issues in specific ways and providing a particular angle on an issue, the news media not only tells us what to think about but also how to think about it (Entman, 1993). Iyengar (1987) found that the way news is framed can also influence how people assign blame for societal problems and how they assess political actors. By framing certain aspects of a policy debate, the news media can steer the direction of public discourse and policy outcomes (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Framing mechanisms include the use of specific language, depictions, metaphors, examples, and visuals to shape how an issue is perceived (Van Gorp, 2010).

Understanding what elements of the EU and European integration tabloids chose to draw attention to or ignore requires an understanding of Entman's (1993) notion on selection and salience, which explains how news media highlight some aspects of a story while downplaying others. The idea that frame affects not only what people think about but also how they think about it (Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1987) allows for an examination of how tabloids may have influenced the debate on the EU and European integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994). Through an explanation of framing strategies including language, metaphors, and images (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), this section provides a foundation for determining the particular strategies tabloids may use to create their narratives. These insights help to analyse the framing strategies used by British tabloids, allowing for a deeper understanding of their framing of the EU and European integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994).

2.3. Framing of the EU and European integration in British newspapers

From 1948 to 1975, British newspapers transitioned from a loosely supportive agreement towards the European Community to a clear and almost uniform excitement for Europe (Wilkes & Wring, 1998; Spiering, 2004). Wilkes and Wring (1998, p. 185) argue that this 'Pro-Communityism' during this period stemmed from the newspapers' will to "cut a profile for itself in domestic policies" by taking a stand in favour of entry into Europe. Subsequently, the UK newspapers' stance towards the European project shifted progressively from a state of "permissive consensus to destructive dissent", as argued by Daddow (2012). The term

'Euroscepticism' was first coined in the UK on 11 November 1985, by The Times (Spiering, 2004). Although Euroscepticism does not have a set definition, many scholars agree that it includes opposing a certain aspect of European integration (Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, 2018; Taggart, 1998; Boomgaarden, et. al, 2011; De Vries, 2018). Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) identified varying levels of 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism. They define hard Euroscepticism as "outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration and opposition to their country joining or remaining members of the EU", and is in practice a principled objection to the present shape of European integration (Idem, p.10). On the other hand, soft Euroscepticism "involves contingent or qualified opposition to European integration" and may manifest as a disapproval of certain policies and without implying a principal opposition to European integration (Idem, p.10). Startin (2015) argues that the tabloids in the UK are a particularly strong source of "hard" Euroscepticism. Startin (2015) argues that what makes the UK unique in this regard is the prominence and influence of its tabloid press. He goes on to argue that although the question of whether people trust what they read in newspapers is still up for debate (Anderson, 2004), there is no denying that the UK tabloid press has a unique influence on how the EU is framed, more so than that of other EU countries (Startin, 2015).

The existing literature discusses a variety of reasons for the presence of Euroscepticism among UK newspapers. More generally, British Euroscepticism is often attributed to the British perception of their own distinctiveness and tradition of viewing themselves as separate from Europe and its people, "as manifested in the (...) condition of the press" (Spiering, 2004, p. 127; Daddow, 2011). Some literature points at the commercial objectives of the tabloid sector, being one of the most commercially successful in Europe (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999), as one of the causes for Euroscepticism among UK newspapers. The argument made here is that the commercially oriented British tabloids, characterised by their strong conversationalist, emotionalist, and xenophobic language (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999), take advantage of this idea of British 'differentness' by reporting about foreign institutions attempting to impose rules on 'us'. This approach generates interest among readers and consequently boosts profitability (Spiering, 2004). In line with this, Tunstall (1996) argues that the British newspaper sector 'differs from the rest of Western Europe' due to its concentration of newspaper ownership and the rivalry among these few media conglomerates developing into a sort of super competition (Tunstall 1996; Anderson & Weymouth, 1999). This rivalry leads to these concerns fighting for the same British public, attracting them mostly by spectacular narratives (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999; Spiering, 2004). Spectacular stories about European

integration are more likely found in articles discussing absurd foreign rules imposed on UK citizens than in explanations of its complex and nuanced nature (Spiering, 2004). In contrast to this sector-wide dynamic, Daddow (2012) points to a single person when explaining the presence of Euroscepticism among UK tabloids: Rupert Murdoch, owner of *The Sun*, *The Times* and *Sunday Times*. Daddow (2012) argues that Murdoch used a certain amount of political influence by supporting UK prime ministers on the condition that they adopt a particular stance on European integration, while simultaneously promoting Euroscepticism via its own newspapers. This, according to Daddow (2012), has altered the debate in the UK regarding European integration. As an example of this political power, Daddow (2012) cites Lance Price who worked for Tony Blair's Labour government and stated in 1998: 'We've promised News International we won't make any changes to our Europe policy without informing them' (Price, 2010). Rupert Murdoch was, and still is, the owner of News International. Arsenault and Castells (2008) argue that Murdoch's hostility towards the European project stems from the belief that it imposes excessive rules on British companies and offers no competitive edge to the British media sector. However, Copeland and Copsy (2017) dispute this notion that the British newspapers, with Murdoch at the forefront, are primarily responsible for fuelling British Euroscepticism. They argue that 'issue capture' has taken place in the British debate on the EU, where a small, passionate group dominates a political topic that is of little interest to the majority but very important to them (Copeland and Copsy, 2017; Copsy & Haughton, 2014). According to Copeland and Copsy (2017), the growth of Euroscepticism can be explained by this "issue capture" in the British debate on the EU and an absence of pro-European rhetoric in UK politics to counter these Eurosceptic voices. Although the literature is divided about the different causes for the negative framing of the EU and European integration among British newspapers, there seems to be consensus in the literature that the early 1990s, marked by the Maastricht Treaty, can be marked as a tipping point of growing Euroscepticism (Daddow, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Wilkes & Wring, 1998; Startin, 2015; Startin and Brack, 2015; Gifford, 2009; Vasilopoulou, 2013;).

2.3.1. The Maastricht Treaty as the tipping point in UK Euroscepticism

The literature discusses a variety of reasons for why the Maastricht Treaty can be seen as a tipping point of growing Euroscepticism. Hooghe and Marks (2009, p. 21) point to the ratification process of the Maastricht Treaty as "a turning point in the causal underpinnings of European integration", leading to referendums and a sequence of national discussions that made the public aware that European integration was diminishing national sovereignty. The

signing of the Maastricht Treaty led to European policy-making elites increasingly having to 'look over their shoulders when negotiating European issues' (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 5). This falls in line with a shared view in the literature that the Maastricht Treaty presented a significant moment of debate and opposition to the EU (Taggart, 1998; Sowemimo, 1999). The renaming of Maastricht from 'Community' to 'Union' indicated a new politicisation of European integration and influenced public consciousness among the member states, challenging the earlier assumption that the EU was only a commercial block composed of states with similar ideologies, centred around the concept of a Single European Market (Startin, 2015). Grande and Hutter (2016) support this perspective by arguing that the Maastricht Treaty was the most politicised integration phase and signalled a turning point in the public's understanding of European integration. Simpson and Startin (2023) argue that the Maastricht Treaty marked a shift, specifically for British tabloids, towards a more Eurosceptic stance and the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism from that period onwards. According to Startin (2015), the replacement of Thatcher by John Major as a more supportive prime minister of the EC together with the continuous process of ratifying the Maastricht Treaty, resulted in a change in how tabloids reported on the matter, adopting a more critical stance (Startin, 2015). Although the literature identifies the Maastricht Treaty period as having transformative effects on the development of Euroscepticism in the UK and among UK newspapers, section 2.4 will highlight that a complete understanding of how the full spectrum of British newspapers framed the EU and European integration during this time is lacking.

2.4. Identifying the gap and contribution of this study

Previous research into the media's portrayal of the European Union has mainly used quantitative content analyses to explore the prominence, volume, and tone (positive/negative) of EU-related news coverage, alongside the frequency of specific topics within the media discourse (Peter and De Vreese, 2004; De Vreese et al., 2006, 2011; Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005; Kandyła and De Vreese, 2011; Gavin, 2000; Copeland and Copsey, 2017; Meyer, 2010; Wenzel, 2015). These studies have provided valuable insights into the structural and thematic elements of EU media discourse, highlighting the general trends in news reporting about the EU. These studies have largely focused on identifying broad, generic news frames across different member states through quantitative methods, offering insights into the prevalence of certain frames but not delving into the nuanced, qualitative aspects of frame construction and use within specific contexts (Medrano and Gray, 2010; D'Haenens, 2005; Vliegthart et al., 2008). However, some studies have focused more specifically on how British newspapers

framed the EU during important moments in European integration history, using a qualitative framing analysis.

An example of the use of a qualitative framing analysis is the work of Hawkins (2012) who provides a qualitative perspective through his discourse analysis of British newspaper coverage during the negotiations of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE) and the Treaty of Lisbon. His findings reveal that British newspapers framed the UK-EU relationship in terms of danger and separation, viewing the EU from a nationalistic standpoint. Another important qualitative study is that of Barth and Bijsmans (2018), who did research on how European integration was debated around the Maastricht Treaty among two UK quality newspapers - *The Times* and *The Guardian*. They concluded that these quality newspapers became increasingly critical of many elements of European integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994). Moreover, they revealed which frames were dominantly used for quality newspapers throughout this period and how these frames evolved. This has provided valuable insights into how quality newspapers used various frames and tones during this period.

However, the role and framing of tabloids during this period, known for their significant contribution to Eurosceptic narratives in the UK, has not been thoroughly explored in this context (Simpson & Startin, 2023). Research by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) showed that the use of news frames depended on the type of outlet and the type of topic. They concluded that the most significant differences were between sensationalist vs. serious types of outlets. They specifically refer to British tabloids as examples of sensationalist news outlets. In their research, they found sober and serious newspapers and television news programs more often used the responsibility and conflict frames in the presentation of news, whereas sensationalist outlets more often used the human interest frame (Idem). One of the reasons provided by the literature for this difference is tabloids' focus on their "salability" (Anderson & Weymouth, 1999; Wiener, 1988; Picard, 1998; Esser, 1999). Although little is known about the framing of tabloids during this study's research period, recent literature suggests several trends. Previous studies have shown that tabloids are more negative in their tone towards the EU compared to quality newspapers, and they tend to emphasise the themes of immigration, national sovereignty and security more heavily (De Vreese et al., 2006; Zappettini, 2021; Leconte, 2010; Simpson & Startin, 2023; Startin, 2015; Levy et al., 2016). Moreover, it is expected that the conflict frame will be less prominent among tabloids compared to quality newspapers (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). Additionally, I expect the consulted tabloids to reframe economic arguments within the debates of sovereignty, security, and migration

(Zappetini, 2021; Moore and Ramsay, 2017). This reframing is expected to present the negative economic consequences of European integration as being tied to a loss of sovereignty, diminished security, or reduced control over migration. Lastly, it is expected that the Maastricht Treaty will be a tipping point for increased Euroscepticism under the consulted tabloids.

From this section follows that I cannot assume that the framing by tabloids before, during and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994) will be the same as that by quality newspapers and thus could be different. As a result, I have an incomplete picture of how tabloids, with their broader reach among UK citizens and ‘agenda-setting’ influence, framed the EU during one of the most important integration periods of the EU, later recognised as a tipping point for Euroscepticism. Moreover, while the Maastricht Treaty period is identified as the beginning of mainstreaming Euroscepticism among British tabloids (Simpson & Startin, 2023), the specific framing strategies used by these tabloids during this time remain unknown. This makes researching this question a relevant extension of Barth and Bijsmans’ (2018) work and an effort to complete this picture.

3. Research Design

3.1. Introduction

This research uses a qualitative framing analysis to address the research question: ‘How did British tabloids frame the EU and European integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty (1990-1994)?’. First, a general visual overview of the quantitative outcomes—such as the frequency of articles per newspaper and the distribution of frames—will be provided. These will help establish a baseline understanding of the prominence and importance of different frames. The integration of these quantitative insights will add to the qualitative framing analysis by providing empirical evidence to support or challenge the qualitative interpretations.

3.2. Method

The choice to conduct a qualitative framing analysis is based on several reasons. First, media framing is by its very nature about the subtleties in language, tone, and presentation as well as the content presentation (Entman, 1993). Qualitative techniques are especially well-suited for showing these subtle communications because they allow a thorough, context-sensitive understanding of how some parts are stressed and others omitted. Though a quantitative method might measure the frequency of words and phrases, it is not as in-depth in interpreting the absence of some elements that could suggest a deliberate disregard for other points of view or concerns. Qualitative analysis allows the researcher to thoroughly grasp the strategic construction and development of these frames over time in relation to the EU and European integration. Second, political events like the signing of the Maastricht Treaty made the early 1990s a significant period in the history of European integration. The way these circumstances affected the media's framing processes can be studied with a qualitative framing study (e.g., Barth & Bijsmans, 2018). Knowing why some frames were used over others requires an understanding of the socio-political environment in which the tabloids functioned. This method allows for that relevant context to be taken into account. The framing analysis of this work will focus on generic frames, making a comparison over time and across themes possible (De Vreese, 2005; Entman et al., 2009). This is relevant, as it can help understand how framing of the EU and European integration may have evolved during this important period for Euroscepticism and European integration.

3.3. Data sources and collection

This research will focus on tabloids as its primary subject of analysis. The sources used for this qualitative framing analysis are articles from the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*. These tabloids were chosen based on their diverse audiences, political viewpoints and high readership (ABC, 2024). By including tabloids with varied political orientations and audience demographics, this research aims to capture a wide spectrum of tabloid discourse. High readership suggests that these tabloids are widely distributed and consumed, indicating that a sizable portion of the population was reached by the way they framed EU problems. This makes it possible to analyse a comprehensive and representative sample of the tabloid media landscape. The *Daily Mirror* targeted primarily working class and left-leaning readers, differing significantly from the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* in political orientation and target audience (Bingham & Conboy, 2009). The *Daily Express* was chosen for its distinctly Eurosceptic stance and influence over the British Eurosceptic debate in present times (Simpson & Startin, 2023). Although The Sun is an obvious tabloid missing in this list, it was excluded because its digital archives do not extend beyond 1996.

Building on Barth & Bijsmans' (2018) study, which examined framing in high-quality newspapers during the same period, this study replicates their timeframe and event-focused methodology to ensure comparability. 1994 is included even though 1993 was the year the Maastricht Treaty was ratified as many of its features—like the creation of the European Monetary Institute—went into force and took shape in this year. This inclusion provides a clearer picture of how the EU and European integration were portrayed not only during the ratification but also in the immediate aftermath of the Maastricht Treaty's passage. This study expands on Barth & Bijsmans' selection by including three additional events. Barth & Bijsmans' original approach includes only one event each in 1990, 1991, and 1994, but four events in 1992, potentially causing an unbalanced period representation. Adding three more events across these years ensures a more balanced and comprehensive analysis of tabloid coverage, addressing the 1992 disproportion in the original study. For the year 1990, this will be the Rome summit, for 1991 the Luxembourg summit and for 1994 the Essen summit. This research will focus on articles around summits and referenda, as research has shown that media coverage intensifies around events, and a substantial amount of media framing can be expected around the summits and referenda during this period (Müller, 2011; Meyer, 2010). In total, this research will focus on the tabloid's coverage of eight important summits - Dublin on 25 and 26 June 1990, Rome on 27-28 October 1990, Luxembourg on 28-29 June 1991, Maastricht on 9-10 December 1991, Lisbon on 27 June 1992, Copenhagen on 21-23 June 1993, Corfu on 24-

25 June 1994 and Essen on 9-10 December 1994. Moreover, I will focus on four referendums during this period - the first Danish referendum on 2 June 1992, the Irish referendum on 18 June 1992, the French referendum on 20 September 1992 and the second Danish referendum on 18 May 1993. This study focuses on articles published three days before, during, and three days after each specific summit or referendum to ensure a comprehensive and sufficient number of articles per event for analysis. The articles were collected through various databases: the *Daily Express* articles were retrieved from UKpressonline, and those from the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* were accessed via Gale Primary Sources. Through the use of keywords, a first selection of articles was made. These keywords were: 'EC', 'EU', 'European Union', 'Brussels', 'country of referendum/summit', and 'Maastricht'. Based on this first selection, 268 articles were found.

After choosing a set of 35 articles at first from the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Daily Express* spread across the different events, an inductive method was used for defining five generic frames. An inductive method was used, since the current knowledge on the particular framing of the EU and European integration by British tabloids during this period is limited. Although I know via Barth & Bijsmans' (2018) article which frames were dominant for quality newspaper articles—Sovereignty, Efficiency, Democratic quality, Security and peace and Economic consequences— it is uncertain whether this is also the case for tabloids. However, based on the literature discussed earlier, I expect a focus on sovereignty, immigration and security issues in the coverage of the tabloids (Simpson & Startin, 2023; Zappettini, 2021; Levy et al., 2016). Each article was carefully read, and relevant quotes or excerpts were identified that illustrated how the EU and European integration were framed. The articles were read sentence-by-sentence and for each identified frame, detailed information was noted in an Excel sheet, including the Article ID, Date, Source, Quote/Excerpt, Frame, Tone and Page Number. This approach ensures that every aspect of the framing is captured and analysed in detail. As the analysis progressed, frames and coding criteria were regularly reviewed and refined to match new patterns in the data. This involved periodically reassessing the frames and criteria in light of new excerpts and quotes that did not fit neatly into existing categories. Through this repetitive process, five generic frames were identified: Sovereignty, Economic Consequences, Efficiency, Democratic Quality, and Conflict. These frames were not pre-defined but emerged inductively from the data, reflecting the dominant ways in which the tabloids portrayed the EU and European integration. The absence of both the security as well as the immigration frame was unexpected based on this study's literature review (Simpson & Startin, 2023; Zappettini, 2021; Moore and Ramsay, 2017). Each frame was then clearly defined and described as shown

in section 3.4 of this study, with specific criteria and examples provided to ensure clarity and consistency in their application. I then sorted through the initial body of 268 articles, including only those that contained at least one of the five generic frames. Issue-specific frames or frames that appeared only sporadically were excluded, as the focus on generic frames allows for the examination of how dominant overarching frames evolve over time (de Vreese, 2005). An example of such a frame that only sporadically appeared was the security and peace frame. Articles that did not include any frame were also not included in the analysis.

A dataset of 229 articles was the result of this improved selection procedure. In total, 1049 frames have been identified in the 229 articles. In line with Entman's (1993) view on the importance of selection in relation to framing analysis, this research has also included quotes from politicians sharing their view on the EU and European integration as tabloids also select which quotes to share with the public and which to ignore. In my framing analysis, I have included not only explicit references to the EU or European integration but also instances where tabloids framed the EU or further European integration through mentions of multiple European leaders. As for the reader, these references are essentially equivalent to the EU and/or European integration. An example includes: "Six of Europe's federalist leaders meet today to plan their Maastricht tactics which, it is feared, may include a summit ambush for Major" (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1860781208-2). Apart from that, this research looks at the articles' tone—positive, negative, or neutral—in relation to the recognised frames. Understanding the tone of the tabloids makes it possible to understand how the EU and European integration were presented as well as the sentiment they expressed.

3.4. The five frames

Sovereignty

Sovereignty refers to the authority and power that a state or government has over its own people and territory, without interference from outside forces. This frame concerns the assessment of the EU and European integration in relation to its impact on national sovereignty. The positive version and use of this frame portrays the EU and European integration as a way to enhance national sovereignty by granting member states greater influence and improving its position on the world stage. An example is: "On balance, the Daily Mail does accept that by remaining at the centre of Europe, Britain is best able to defend and advance its interest" (Daily Mail, 1993; EE1861232372.). The neutral stance on the matter suggests that, without explicitly assessing the present circumstances, the EU and European integration should not disproportionately limit

national sovereignty. An example is: “The treaty on the table at Maastricht needs to balance the benefits of joint action, against the right of governments, where necessary, to take separate national decisions” (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1861004555-2). Negative usage characterises the EU and European integration as a potential danger to national sovereignty. An example of this negative use: “[Thatcher] as the defender of Britain against domination by the European Commissioners, she can grab support across all party lines” (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1862090331).

Economic consequences

Economic consequences refers to the economic effects of the EU and European integration on national economies. It focuses on costs and benefits of EU membership and further European integration. When this frame is used positively, the EU and European integration are seen as ways to boost economic prospects, save expenses, and raise global competitiveness. An example is: “He said that British industry desired a single currency because it would reduce costs and open up more opportunities” (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1861068886-3). A neutral version of this frame is used when highlighting the projected economic path of the European Union and/or possible trade-offs between collective activities and individual national decisions, without assessing the current or future situation. An example is: "Meanwhile, the other 11 members purposefully commit themselves to 1994 as the deadline for the creation of a central European bank and 1997 as the starting pistol for introduction of a single currency by the turn of the century” (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1862209295). The negative use of this frame emphasises how EU policies or further economic integration within the EU could damage national economies by increasing expenses, implementing tighter regulations hindering businesses, or reducing industrial autonomy. An example is: “Governmental economists claim that the planned European social charter would cost £3 billion and thousands of jobs” (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1862090490).

Efficiency

Efficiency in the context of European Union and European integration refers to the efficiency with which decisions are taken and carried out and the degree to which EU institutions are doing work that may be better done by individual states. In particular, this frame focuses on the effectiveness of EU policy-making and the cost/benefit of working together within the EU to solve certain problems or achieve desired outcomes. Used positively, it frames EU policies and integration as ways to achieve more efficient results. An example is: “Airlines will have

much greater freedom to operate services on routes throughout the EC" (Daily Mail, 1992; EE1861661535). The neutral use of this frame either points to areas where the EU may be more effective without judging the current situation or underlines the need of thoroughly examining EU policies for need and effectiveness. An example is: "In some areas, such as environmental protection or cross-border transport, action at the European level can make sense" (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1861004555-2). The negative version of this frame argues that the EU and European integration are hindering a nation's effectiveness, often by putting unnecessary obligations and regulations on citizens and businesses. An example of this use: "He [Delors, EC President] breakfasts off blue books, dines on memoranda, sups on forms in triplicate, and dreams of spy-satellite photos monitoring what kind of apples farmers grow in Somerset and Normandy" (Daily Mail, 1992; EE1860914621).

Democratic quality

The Democratic quality frame refers to how democratic values are reflected in or undermined by the EU or in EU decision-making procedures. It also refers to the support or opposition of the public towards the EU and/or European integration. When used in a positive way, it shows support from the general public for the EU or further European integration. An example is: "THE DANES settled Europe's Maastricht crisis last night with an overwhelming Yes to the treaty" (Daily Express, 1993; DExp_1993_05_19_001). The neutral version of this frame refers to the democratic values that must be upheld within the EU, without assessing the current situation. An example is: "The Community must ensure that power is kept as close as possible to the people" (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1861004555-2). The negative use of this frame critically depicts the EU as run by unelected officials, who do not listen to the people and speak a language the people don't understand, e.g. 'Eurobabble' (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_06_26_008). It is also used to highlight widespread opposition against the EU and/or European integration and frame the EU as having democratic deficits. An example of this is: "Who does Delors think he is? So far as I am aware he does not speak from the position or the power of an elected representative" (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_12_09_010).

Conflict

The "Conflict" frame concentrates on the conflicts, disputes, and confrontations that arise particularly between the UK and the EU or between the UK and those who support more European integration. Used in a positive way, the UK is framed as the "winner" of a conflict with the EU. An example includes: "John Major defeated the Europeans via knockout last

night” (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1861113333). The neutral version of this frame highlights conflicts between the UK and the EU or EU leaders who stand for further European integration but without mentioning an obvious winner. An example is: “Gang of six plot ambush for Major” (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1860781208-2). The negative version of this frame is used to depict the UK as being on the losing side or on the back foot in the conflict with the EU or EU leaders who stand for further European integration. Examples include: “There was speculation that Mr Major’s humiliation in the European Union Majority voting row three months ago - when he surrendered despite a promise to fight (..)” (Daily Mail, 1994; EE1861263991), or “This is a defeat for the people of Britain” (Daily Mirror, 1991; MPKDDV379513565).

3.5. Limitations of the research

As just three tabloids were examined, the results might not apply to all British tabloids. Moreover, the reliance on available digital archives means that some relevant articles might have been overlooked if they are not included in the accessed databases. Lastly, the coding of frames was conducted solely by myself due to limiting resources, which decreases the objectivity of the analysis.

4. Research outcomes

4.1. Distribution and analysis of articles, frames and tones

Below, Figure 1 shows the distribution of articles by tabloids during the 1990-94 period, broken down by event. Based on the articles written around the different events, it seems clear that the tabloids' attention for the EU and European integration was at its highest in 1991, when the Luxembourg summit and Maastricht summit took place. Afterwards, the number of articles by the tabloids remains quite stable between 15-25 articles written around the other events, with the exception of the 1994 Copenhagen summit with only 9 relevant articles published. This overview of the number of articles per event is relevant because part of framing involves selection (Entman, 1993).

Figure 1: Number of articles per event.

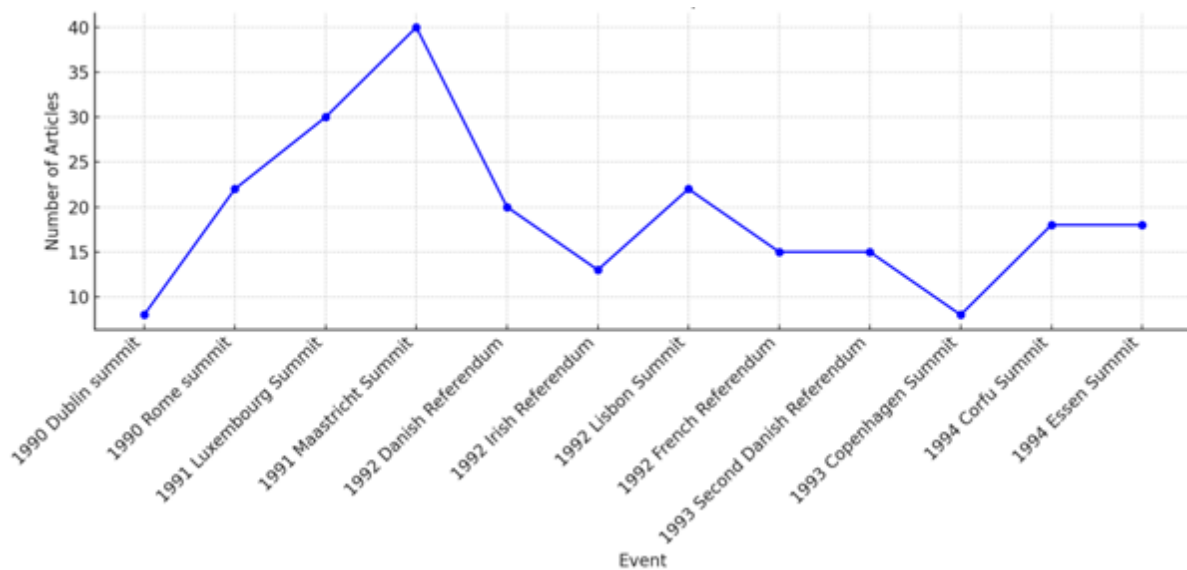
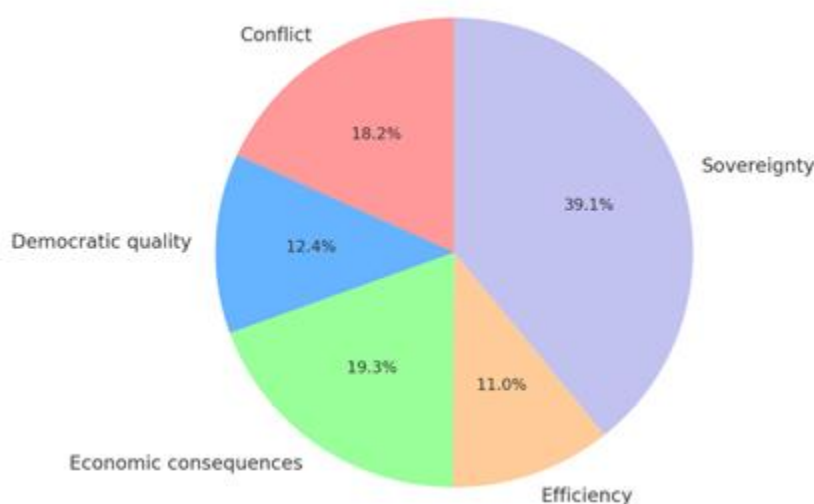


Figure 2 shows the distribution of frames across all tabloids throughout the period that was examined (1990-1994). As shown in the pie chart below, one can see the percentage breakdown of the five generic frames formulated and identified among the three tabloids. Based on this study's research, the dominant frame across all tabloids was the sovereignty frame with 39.1% of all frames identified falling under this generic frame. This initial finding indicates a significant focus on issues related to national sovereignty in the coverage of the EU and European integration by British tabloids. This focus on sovereignty by the consulted British tabloids is in line with this study's expectations. However, if I compare the prominence of the sovereignty frame between quality newspapers as researched by Barth & Bijsmans' (2018) with this study, I see in Appendix 1 an interesting result. Namely, the sovereignty frame appeared eight times as the most prominent in quality newspapers and only six times in

tabloids, after adjusting for the difference in the number of quality newspapers and tabloids.¹ Although specific numbers are not available, it shows an interesting different image than was expected. Moreover, figures 2 and 4 reveal that the conflict frame was not only present but also at one time the dominant frame. This was unexpected, as the literature indicated that quality newspapers would use the conflict frame more frequently while Barth and Bijsmans' (2018) study did not even include the conflict frame, as it was not prominently used enough to include in their generic frames.

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of frames across all tabloids.



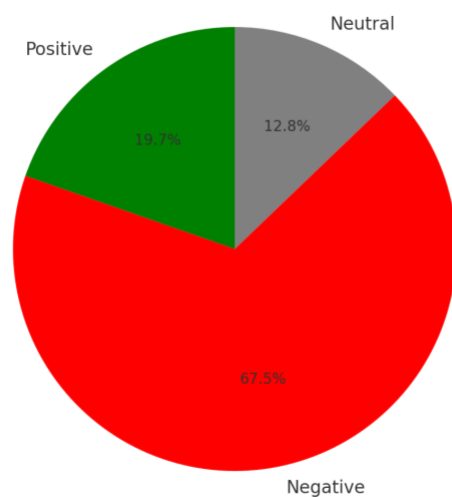
Furthermore, since this study aims to understand how British tabloids framed the EU and European integration, particularly during a period viewed as a 'tipping point' in Euroscepticism, analysing the distribution of tones in the tabloids' coverage of these topics is highly relevant. Figure 3 highlights this distribution, revealing that across the entire period and all tabloids, 67.5% of the frames used by tabloids contained a negative tone towards the EU and/or European integration.² This contrasts sharply with the 19.7% of frames that contain a positive tone, and the 12.8% that are neutral. This negative framing by the consulted tabloids is as expected based on the literature (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2006; Simpson & Startin, 2023). When comparing the distribution of negative and positive tones between the consulted tabloids and the quality newspapers from Barth and Bijsmans' study, I find that the negative tone was used at least once in 51 instances for the different frames during the studied period among tabloids,

¹ I compared Annex 1 with the overview on page 222 of Barth and Bijsmans' (2018) article.

² The conflict frame was not included in figure 3 as its positive/negative/neutral tone does not have a similar meaning as compared to the other four generic frames.

compared to 46 instances by the quality newspapers (Annex 1).³⁴⁵ Regarding the use of positive tones, tabloids used at least one positive frame 27 times, compared to 16 times among quality newspapers. I expected that tabloids would be more negative about the EU and European integration compared to quality newspapers (BRON). Although this comparison is limited as the exact figures are missing in Barth & Bijsmans' study, making it difficult to assess the differences in intensity, I can still draw some cautious conclusions from Annex 1. The data suggest that while both tabloids and quality newspapers predominantly used negative tones, the tabloids did so more frequently. However, quality newspapers used positive tones even less frequently than tabloids, which might indicate a more consistently negative portrayal overall. This suggests that while tabloids were potentially more negative in their framing, quality newspapers possibly maintained a more consistently critical stance by using positive frames less consistent. This means that I cannot confirm our expectation that tabloids framed the EU and European integration more negatively than quality newspapers.

Figure 3: Distribution of tones in tabloid coverage.



When looking at the tone development between 1990 and 1994, there is a clear rise in negative tones and a comparable decline in positive tones. Figure 4 clearly illustrates this trend. The effect is especially clear when one concentrates especially on the Maastricht summit in the light of its possible function as a tipping point in Euroscepticism, a topic that is covered in detail in the literature review. Before the Maastricht summit, 59% of articles portrayed the EU and

³ After adjusting for the difference in the number of tabloids versus quality newspapers.

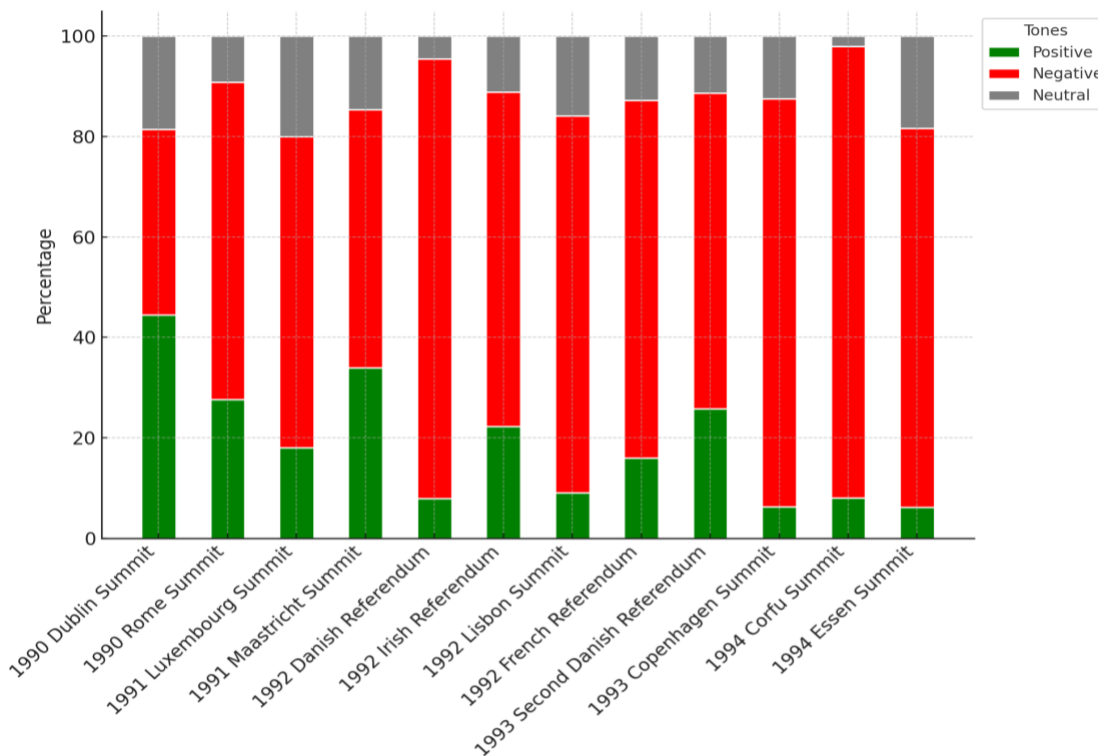
⁴ The conflict frame was not included in this comparison 3 as its positive/negative/neutral tone does not have a similar meaning as compared to the other four generic frames.

⁵ I compared Annex 1 with the overview on page 222 of Barth and Bijsmans' article.

European integration negatively, while 25% on average used positive tones. The proportion of positive tones increased to 34% and that of negative tones fell to 51% during the summit. However, the tone changed significantly in the aftermath of the summit; just 12% of stories continued to use a positive tone, while a remarkable 77% had a negative one.⁶ These figures suggest that the Maastricht summit on the Maastricht Treaty was indeed a tipping point when it comes to the negative framing of the EU and European integration among our consulted tabloids. One could argue that this tendency towards negativity contributed to an unbalanced ‘news diet’ for tabloid readers, potentially influencing public perception towards cynicism regarding European integration or the EU in general.

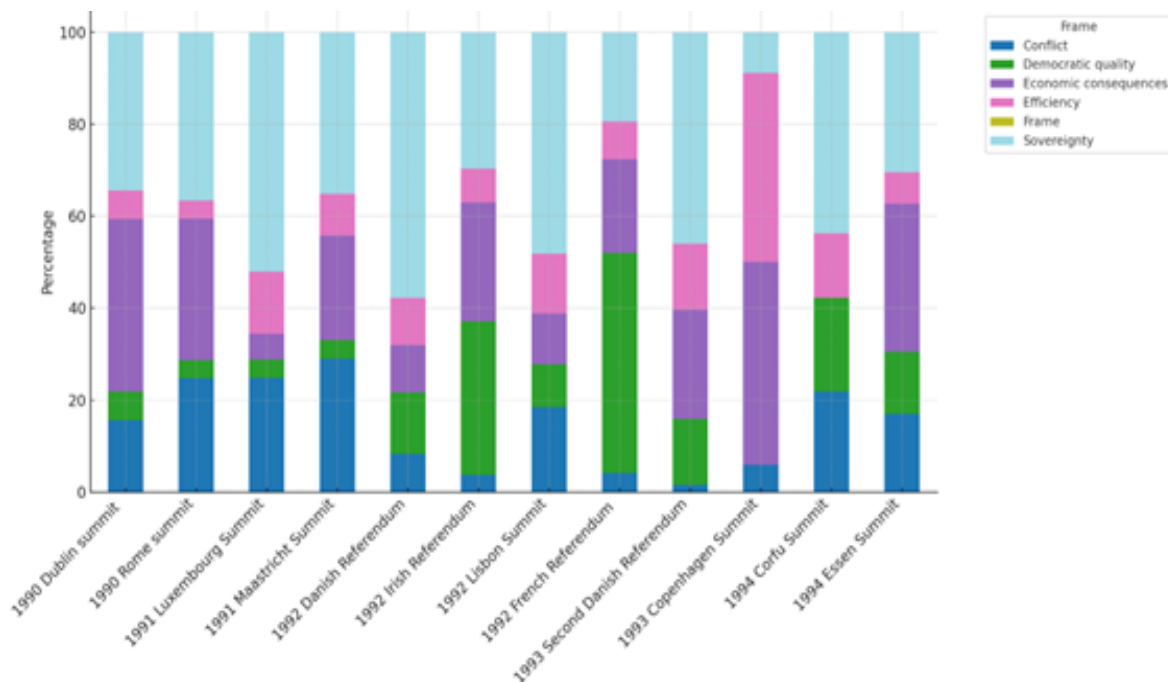
Now that I have a general understanding of the frames and tones used by British tabloids, it is important to focus on their development from 1990-1994. This analysis directly addresses the research question by exploring how these frames and tones developed and shifted over time, revealing nuances and underlying shifts in the tabloids’ portrayal and perspective of the EU and European integration. Importantly, it helps clarify the underlying changes in tabloid perspectives and highlights the events or circumstances that may have triggered the emergence or dominance of specific frames or tones during this important period in European integration history. Section 4.2 will delve deeper into these developments, providing an analysis of the framing and tones over time.

⁶ The calculations were made by averaging across all events after the Maastricht summit.

Figure 4: Percentage tone distribution by event from 1990 to 1994 (excluding Conflict frame).

4.2. Framing developments over time

This section delves into the framing developments of British tabloids concerning the EU and European integration from 1990-1994. Figure 5 shows the percentage of each frame per event across all tabloids, supporting this analysis.

Figure 5: Percentage of each frame per event across all tabloids.

4.2.1. Sovereignty frame

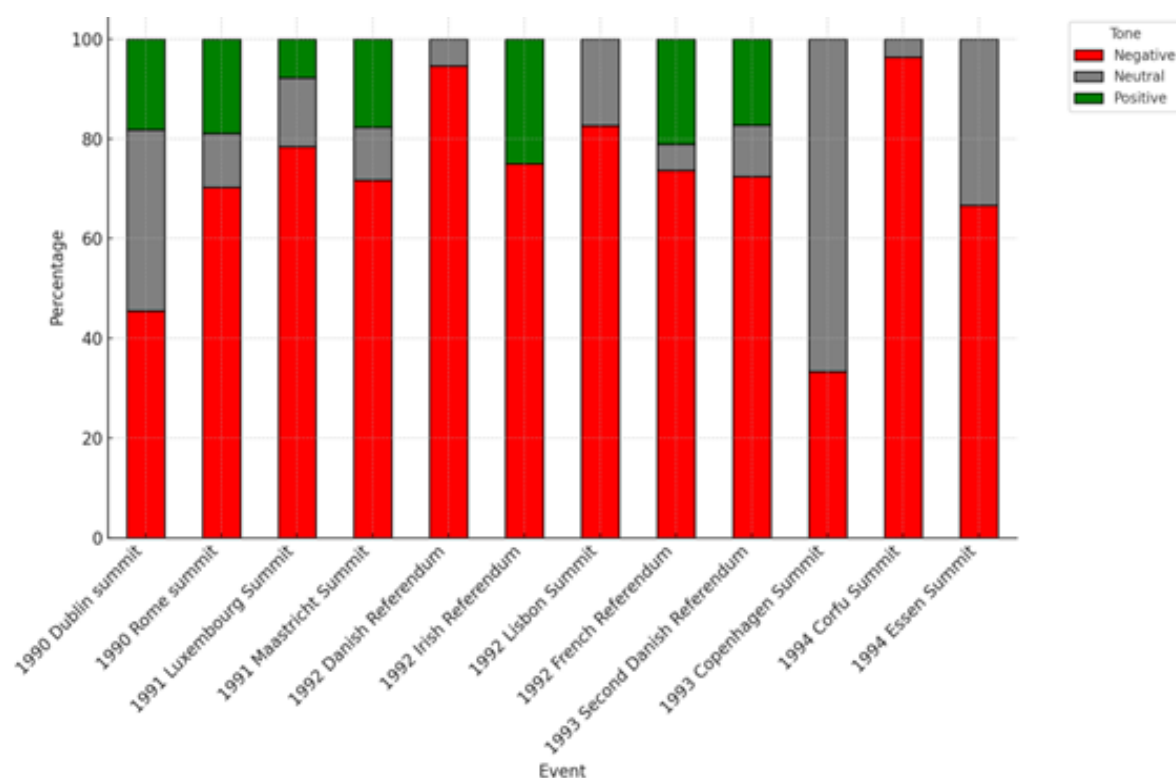
Around the Dublin and Rome summits in 1990, the tabloids that were consulted frequently used the sovereignty frame to highlight the danger that European integration posed to British national sovereignty. The sovereignty framing was mostly used at this time to present Margaret Thatcher as a champion of national sovereignty against a looming European superstate. An example includes: “The battle-line was drawn when she gave an unequivocal answer to a three-point plan to switch power from Westminster to the Eurocrats of Brussels. 'No, No, No,' she replied defiantly” (Daily Express, 1990; DExp_1990_10_31_001). The sovereignty frame in this period was also often used to negatively depict European integration as a process in which national identities would be “swallowed” and “submerged in a European superstate” (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1862090331; EE1861454430). An exception to the rule here was the *Daily Mirror*, who positively used the sovereignty frame to frame further European integration: “Our 11 European partners are marching forward while we are left to limp behind” (1990; LNUALD223245430).

In 1991, especially during the summits of Luxembourg and Maastricht, the sovereignty frame continued to be dominant in the tabloids consulted. Its focus was on the potential loss of British sovereignty to a centralised European authority. During the Luxembourg summit, the tabloids stressed Prime Minister John Major's resistance to any moves towards a "federal superstate" (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_06_28_002). This frame was strengthened by warnings about the consequences of a common foreign policy and political union, which were seen as threats to British parliamentary sovereignty and control over domestic affairs: “Britain's worries concern the sovereignty of Parliament, which the Government fears could be fatally undermined by the sort of European Union being urged by people such as Mr. Delors” (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_06_26_008). The framing intensified around the Maastricht summit, where the proposed extensions of EC powers were framed as the “greatest abdication of national and parliamentary sovereignty in our history” (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1861068886). Thatcher's warnings about the creeping power of Brussels into every area of British life were also prominently reported around these events: “GUARD against handing sovereignty to Brussels. The latest EC package amounted to a massive extension of community power and competence into elements of every area of our national life” (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_06_27_001). Furthermore, the idea that federalism was the same as the centralization of power in Brussels was a theme that came back often. The *Daily Express* shared this sentiment with quotes like: “Those who pretend that federalism means devolving power from Brussels to Britain are either stupid or liars, or both” (1991; DExp_1991_07_01_008).

1992 saw the consulted tabloids continue to make frequent use of the sovereignty frame, particularly around the referendums in France and Denmark. The sovereignty frame was mostly used to represent the danger of a loss of national identity and a growing concentration of power in Brussels. By contrast to 1990 and 1991, this framing was used with a greater focus on the EU's bureaucratic overreach in connection to its effects on national sovereignty. During the Danish referendum, the tabloids highlighted the widespread fear of losing national sovereignty to Brussels. For example, the *Daily Express* noted: “The Danes voted 'no' for a variety of reasons. Most of all, out of fear that their tiny country would be swallowed up by Mr Delors' Brussels bureaucracy” (1992; DExp_1992_06_04_008-2). This framing supported the idea that European integration threatened national identities. The negative portrayal of the European Commission and its president, Jacques Delors, was also a recurring pattern. The *Daily Mail* reported that the “European Commission President was being accused of frightening Danish voters by apparently aiming at greater powers for himself and his Brussels bureaucrats” (1992; EE1860830302-2). This suggested that the centralization of power in Brussels was driven by self-serving bureaucrats rather than the collective good of Europe. There were also warnings about the potential for increased EC centralization and control. The *Daily Express* warned that “opponents of the treaty said it would lead to greatly increased EC centralization and control and mean loss of national identity and sovereignty” (1992; DExp_1992_06_04_008).

The tabloids consulted as part of this research carried on using the sovereignty frame throughout 1993, particularly in the run-up to the second Danish referendum. The emphasis stayed on the supposed dangers that more European integration and Brussels' concentration of power would bring to national sovereignty and identity. The threat of federalism and the creation of a Euro-superstate were recurring themes. The *Daily Express* warned: “Before you can say Jacques Delors, the EC federalists' tanks will roll” (1993; DExp_1993_05_20_008). Framing the risks of European federalism and increased European integration, this image suggested an approaching threat to national sovereignty. The tabloid coverage framed the opposition to these federalist actions as a protection of national sovereignty and identity. For example, the *Daily Mail* noted: “The federalists will have to face the fact that ... it is dangerous to tamper with national identities and feelings” (1993; EE1860846244). A notable development in 1993 was the more nuanced approach in some articles, using the sovereignty frame to underline the necessity of being at the centre of the European Community while still protecting national interests. For example, the *Daily Mail* said in its Comment article: “On balance, the Daily Mail does accept that by remaining at the centre of Europe, Britain is best able to defend and advance its interest” (1993; EE1861232372).

The framing of the EU as a danger to national sovereignty became more intense in 1994, and the feared centralisation ambitions of European federalists received more attention. One constant element was the portrayal of Delors and Dehaene as threats to British sovereignty. The *Daily Express* noted: “Delors leaves the corridors of Brussels this December after years dedicated to syphoning powers away from national governments into his clutches” (1994; DExp_1994_06_23_013). Similarly, the *Daily Express* described Dehaene as “a dedicated federalist, a Delors Mark Two” (1994; DExp_1994_06_23_013). On the other hand, the resistance against this federalist push, particularly through the actions of Prime Minister John Major, was also highlighted: “Mr Major is determined to block front-runner and arch-federalist Jean-Luc Dehaene of Belgium” (1994; DExp_1994_06_23_013). This framing presented Major as a defender of national sovereignty against the centralising ambitions of EU federalists. Generally speaking, 1994 saw a greater sense of urgency and opposition in the use of the sovereignty frame as is reflected in figure 5 where the positive tone of the frame disappears in that year. The portrayal of EU federalists as aggressive and overreaching was sharper, and the defence of national sovereignty became a key issue. Overall, the tone of the sovereignty frame was consistently negative throughout the 1990-1994 period. Notable is the disappearance of the positive use of this frame near the end of 1993 and in 1994. Contrary to this study’s expectation that the consulted tabloids would frame the negative economic consequences of European integration as being tied to a loss of sovereignty, this was not the case.

Figure 6: Sovereignty frame coverage by tone (percentage) per event.

4.2.2. Economic consequences frame

In 1990, during and around the Dublin and Rome summits, the consulted tabloids' dominant focus lay on the economic consequences of European integration, as is evident from figure 4. The reporting was strongly focused on the potential risks and consequences of economic integration that were discussed during these events. During the Dublin summit, where steps towards a monetary union were discussed, economic integration was often framed as a risk. For example, one article stated: "the rest of the world is coming to see the EC as a noble enterprise in great danger of going off the rails" (Daily Express, 1990; DExp_1990_10_31_008). This frame reflects the uncertainty and potential negative consequences of further economic integration. At the same time, there was also a similar amount of reporting that highlighted the necessity of economic integration, as can be seen in figure 6. For example, an article from the *Daily Mail* stated: "London now is the financial capital of Europe. It needs to stay that way, and without monetary union we'd lose that" (1990; EE1860873936). A new use of the economic consequences frame was introduced during the Rome summit, namely as an opportunity for economic prosperity through further European integration. Often combined with survey statistics showcasing the support among exporters, statements as the following followed: "It is perhaps not so surprising that exporters should enthuse about being freed from the ups and downs and the extra costs of doing business in

Marks, Francs, Lira and so on, because that would make their job easier” (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1862090132). However, the frame was also used to negatively depict the EU’s economic policies. This new use of the economic consequences frame specifically targeted both the Social Charter and the EC’s farming subsidies: “Why Mrs Thatcher is right to dig in over the nonsense of EC farming subsidies” (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1862209295-2). An exception to the rule is the *Daily Mirror*, which praises an economic EC policy regarding better maternity pay: “Mrs Thatcher’s opposition to these progressive proposals is another example of her anti-Europeanism and will do nothing but harm to the women of Britain” (Daily Mirror, 28-10-1990; KZLNMJ436007). However, considering the editorial stance of this tabloid towards the Conservative Party, it can be argued that this frame is more about putting Thatcher in a negative light than about positively framing the EU.

In 1991, around the Luxembourg summit, the economic consequences frame was not used often among British tabloids. However, when it was used, it was mostly used to frame European integration as an economic opportunity: “He claimed British industry wanted a single currency, saying it would bring greater opportunities as well as cutting costs” (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1861068886-3). The Maastricht summit period can be characterised as one where further European integration was framed as a necessity and an opportunity from an economic consequences perspective. Whereas the *Daily Express* up until then had only framed European integration negatively or neutrally using this frame, its own Opinion article, reflecting the position of the editorial staff, now stated: “Europe is embarked on an exciting and inspiring project, whose economic and political potentials are enormous” (1991; DExp_1991_12_09_008). Also the necessity and fear of losing out when not joining further European integration was prominent in this period: “Britain would pay a heavy economic price for not committing itself to a single currency” (Daily Mirror, 1991; MPKDDV379513565). However, the tabloids did also again negatively depict the EU’s economic policies in the form of the Social Charter: “The charter proposed by Euro boss Jacques Delors could cost huge numbers of jobs and income to companies and workers” (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_12_10_007). Overall, the tabloids mostly used the economic consequences frame in this period to positively portray European integration as is evident from figure 6, emphasising the opportunities and necessity of participating in the process.

In 1992, around the Danish, Irish and French referendum and the Lisbon summit, the consulted tabloids used a new version of the economic consequences frame to portray the EU. Namely, by framing EU policies and the EU budget composition as unfair. Examples include: “Measures to help poorer countries such as Portugal would add to the level of taxation in richer

countries such as Britain” (Daily Mail, 1992; EE1860934073), and: “They are efficient, but all the time they are subsidising agriculture in France or Spain. It is not fair” (Daily Mail, 1992; EE1860914604). Also notably and specific for this period was the tabloids’ framing of the EU as the cause for the UK’s economic recession at the time through its negative portrayal of the Exchange Rate Mechanism: “British membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism has indeed had such an effect, producing the longest recession since the war and soaring unemployment” (Daily Mail, 1992; EE1860830295). The overall negative depiction of the EU through the use of this frame can at least partly be explained by ‘Black Wednesday’, on 16 September 1992, when the UK was forced to pull the pound from the ERM. This event exposed the vulnerabilities and challenges of economic integration with the EU, potentially leading to increased scepticism about the benefits of such EU policies. Figure 6 shows how this frame was used more negatively overall this year compared to the years before.

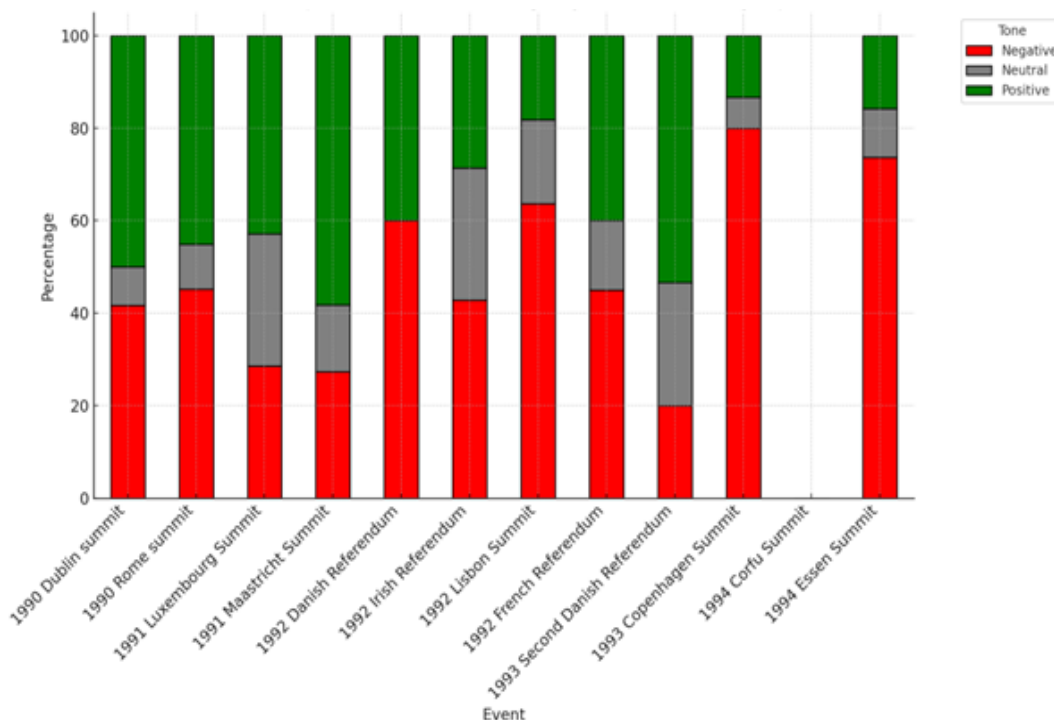
In 1993, around the second Danish referendum and the Copenhagen summit, the consulted tabloids prominently framed the economic consequences of European integration in three main ways. First, the tabloids portrayed the ERM again as a contributor to economic instability and recession, stating that the “shambolic state of the EC’s fixed currency system” was ammunition for Euro-sceptics (Daily Mail, 1993; EE1861354687). Second, the negative impact of EC regulations and the Social Charter was a recurring theme. Major’s stance that EC regulations were “destroying jobs and increasing industry’s costs” was widely reported (Daily Express, 1993; DExp_1993_06_22_004). This framing suggested that EC policies were “strangling British businesses with red tape” and high labour costs, ultimately leading to job losses and reduced competitiveness (Daily Mail, 1993; EE1862381008-2). Third, the necessity and benefits of European cooperation were also acknowledged, although less frequently. Business leaders were reported who warned that Britain risked “sidelining itself in Europe”, missing out on the single market, which was described in the *Daily Express* as the “opportunity of a business lifetime” (Daily Express, 1993; DExp_1993_05_19_002; DExp_1993_05_19_002-2). The tabloids stressed in various ways that staying engaged with Europe was crucial for protecting “British jobs, British sales and Britain’s future” (Daily Mail, 1993; EE1861232383). These frames collectively shaped a complex narrative, balancing the critique of EU policies with the recognition of the potential economic benefits of European integration.

In 1994, the consulted tabloids did not use the economic consequences frame around the Corfu summit. A new use of the frame that emerged around the Essen summit was that of the EU as an economically incompetent and perhaps even corrupt institution. This shift can be

linked to growing public criticism and scrutiny of the EU's financial management, which has been emphasised by numerous allegations of fraud and mishandled funds. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, gave instances of public outrage, including: "People get rightly angry when they see their taxes mismanaged, wasted and drained by criminal fraud", and "As much as 6 billion pound a year is being creamed from the Union's massive farm subsidy system in scams" (1994; EE1860880670). Another consistently used version of the frame which focuses on the EC social policies remained prominent during this period, an example: "stop Brussels killing British jobs by kindness" (Daily Mail, 1994; EE1860920402).

From 1990 to 1994, British tabloids framed the economic consequences of European integration in varied ways but were quite consistent in terms of its usage. Initially, during the Dublin and Rome summits, the focus was on the potential risks of economic policies. However, the necessity and benefits of integration were also highlighted. By 1991, the narrative shifted slightly to include opportunities, particularly during the Maastricht summit, where integration was framed as economically essential. In 1992, the focus turned to framing the EU as a financial burden, enlarged by events like 'Black Wednesday.' The 1993 coverage stressed how EU rules hurt employment, while in 1994 the EU was depicted as corrupt and incompetent. Overall, as figure 6 shows, the positive use of this frame clearly declined in 1992 around the Irish Referendum and Lisbon summit, as well as in the latter part of 1993 around the Copenhagen summit and in 1994 around the Essen summit, with a rise in the negative use.

Figure 7: Economic consequences frame coverage by tone (percentage) per event.



4.2.3 Efficiency frame

During the 1990 Dublin and Rome summits, the consulted British tabloids covered both the practical ease of a common currency, as well as focused on the inefficiencies and impracticality of certain EU policies. For example, the *Daily Mail* criticised the emergency measures regarding car bans as overly ambitious and impractical: "Under emergency measures, cars would be banned on certain days of the week and member countries would pool their oil stockpiles" (1990; EE1862209281-2). Grand plans for the economic and monetary union were also written off as unrelated to pressing, practical issues: "While they couldn't agree on urgent, current problems, they were only too happy to issue 'grandiose' plans for Economic and Monetary Union" (Daily Mirror, 1990; VIIPOE950984607).

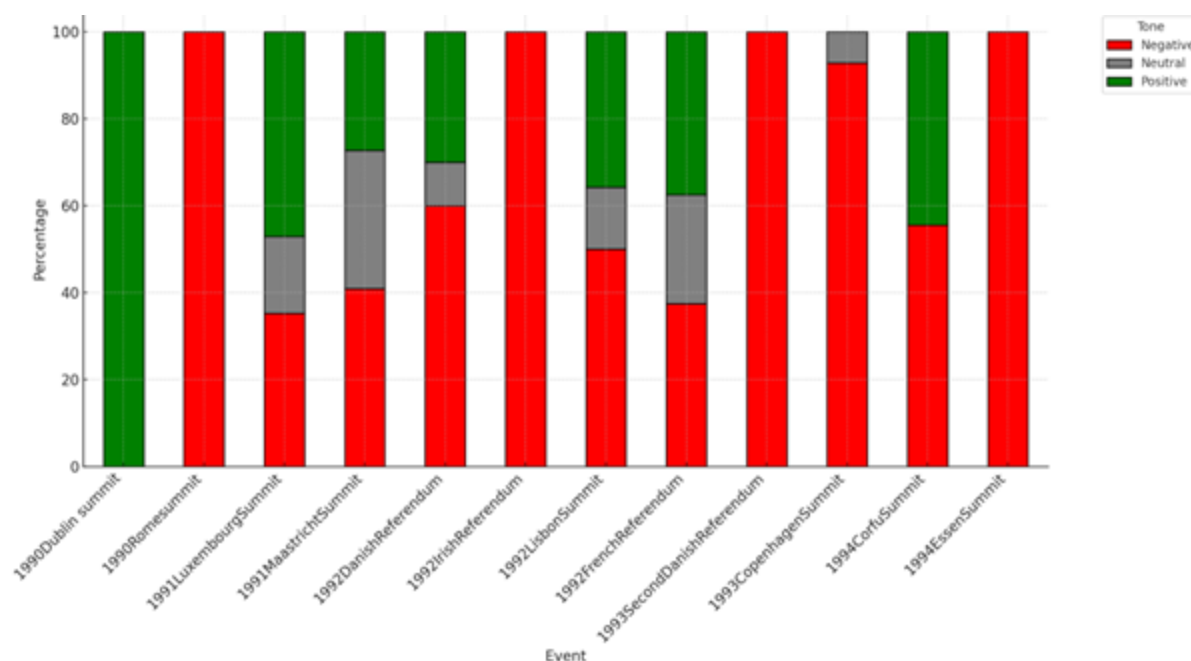
In 1991, the efficiency frame was used to highlight the positive effects on European cooperation regarding the conflict in Yugoslavia at the time: "YUGOSLAVIA'S feuding leaders early today backed a peace initiative launched by the European Community" (Daily Mail, 1991; EE1861069332). The inconsistency between the EU's goals and its actual actions remained another focus of the efficiency frame in 1991. The *Daily Express* highlighted the failure of some nations to follow the EC directives, despite their outspoken support for federalism: "Britain has been meticulous in complying with EC Directives, but some of the nations making the most noise about federalism ignore many rulings they don't like" (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_06_26_002). The narrative of bureaucratic inefficiency was also prominent, such as the failure to reduce immigration flows: "The failure to stem the flow of migrants into EC countries might increase support for the far-right" (Daily Mirror, 1991; XDMBDT526309319).

By 1992, the use of the efficiency frame widened to include both criticism of bureaucratic excesses as well as acknowledgment of the potential benefits of EU cooperation: "There should be better cooperation between us on crime, foreign affairs, defence, and immigration. That is a sensible step forward" (Daily Express, 1992; DExp_1992_06_05_008). However, the EU's bureaucratic habits were still portrayed as an important concern: "He breakfasts off blue books, dines on memoranda, sups on forms in triplicate, and dreams of spy-satellite photos monitoring what kind of apples farmers grow in Somerset and Normandy" (Daily Mail, 1992; EE1860914621).

During 1993, the efficiency frame was widely and exclusively used negatively as can be seen in figure 7. The inefficiency of the EU was highlighted among the tabloids, especially in relation to how it handled the Bosnian crisis. The *Daily Express* criticised the EU's failure to act decisively: "The internal wrangling over Europe's response to the Bosnian crisis has

undermined the Utopian moves towards a common defence policy" (Daily Express, 1993; DExp_1993_05_15_008). The tabloids also portrayed the EU's bureaucratic inefficiencies through colourful images, such as the "paper mountain" of EC subsidy forms: "Piled up, it would soar 20,000 ft into the sky... nine million farmers are likely to produce an 833,333ft pile of paperwork" (Daily Mail, 1993; EE1862314994).

In 1994, the efficiency frame included criticisms of specific EU policies and directives, as well as broader concerns about waste and mismanagement. However, around the Corfu summit, the *Daily Express* also highlighted the efficiency of further European cooperation in the fight against cross-border crime, emphasising the need for EU partners working together: "‘Crime knows no frontiers and we need to tackle it together,’ he told his EU colleagues" (Daily Express, 1994; DExp_1994_06_25_010). The *Daily Mail* described new rules as putting "unnecessary costs and bureaucracy on companies", and the tabloids carried on criticising the EU's bureaucratic excesses (Daily Mail, 1994; EE1860638123). In conclusion, the efficiency frame in the consulted tabloids from 1990 to 1992 mostly portrayed the EU as a bureaucratic entity troubled by inefficiencies. However, there was also an acknowledgment of the benefits of coordinated actions within the EU, especially in those that called for teamwork. The efficiency frame in 1993 and 1994 built upon earlier criticisms but also adjusted to new contexts, such as the Bosnian crisis and specific regulatory measures. The criticism deepened around the Second Danish Referendum and the Copenhagen summit, concentrating not just on general inefficiencies but also on the actual damage that EU policies and directives caused. A trend of more negative use of the frame is evident near the end of the studied period as can be seen in figure 7.

Figure 8: Efficiency frame coverage by tone (percentage) per event.

4.2.4. Democratic quality

In the early 1990s, the democratic quality frame was not yet prominent among the consulted tabloids. Still, examples of its use brought to light how European integration was seen to be eroding democratic principles. For example, the *Daily Express* warned: “Supposedly committed to enhancing economic and political freedom, the EC is openly arranging ever more decisions to be taken by unelected bureaucrats” (1990; DExp_1990_10_31_008). This sentiment was repeated in the *Daily Express*, which noted, “Before a British Chancellor comes to the Commons with a Budget day script written by Eurocrats in Brussels, the voters are entitled to know exactly what monetary union means for them and our centuries-old democratic process” (1990; DExp_1990_10_31_008). These fears increased in 1991 along with discussions of a European political union: “The trouble for millions of Euro citizens is that they won't have the faintest idea what the delegates are talking about” (DExp_1991_06_26_008), was how the *Daily Express* highlighted the claimed disconnect between Eurocrats and ordinary people. This was the period when the democratic quality frame was used by tabloids to challenge the legitimacy of judgements made by a depicted far-off, apparently unaccountable bureaucracy. Interestingly, at this time 43% of *Daily Mail* readers at this time favoured joining a federal union versus 31% opposed (1991; EE1861068679; EE1861068886).

Around the French and Danish referendums on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the democratic quality frame took front stage as can be seen in figure 4. The Danish referendum results were presented as results that highlighted public discontent with the lack of direct

democratic input in European decisions: “They have reminded the political and bureaucratic elites throughout Europe that the views of ordinary citizens on Euro federalism—or on any other issue—must not be taken for granted” (Daily Express, 1992; DExp_1992_06_04_008). This sentiment was echoed in the period around the Irish referendum, where the *Daily Express* stated: “The Danes' rejection of Maastricht has shown the danger of taking decisions over the heads of ordinary citizens” (1992; DExp_1992_06_16_008). During the French referendum, tabloids concentrated on how close the vote was and the consequences for the EU’s democratic legitimacy: “The wafer-thin referendum result was hailed as a victory for President Mitterrand and for Europe. But it could hardly have been closer” (Daily Express, 1992; DExp_1992_09_21_001). During this time, the usage of the democratic quality frame significantly increased as tabloids presented the EU as an organisation disconnected from its people more and more.

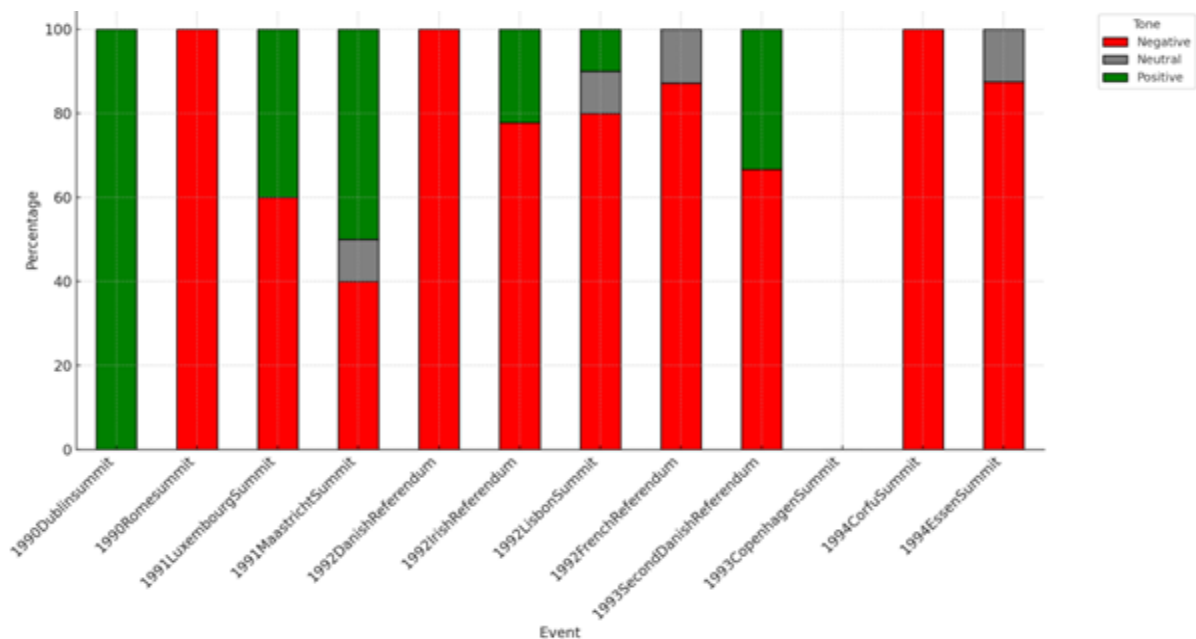
In 1993, the democratic quality frame remained important, particularly during the second Danish referendum. In this period, the tabloids emphasised that the EU's actions were undermining democratic processes and suggested that public discontent was widespread and growing. The *Daily Express* reported: “Teresa Gorman said: ‘All over Europe politicians are forcing people into a treaty nobody wants’”(1993; DExp_1993_05_19_002-2). The *Daily Mail* criticised the lack of transparency and the repression of public opinion: “The European Commission this week suppressed until after the Danish vote an opinion poll that shows waning support for Maastricht in southern EC countries” (1993; EE1861232383).

In 1994, around the Corfu and Essen summits, the democratic quality frame was used exclusively with a negative tone to depict the EU and/or European integration as is evident from figure 8. The *Daily Mail* highlighted the lack of public involvement in critical decisions: “The 340 million citizens of Europe will, of course, have no say” (1994; EE1860669424). The way this was presented highlighted the seeming divide between European citizens and EU administrators. In line with this, the *Daily Express* reported, “It risked losing even more credibility among voters already highly sceptical about its benefits” (1994; DExp_1994_12_10_014). Moreover, concerns about fraud and mismanagement within the EU were framed as threats to democratic integrity: “Fraud and ‘unnecessary interference’ by Brussels bureaucrats were two reasons why ordinary people were sceptical of the EU” (Daily Mail, 1994; EE1860880670).

From 1990 to 1994, the consulted tabloids increasingly used the democratic quality frame to critique the EU and further European integration. While first focused on the perceived disconnect between Eurocrats and citizens, this frame evolved to highlight concerns about

transparency, accountability, and the erosion of democratic processes. The 1992 referenda were important in boosting these issues, leading tabloids to frame the EU as an undemocratic entity, dominated by unaccountable bureaucrats and disconnected from the will of the people. As figure 4 shows, the tabloids hardly had any democratic quality frames before the Danish referendum. But following this referendum, this framing took front stage at the French and Irish referendums and remained more prevalent overall than it had been before. Moreover, starting with the Danish referendum, the framing was used with increasing negativity as can be seen in figure 8.

Figure 9: Democratic quality frame coverage by tone (percentage) per event.



4.2.5. Conflict frame

Around the Dublin summit in 1990, the conflict frame was mostly used to highlight confrontations between Margaret Thatcher and other European leaders. Whereas the *Daily Mail* portrayed Thatcher as a fighter who opposed European integration, often using terms such as “collision course,” and “winning her battle” (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1861062756; EE1861454430), the *Daily Mirror* used a dominantly negative tone for Thatcher’s role in conflicts with the EU; portraying her as a barrier to European unity: “PREMIER Margaret Thatcher yesterday poured a bucket of cold water on Europe’s historic step towards political union” (Daily Mirror, 1990; QRXOHY902985600). At the Rome summit, the focus shifted from confrontation to isolation. Thatcher was often portrayed as a lone warrior against an overwhelming majority of European leaders. Quotes such as “MRS THATCHER stood alone in defence of the £” and “the abiding impression from Rome is of a lady all alone” emphasised

her isolated position (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1862209295) (Daily Express, 1990; EE1861454430). The use of terms such as “boxed into a corner” and “ambushed” gave the impression of a hostile environment in which Thatcher had to defend herself and was on the losing end of this conflict with European leaders that supported further European integration (Daily Mail, 1990; EE1861929731, EE1862280527). This negative depiction of the UK's position in the conflict around these events is also evident from figure 9.

The conflict frame was most commonly used in 1991, and it also began to be applied more positively, portraying the UK as the winner in the “Euro battle” (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_06_25_001). Whereas in 1990 the conflict was primarily framed as one between Thatcher and European leaders, by 1991 it had shifted to a broader narrative of Britain versus Europe, creating a more obvious ‘we vs. them’ dynamic. This is evident in quotes like, “The pause gives Britain the chance to gear up for the Euro battle ahead, just as half a century ago the nation pulled out of Dunkirk and returned to win the war”, and “We must not lose out to Euro-creeps” (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_06_25_001; DExp_1991_07_01_008). The increasing use of the positive frame, especially around the Maastricht summit, seems partly due to the change in leadership within the Conservative Party, with John Major succeeding Thatcher. Notably, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* clearly supported Major, highlighting his successes and his personal qualities: "The final trial of strength was Mr Major's crowning glory after two days of brilliant diplomacy" (1991; DExp_1991_12_11_001). After the Maastricht summit, which these tabloids framed as a great victory for Britain, overviews were given where the outcome of the deal was framed as wins and losses. Here, further European integration was almost exclusively framed as “Britain lose”, while less European integration as “Britain win” (Daily Express, 1991; DExp_1991_12_12_004). A significant difference in the use of the conflict frame is clear with regards to the *Daily Mirror*, which consistently portrayed the UK's position in the conflict with the EU more negatively. This included the outcome of the Maastricht Summit, with statements like “This is a defeat for the people of Britain” (1991; MPKDDV379513565).

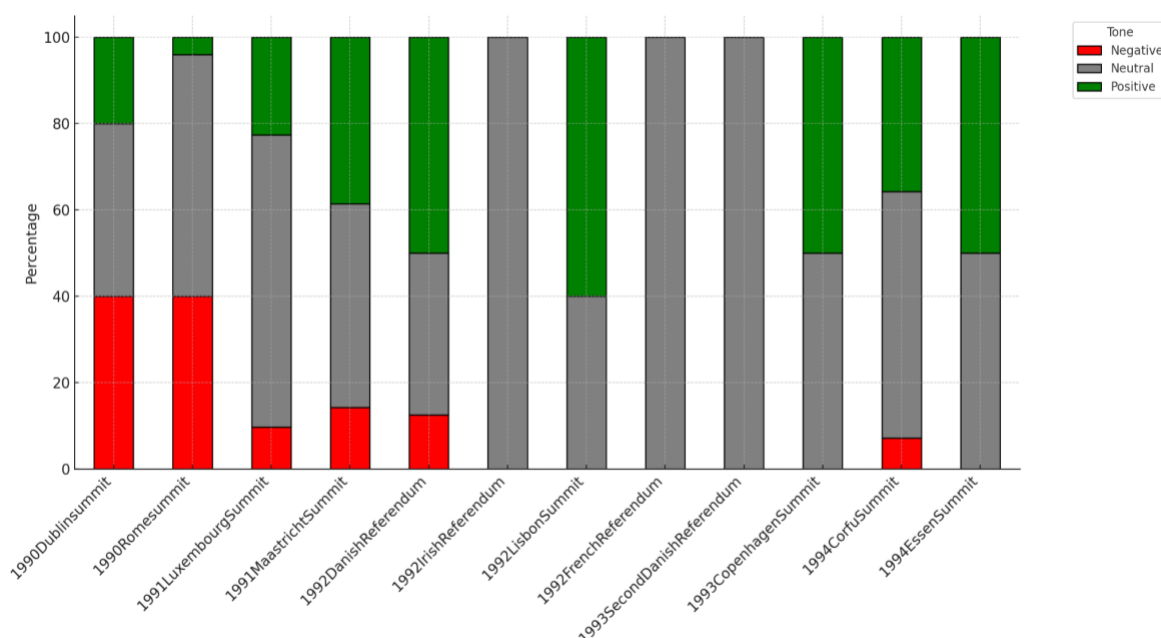
In 1992, as figure 4 shows, the conflict frame was not prominently used among the tabloids, with the notable exception of the Lisbon summit. Around this event, the frame was mainly used to portray Major as a victor in his battle against EC policies regarding 48-hour work weeks and Britain's contribution to the EC budget: “Britain defeats EC restrictions” (Daily Mail, 1992; EE1860876777). The ‘us vs. them’ dynamic continued across all tabloids during this period. However, the negative portrayal of the EU as something that had to be conquered intensified in the *Daily Express*, by including statements such as: “PM slams the

Euro monster”, and “Mr Major’s vision of himself as St George against the Euro dragon” (1992; DExp_1992_06_27_001; DExp_1992_06_27_002-2).

The conflict frame was only used three times around the Second Danish Referendum and the Copenhagen summit in 1993. Here it was used mainly to showcase Major’s battle against Brussels’ bureaucracy: “John Major yesterday scored a key victory against “muddle-headed meddling” by Brussels in its battle to burden business with costly red tape”, and “They must fight unceasingly against its bureaucratic and protectionist tendencies” (Daily Mail, 1993; EE1862315802;EE1861232372). The conflict frame regained some of its prominence among tabloids in 1994, around the Corfu and Essen summit. These summits did not saw new uses of the conflict frame, but rather a continuation of the conflict frame by using words as “showdown”, “war” and “bitter conflict”; often portraying the European Union as an opponent in a boxing game: “Round One to Major in Euro battle”, and “That’s the pre-fight promotion from Downing Street” (Daily Express, 1994; DExp_1994_06_25_002; Daily Mail, 1994; EE1860638102).

Overall, the use of the conflict frame evolved from highlighting individual confrontations between Thatcher and other European leaders to a broader narrative of ‘Britain vs Europe’, and ‘us vs. them’. Furthermore, as is shown in figure 9, there was a notable shift from the negative portrayal of the UK's conflict with the EU in 1990 towards a more positive depiction in the years that followed. The negative framing was almost entirely absent in most of 1992, 1993, and 1994, with the focus shifting to emphasising British victories and resilience against European integration efforts.

Figure 10: Conflict frame coverage by tone (percentage) per event.



5. Conclusion

This research aimed to answer the question: "How did British tabloids frame the EU and European integration before, during, and after the Maastricht Treaty period (1990-1994)?" Knowing the significance of tabloids in shaping the Eurosceptic narratives in the UK, this study deemed it important to understand how they have framed the EU and European integration during a significant moment in European integration history and a moment recognised as a 'tipping point' for Euroscepticism (Startin, 2015; Simpson & Startin, 2023). To do so, this study performed a qualitative framing analysis of articles from *the Daily Mail*, *the Daily Mirror*, and *the Daily Express*. The overarching goal of this study was to build upon the work of Barth & Bijsmans and complete the picture of how the full spectrum of British newspapers framed the EU and European integration during this important moment in European integration history. Five generic frames were identified as being dominant among the tabloids throughout the studied period. Apart from insights into the tones and distribution of these different frames, the evolution of the use of these frames by the consulted tabloids throughout the studied period was also part of this study's research. The research showed that the sovereignty frame consistently portrayed the EU as a threat to national identity and British sovereignty. Additionally, this study showed how the economic consequences frame was initially used to present a balanced view of the risks and opportunities of European integration but was later used to highlight financial burdens and corruption within or by the EU. Moreover, it was shown that the efficiency frame was used to depict the EU as inefficient and bureaucratic, but also to acknowledge the benefits of coordinated actions within the EU. The research showed that the democratic quality frame evolved from concerns about the disconnect between Eurocrats and citizens to issues of transparency and accountability, particularly increased in both negative tone and presence due to the 1992 referenda, and started portraying the EU as undemocratic and dominated by unaccountable bureaucrats. Lastly, the conflict frame was shown to shift from individual confrontations to a broader 'Britain vs. Europe' narrative, transitioning from a negative portrayal of the UK's conflict with the EU in 1990 to a more positive depiction in later years. This part of the study has given us insight into the development of Eurosceptic narratives through the different framing strategies used over time by the researched tabloids. When turning to the expectations of this study, based on the present yet limited literature on tabloid framing, a mixed image can be observed. First, the study did confirm the hypothesis that the Maastricht Treaty period can be seen as a tipping point in the negative framing of the EU and European integration among the consulted tabloids. There is a clear trend towards a more

negative portrayal of the EU and European integration during the 1990-94 period. This research has thus provided additional evidence to support the debate in the literature that this period was indeed a tipping point for Euroscepticism. Moreover, it has enhanced the understanding of the development of the Eurosceptic narratives and frames from British tabloids during this important period. Another expectation was that tabloids would be more negative towards the EU compared to quality newspapers. However, the comparison executed in this research showed that while tabloids were potentially more negative in their framing, quality newspapers may have maintained a more consistently critical stance by using positive frames less frequently. Although this sparks an interesting and unexpected image, the fact that the exact data is missing from Barth & Bijsmans' study makes that the hypothesis can neither be confirmed nor denied with certainty. Furthermore, both the expected focus on immigration and security as well as the reframing of these issues in connection to economic arguments was not found in this research. The conflict frame also was not prominently featured in quality newspapers but was instead one of the dominant frames used by the tabloids, which was unexpected. These differences between the expectations and the outcomes show the need for more study on the historical framing of the EU and European integration by tabloids. This will provide more insights and understanding of the development and origins of certain frames regarding the EU amongst these influential media outlets. Knowing how British tabloids, with their substantial impact on Euroscepticism, characterised the EU at crucial periods provides important insights for future policy-making due to a better understanding of the framing strategies used to shape Eurosceptic narratives by British tabloids.

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Annex 1

	Daily Mail	Daily Mirror	Daily Express
1990 Dublin summit	Sovereignty o/+/- Economic consequences +/-/o Efficiency + Democratic quality + Conflict +/o	Conflict –	Sovereignty –
1990 Rome Summit	Sovereignty –/+/o Economic consequences +/-/o Efficiency – Democratic quality – Conflict o/-	Sovereignty +/o Economic consequences +/ Efficiency – Conflict o/-/+	Sovereignty – Economic consequences –/o Democratic quality – Conflict o
1991 Luxembourg Summit	Sovereignty –/o/+ Economic consequences +/- Efficiency +/o/- Democratic quality + Conflict o/-/+	Sovereignty –/o Economic consequences +/o/- Efficiency o/- Conflict o/-	Sovereignty –/o Economic consequences o Efficiency – Democratic quality – Conflict o/+
1991 Maastricht Summit	Sovereignty –/+/o Economic consequences +/-/o Efficiency o/-/+ Democratic quality +/ Conflict o/+/-	Sovereignty –/+/o Economic consequences +/o/- Democratic quality – Conflict –/o	Sovereignty –/o/+ Economic consequences –/+/o Efficiency -/+/o Democratic quality –/o Conflict +/o/-
1992 Danish Referendum	Sovereignty –/o Economic consequences –/+ Efficiency –/o Democratic quality – Conflict o	Sovereignty o Economic consequences – Democratic quality –	Sovereignty – Efficiency + Democratic quality – Conflict +/o/-
1992 Irish Referendum	Sovereignty – Efficiency – Democratic quality –	Democratic quality + Conflict o	Sovereignty –/+ Economic consequences –/o/+ Democratic quality –/+
1992 Lisbon Summit	Sovereignty –/o Economic consequences –/+ Efficiency +/ Democratic quality –/+ Conflict o/+	Sovereignty o/- Economic consequences –/o Democratic quality –/o Conflict +/o	Sovereignty –/o Economic consequences –/+ Efficiency –/+/o Democratic quality – Conflict +/o
1992 French Referendum	Sovereignty –/o/+ Economic consequences +/- Efficiency +/ Democratic quality –/+	Sovereignty + Efficiency + Democratic quality –	Sovereignty – Economic consequences –/o/+ Efficiency o/-

	Democratic quality –/o		Democratic quality –/o Conflict o
1993 Second Danish Referendum	Sovereignty –/+ Economic consequences –/+/o Efficiency – Democratic quality –/+ Conflict o	Sovereignty – Economic consequences +	Sovereignty –/o/+ Economic consequences +/o Efficiency – Democratic quality –/+
1993 Copenhagen Summit	Sovereignty – Economic consequences –/o/+ Efficiency – Conflict +	Economic consequences –/+ Efficiency –/o	Sovereignty o Economic consequences – Efficiency – Conflict o
1994 Corfu Summit	Sovereignty – Efficiency –/+ Democratic quality – Conflict o/+/-	Sovereignty –/o	Sovereignty – Efficiency –/+ Conflict o/+
1994 Essen Summit	Sovereignty –/o Economic consequences –/+/o Democratic quality – Conflict o/+	Economic consequences –/+/o Efficiency – Democratic quality –/o Conflict o	Sovereignty –/o Economic consequences – Efficiency + Democratic quality + Conflict +