

## Letter to the *Telegraph* from political scientists and legal scholars

Sir,

A referendum result is democratically legitimate only if voters can make an informed decision. Yet, the level of misinformation in the current campaign is so great that democratic legitimacy is called into question.

Both sides are making misleading claims. Their official communications have been dropping through letter boxes – at taxpayers’ expense – in recent days. Vote Leave’s leaflet purports to offer “The Facts”, yet leads with the claim that EU membership costs the UK £350 million a week – repeatedly exposed by independent authorities as a blatant falsehood. The Remain leaflet begins by saying that “over 3 million UK jobs are linked to our exports to the EU”. Though this is in line with independent analyses, not all these jobs would go in the event of Brexit.

Propagating falsehoods, with support from the public purse, distorts the public communication upon which democracy depends. When the dust from this referendum settles, we must review means of strengthening campaign truthfulness without curtailing legitimate free speech.

In the short term, broadcasters and the media must focus more fearlessly on challenging deliberate misinformation from both sides. Impartial fact-checkers – at the BBC, Channel 4, Full Fact, the UK in a Changing Europe initiative, and elsewhere – are doing excellent work, but are receiving insufficient attention. As the campaign draws to a close, an informed public decision true to the values of British democracy depends on a change of tone.

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