

From Callaghan to Credit Crunch:

Changing Trends in British Television
News 1975-2009

Steven Barnett and Gordon Neil Ramsay,
University of Westminster, and
Ivor Gaber, University of Bedfordshire

January 2012

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Methodology.....	11
3. Results I: Overall News Trends	14
4. Results II: Subcategory Analysis	25
5. Qualitative Analysis.....	27
6. Conclusions.....	33
Appendices.....	36

Acknowledgements

This study has been funded by the Leverhulme Trust. We are very grateful to the Trust for enabling us to continue our analysis and provide the most comprehensive longitudinal study into television news content in Britain.

We would also like to thank the BBC, Sky and the British Universities Film and Video Council for their help and assistance in sourcing all the necessary material.

Executive Summary

- This study analyses changing trends in UK television news over the last 35 years. It extends the content analysis of our first study, *From Callaghan to Kosovo* (published in 2000) to 2009, thereby creating the most comprehensive longitudinal study of UK television news to date.
- For the present study, 357 evening news bulletins from 2004 and 2009 were analysed, drawn from BBC1, ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5 as well as (for the first time) the BBC and Sky's 24 hour news channels. A total of 5458 stories were individually coded into one of 31 categories, following an identical system of categorisation to that used in the first study.
- As before, these 31 story categories were then aggregated into "Broadsheet" or "Tabloid" according to carefully constructed criteria, explained in our report. Broadsheet categories were further divided into "Domestic" and "Foreign" to allow for analysis of trends in foreign coverage.
- Despite major upheavals over the last ten years in the technological and economic environment in which television news is produced, distributed and consumed, we have found no evidence of a significant shift towards a more tabloid news agenda. Even in the face of acute commercial pressure and serious audience fragmentation, every evening news bulletin, except for Channel Five, has maintained a predominantly serious agenda.
- This is particularly true of the two BBC1 bulletins which, over the full 35 year span of the study, have shown no significant change in the balance of their evening bulletins. While the two ITV bulletins have doubled the level of tabloid coverage since 1975, there has been no noticeable increase since 1999, and the balance remains two thirds broadsheet to one third tabloid. The clear differentiation between BBC and ITV which we noted in our first study has therefore been consolidated but has not widened.
- On the BBC1 6pm bulletin, tabloid coverage fell between 1999 and 2009, while over the full 35 year period there has been a slight increase of around 5%. Overall, three quarters of the bulletins in 2009 continued to be broadsheet, with a strong domestic emphasis.
- Tabloid content in ITV's early evening bulletins had risen to a peak of one third in 1999, which we suggested in our earlier study might herald a longer term strategic shift. In fact, the tabloid proportion has remained consistent during the 2000s at around one third. The bulletin's level of foreign coverage in 2009 was identical to its counterpart on the BBC.
- The BBC late evening bulletin has maintained an overwhelmingly broadsheet agenda over the full 35 years, only once (in 1985) falling below 80%. Its foreign coverage, one third of the total in 2009, is markedly higher than its earlier bulletin or its ITV competitor. There has been a small increase of 5% tabloid coverage over the last 10 years to around one fifth of the total.

- As with its earlier bulletin, tabloid content on ITV late evening news had risen to one third in 1999, but has also levelled out during the 2000s. A clear differentiation with the BBC's bulletin has been maintained, both in the level of tabloid content (around one third versus one fifth) and in the overall level of foreign coverage (one quarter on ITV versus one third on BBC).
- *Channel 4 News*, as anticipated, has maintained the most consistently broadsheet news agenda over the entire period of study both in proportion – typically 80-90% of content – and in the absolute volume of broadsheet coverage. There has been a slight but significant rise in tabloid content over the past decade, for reasons which we explain in the report, but this remains under 20% of the total.
- Only Channel 5's evening news output displayed a substantial shift in its output during the course of this study, swinging dramatically from a tabloid-driven to a broadsheet-driven agenda between 1999 and 2004, and then back again by 2009. By that point, over half its main evening bulletin was tabloid, easily the highest of all the bulletins measured.
- Our conclusions from the first study, that there was a healthy balance of serious, light and international news coverage available to viewers across the main evening bulletins, are thus reinforced by this updated study. Within a predominantly serious framework, there remains a diversity of news output from the more highbrow BBC at 10 and Channel 4 News to the slightly more populist and domestically-oriented ITV bulletins to the unashamedly populist (and youth-oriented) Channel 5 News.
- Our analysis of the flagship programmes for the two 24-hour news channels on BBC News and Sky indicates a pattern that was not dissimilar from the main early evening bulletins: a mostly broadsheet and heavily domestic agenda. There was a significantly more tabloid agenda on Sky (a difference of over 10%), explained partly by a longer sports section.
- In a more finely tuned analysis of the categories, several interesting trends were evident:
 - The last ten years saw significantly increased coverage of political affairs across all terrestrial bulletins, which is not entirely explained by the global economic crisis.
 - 'Light' coverage – that is, unequivocally populist stories excluding crime, sport and other potentially ambiguous subject areas – comprise a very small proportion of all bulletins except for Channel 5 where it accounts for nearly 40%.
 - The rise in tabloid content on *Channel 4 News* (albeit to levels which are still the lowest of all bulletins) is attributable to a combination of slight rises in Sport, Crime, and Light stories.
 - 24-hour news bulletins contain significantly more sport and business news than traditional bulletins on BBC and ITV, and therefore devote less time to political affairs and social policy issues.
- A more qualitative analysis of three specific stories across the main news bulletins found surprising similarities in overall approaches, use of television production techniques (such as live two-ways), and time devoted to different elements of each story.

- Overall, our data suggest that television news on the mainstream channels has proved remarkably resilient in the face of enormous economic and technological upheavals. It continues to fulfil the democratic and informational roles established by the public service framework of the 2003 Communications Act and the 2006 BBC Charter and Agreement.
- Television remains the most important and trusted source of national and international news for the vast majority of people in Britain, and will continue to play a central role in the informational needs of British citizens. We therefore believe it is vital that governments do not attempt to dismantle the protective frameworks that have so far sustained the relative seriousness of mainstream news agendas which make a very significant contribution to public knowledge and an informed democracy.

1. Introduction

1.1: Our Original Study

This study was funded by the Leverhulme Trust and follows on from a previous project¹, funded jointly by the BBC and the then Independent Television Commission (ITC), which analysed changing trends in terrestrial television news from 1975 to 1999. The current study extends this analysis to 2009. As well as providing the first (and to date, only) large-scale longitudinal empirical analysis of British television news outside general election campaigns, the original *From Callaghan to Kosovo* research project generated two broad conclusions regarding trends in news output over the last quarter of the 20th Century.

First, we noted that television news coverage in the UK at the turn of the millennium provided viewers with a “healthy balance” of serious, light and international coverage, and that any concerns about increased “tabloidisation” of output were largely unfounded. The diversity of bulletins provided by the BBC and terrestrial Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) also ensured that, in stark contrast to the situation in 1975, a wide range of television news formats and styles was available across the increased range of channels. Second, despite this diversity, there was clear empirical evidence of a shift in most bulletins towards a more tabloid domestic agenda, including a general decline in the volume of political affairs reporting.

Though cautiously optimistic about the state of television news at the end of the last century, *From Callaghan to Kosovo* concluded with some reflections on the potential impact of digital terrestrial television (DTT), channel proliferation, market competition and media convergence, and it highlighted the need for future research to explore these impacts. The present study fulfils that need, and we hope to be able to continue this longitudinal series in succeeding years.

Changes in the broadcasting environment between the end of the previous study in 1999 and the present are perhaps as extensive as developments across the whole span of analysis in *From Callaghan to Kosovo*. Significant, and linked, changes in the regulatory framework of television, in the global economic and financial environment – culminating in the world financial crisis of 2008 – and in the structure of the communications and media market have combined to alter substantially the circumstances in which television news is gathered, produced, broadcast, and consumed. None of the terrestrial channels with PSB commitments to news provision have been left untouched by these developments, and each has faced unique challenges in the period 1999-2009. These changes may broadly be described under the headings of technological, political and economic.

1.2: Technological Changes

Technological changes within broadcasting saw the number of available channels increase dramatically over the decade via cable and satellite platforms. At the same time, the gradual switchover from analogue to digital on the terrestrial network – due to be completed by the end of

¹ Barnett, S., E. Seymour, and I. Gaber (2000) *From Callaghan to Kosovo: Changing trends in British television news*, available from Ofcom at http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/itc/research/callaghan_to_kosovo.pdf

2012 – ensured that by 2009 the vast majority of homes had access to at least 20-30 channels. This dramatic increase in capacity via digital terrestrial, cable and satellite platforms led to a marked increase in the number of English-language news channels available to UK viewers, of which the BBC News Channel and Sky News are easily the most watched (albeit with audiences a fraction of the size of mainstream news channels, as explained below). There are also a number of other 24-hour news channels available to UK audiences, originating from a wide range of countries including the United States, China, Russia, India, Pakistan, France, Qatar and Iran.

At the same time, there has been a transformation in the means of accessing news and the number of platforms on which it is available. While news has tended to be unaffected by the widespread availability and use of hard drive recorders such as Sky Plus and Virgin Plus – BARB figures demonstrate that very little news is time-shifted for later viewing – its consumption is certainly influenced by the new array of mobile platforms such as laptops, tablets and smartphones which allow immediate and frequent access on the move.

These new platforms are complemented by the rise in online and aggregator sites such as Google and Yahoo which ostensibly provided a greater array of news sources but in practice tend to cannibalise or link to mainstream news sites – which, in turn, are little different from the traditional broadcast or print manifestations produced by the originating news organisations.² Moreover, in consumption terms, we should certainly be wary of making assumptions about online sources of news (however they are accessed) supplanting mainstream television news: the most recent figures from Ofcom show that only 7% of the population quote the internet as their main source for UK news and only 8% for international news³.

1.3: Political Changes

As part of New Labour’s market-oriented deregulatory approach to the media industries, the 2000 Communications White Paper outlined the creation of a new Office of Communications (Ofcom), tasked with both promoting competition in the communications market and furthering “the interests of citizens”. While most quota-based content obligations on commercial Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) were scrapped, the news provisions were retained in recognition both of their contribution to an informed citizenry and of their potential vulnerability in a more market-led system.

Thus, the 2003 Communications Act granted Ofcom the power to impose a certain statutory level of news and current affairs quotas as part of its three-tier regulatory framework governing the output of the terrestrial channels. The Act represented a continuation of the liberalisation of British broadcasting policy, whereby commercial PSBs are granted increasing flexibility with regard to the regulation of their public service obligations while safeguarding news programmes.

² For a full analysis see Redden, J. and T. Witschge, “A New News Order? Online News Content Examined” in Fenton, N. (ed) (2010) *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age*, Sage, pp 171-186

³ Ofcom (2011) Public Service Broadcasting Annual Report 2011, Information Pack F, <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/reviews-investigations/psb-review/psb2011/Perceptions-F.pdf>

1.4: Economic Changes

Commercial PSBs have been subjected to intense economic pressures over the past decade for two main reasons: the move from analogue to digital broadcasting and declining advertising revenue⁴. In the first case, the proliferation of new digital channels ushered in by digital switchover has fragmented audiences and consequently led to a declining audience share for all broadcasters. In the second case, advertising revenues have been hit both by the global recession and, to a lesser extent, by the migration of advertising revenue to online (although this is a significantly greater problem for the print media).

ITV has borne the brunt of these economic difficulties, despite the Competition Commission giving the go-ahead to a merger of Granada and Carlton that was completed in 2004, consolidating 12 of the 15 regional ITV broadcasting licences, and theoretically creating a single national commercial broadcaster better equipped to weather economic pressures⁵. This new market environment has presented both the regulator and broadcaster with a dilemma: if regulatory burdens, including those stipulating a minimum provision of news and current affairs, are perceived as being too burdensome, the broadcaster can, as a last resort, opt to surrender its digital terrestrial licence and move itself on to cable and satellite as one of the many channels with minimal regulatory obligations beyond returning a profit (albeit without guaranteed universal access).

The financial uncertainty of ITV, combined with the relaxation of certain public service obligations, has led to a turbulent decade for ITV news bulletins, with a number of scheduling changes to their late-night news programme. Our previous study ended in 1999, overlapping the end of the 33-year run of *News at Ten*, and the introduction of the short-lived *Nightly News*. Viewed at the time as an epoch-defining event⁶, this was the first stage in a decade of rescheduling of the late-night news bulletin that reflected ITV's attempts to balance profitability and public service obligations. A full summary of the scheduling changes is included in section 3.

As we reported in our first study, *Channel 4 News* has, since its inception in 1982, offered a consistent diet of serious content and foreign coverage in line with its obligations under the 1981 Broadcasting Act to place more emphasis on diversity and innovation⁷. During the 2000s, however, Channel 4 has been no less immune to economic pressures as a result of digitalisation and fragmentation, despite its unique status as a publicly owned but commercially funded body. Ofcom noted in 2008 that Channel 4 was finding it difficult to afford its public service content without considerable further investment⁸. While Channel 4's PSB status was confirmed by the Digital Economy Act 2010, it is important to note that *Channel 4 News* consistently loses money for the Channel⁹, and the maintenance of a loss-

⁴ House of Lords Communications Committee (2010) *The British Film and Television Industries*:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldselect/ldcomuni/37/3702.htm>

⁵ Competition Commission (2003) *Carlton Communications Plc/Granada Plc : A Report on the Proposed Merger*, http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/rep_pub/reports/2003/482carlton.htm#full

⁶ Semetko, H. A. (2000) 'Great Britain: The End of *News at Ten* and the Changing News Environment', in R. Gunther and A. Mughan (eds.) *Democracy and the Media: A Comparative Perspective* (pp343-374), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Lindley R. (2005) *And Finally....? The News From ITN*. London: Politicos.

⁷ Great Britain (1981) *Broadcasting Act 1981 c.68*, London: HMSO

⁸ Ofcom (2008) *Ofcom's Second Public Service Review, Phase 2: Preparing for the Digital Future*, http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/psb2_phase2/summary/psb2_phase2.pdf

⁹ Barnett, S. (2011) *The Rise and Fall of Television Journalism: Just Wires and Lights in a Box?* London: Bloomsbury Academic, p198.

making programme in a potentially lucrative time slot is likely to cause tension while the channel strives to fulfil its statutory remit within a highly competitive multichannel environment.

While Channel 5, with its more populist approach and comparatively small share of the national audience, is sometimes compared unfavourably to ITV and Channel 4, its news output does add a more youthful, vibrant and less straitened dimension to the diverse range of British television news bulletins. During the period 1999-2009, the most significant development was a switch in Channel 5's news supplier from ITN to Sky News in January 2005. The sale of Channel 5 to Richard Desmond for £104m in July 2010 was beyond this study's period of analysis as was the transfer of news supplier from Sky News back to ITN which takes effect from February 2012.

1.5: The BBC

As ever, the 2000s witnessed numerous debates about the future of the BBC and the licence fee, prompted in particular by the growth in channel numbers which has progressively eroded the BBC's audience share. In terms of consequences for journalism, there were two major events. Following its post-Iraq war reporting about intelligence dossiers, the death of David Kelly and the subsequent Hutton report, an internal independent report was commissioned from Ron Neil, a former director of news and current affairs, to examine editorial issues and to make any necessary recommendations. The report concluded that BBC news programmes should be allowed to "develop their own house styles and approach" as long as core BBC values were universally observed and practised.¹⁰

Then, following the Charter Review of 2006, the Board of Governors was replaced by a BBC Trust under a new Charter which enshrined six public purposes to guide the BBC's strategic direction. Three of these public purposes can be interpreted as having implications for the provision of news: "sustaining citizenship and civil society", "representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities" and "bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK"¹¹. The accompanying Agreement requires the BBC Trust to define and monitor specific licences for each BBC channel or station, with a view to ensuring that programming is in line with its public purposes¹². The most recent service licence for BBC 1, retaining the statement of purposes from the original licence in 2006, requires it to be "the BBC's most significant provider of accurate, impartial and independent television news, with comprehensive news bulletins in peak time"¹³.

¹⁰ BBC (2004) *The BBC's Journalism after Hutton*, The Report of the Neil Review Team, BBC, June 2004. The five core values were: truth and accuracy; serving the public interest; impartiality and diversity of opinion; independence; and accountability.

¹¹ Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2006a) *Royal Charter for the Continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation*, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/charter.pdf

¹² Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2006b) *An Agreement Between Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/agreement.pdf

¹³ BBC Trust (2010) *BBC One Service Licence*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/regulatory_framework/service_licences/tv/2010/bbc_one_may10.pdf

1.6: Viewing figures over analysis period

Viewing figures for the bulletins sampled have, as Table 1 below shows, declined modestly between 2004 and 2009, although there was a slight rise in the audience for the BBC's *Ten O'clock News*. The most significant decline was for ITV's *Evening News*, a trend which continued beyond the sampling period¹⁴ (Ofcom, 2011) and which prompted ITV to integrate local and national news bulletins in its early evening schedules.

Despite the decline in viewing figures, three quarters of the population still regard the terrestrial PSBs as their main source of national and international news, as well as the most reliable. According to the most recent figures from Ofcom, 79% cite television as their main source of world news and 74% as their main source of national news. In both cases, television is easily the medium most trusted to present fair and unbiased news coverage.¹⁵

Viewing figures also demonstrate clearly that the 24 hour news channels have made little audience inroads. BARB figures¹⁶ for the last month of our study – December 2009 – show that Sky News' average audience share during that month was 0.6% of the TV audience whilst BBC News 24's was 0.8%. This compares to BBC 1's share of 20.6%, ITV1's 17.8% share, Channel 4's 6.1% and Channel 5's 4.3%. Thus, the average viewer in December 2009, in the course of one week, watched 12 minutes of Sky News and 20 minutes of BBC News 24, compared with seven hours and 17 minutes of BBC1, four hours and 45 minutes of ITV 1, two hours of Channel 4 and one hour 12 minutes of Channel Five.

In terms of the audience for individual bulletins, the contrast is even more stark: while BBC bulletins averaged between 4 and 5 million viewers and ITV between 3 and 4 million – and Channels 4 and 5 both averaged a little less than a million – average audiences for the two 24 hour bulletins analysed in this study were 136,000 for BBC News and 83,000 for Sky News¹⁷. In other words, despite the growing influence of 24 hour news channels among certain sections of the news-committed audience, neither is significant as a mass viewing platform and their impact on the overall UK audience has remained relatively minor.

Viewing figures (millions) - Terrestrial PSB Bulletins, 2004 and 2009¹⁸

	BBC 6pm	BBC 10pm	ITV Evening	ITV Nightly	Channel 4	Channel 5 7pm
2004	4.91	4.83	4.54	2.82	1.04	N/A
2009	4.45	4.93	3.32	2.48	0.79	0.74

¹⁴ Ofcom (2011) *Public Service Broadcasting Annual Report 2011, Part C – PSB Viewing* (p29) <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/reviews-investigations/psb-review/psb2011/psb-viewing-C.pdf>

¹⁵ Ofcom (2011) *Public Service Broadcasting Annual Report 2011, Information Pack F*, <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/reviews-investigations/psb-review/psb2011/Perceptions-F.pdf>

¹⁶ Figures taken from Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) at <http://www.barb.co.uk/report/monthlyViewingSummary>, accessed 21 December 2011

¹⁷ BARB figures. It is worth noting that figures for 2011 were around 50% higher in each case, almost certainly a consequence of the major news events of the year (Arab Spring, Japanese earthquake, Royal Wedding, Bin Laden's killing, Eurozone turmoil, phone-hacking scandal and so on)

¹⁸ BARB data; obtained via MediaTel

1.7: Summary

The decade between 1999 and 2009 has been characterised by dramatic change in the broadcast news environment. However, despite the proliferation of alternative sources of news to mainstream news channels, several factors underline the continuing relevance of monitoring long-term trends in television news content on the main terrestrial channels.

Most significantly, even in the age of convergence and multiplicity of online news sources, television remains the most important and most trusted source of news. Within the television medium, despite the emergence of a host of 24-hour news channels, evening news bulletins on mainstream terrestrial channels remain by far the most frequently viewed source of television news. While these channels may therefore have important implications for economies of scale in news production and for instant access to breaking news, they have made little impact in mass audience terms.

A challenging economic environment and shifting political priorities (especially in relation to BBC funding) have had an impact on the resources available for television news investment over the last decade, with potential implications in particular for the more logistically difficult or resource-heavy areas of newsgathering (for instance, foreign reporting). In addition, the competitive imperatives of channel proliferation and audience fragmentation have imposed further pressures on news editors. For all these reasons it is important to understand how television news output on the main channels has been changing, if at all, and to consider what the policy implications of any changes might be.

2. Methodology

Sampling

The sampling method adopted in the present study replicates that used in the 2000 *From Callaghan to Kosovo* project. Continuing the study at five-year intervals (explicitly avoiding election years and the possible distorting effect of election campaigns on news agendas), the sampling took in the years 2004 and 2009, (in addition to the earlier sampling points of 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 1999). Within each year, 25 random days were selected for analysis. Five periods of five weeks (starting in February, April, June, September and November) were selected, ensuring an even spread throughout each year.

Within each five-week period, one weekday per week was selected once only, counteracting any possible distortions due to particular scheduling trends on particular days, and to prevent results being skewed by a single dominant story in a given week. Where possible, the selection of weekdays was repeated identically in each year, although substitutions were made in a small number of cases due to bank holidays or (in one case) unavailable bulletins.

Coding

Each news item was coded on the basis of three criteria: the format of the item, length in seconds and the subject matter. To ensure longitudinal validity within the period of analysis, the 31-category list adopted in the 2000 study was replicated without amendments. Foreign items were also coded on the basis of the country and region with which the item is concerned. Early results were compared with the data from the previous study in order to ensure reliability within the coding process between the two studies.

Definitions and Interpretation of Data

In keeping with the previous study, the 31 categories are subdivided at two levels. Firstly, all categories are designated as either 'tabloid' or 'broadsheet' and – within the broadsheet list – 'domestic' and 'foreign'. Secondly, within these groups, three other subgroups were created: 'Political Affairs' (politics, European Union issues, and foreign relations); 'Social Policy' (education, health, social affairs, environment, transport, and culture), and 'Light News' (royalty, human interest, show business, and humour). The full list of categories is outlined in Table 2.

As with the designation of any content-related category titles, we appreciate that the terms 'broadsheet' and 'tabloid' carry particular connotations. The use of the terms 'tabloid' (often seen as pejorative) and 'broadsheet' (traditionally a more positive epithet) is deployed here in exactly the same way as in the previous study – as neutral and descriptive terms not intended to carry any specifically judgemental element.¹⁹ These terms are retained in the interests of comparability.

¹⁹ Barnett, S., E. Seymour and I. Gaber (2000) *From Callaghan to Kosovo*, p4

Coding Categories

Broadsheet	Tabloid
Politics/Economic policy	Crime
Business/Industry/Finance	Consumer
Social Affairs	Tragedy
Legal	Weather (General)
Foreign Relations/Diplomacy	Sport
European Union Issues	Royalty
Unrest/Civil Disturbance	Showbiz/Entertainment
War	Human Interest/Animal Stories
Northern Ireland	Humour/Quirky Stories
Health	Expeditions/Adventure
Education	
Employment/Industrial Relations	Other
Environment/Ecology/Planning	Other
Natural Disasters	
Science/Technology	
Transport	
Religion	
Culture/Media/Arts	
Moral/Ethical Issues	
Military/National Security	

Content analysis techniques invariably result in the reduction of the multifarious content of broadcast news and information into allotted categories, with some loss of qualitative distinctions between items with similar content characteristics. News as a genre does, however, invite categorical analysis in this manner at two levels. First, bulletins present a series of functionally similar units – news items – each of which is separated from other items in the bulletin by the subject they deal with, and by the reporter conveying the information. It is therefore justifiable to divide news bulletins into functionally-similar but distinct units, in the form of news items.

Second, the resilience of news values means that, despite the information-rich nature of television news as it is experienced by the viewer, it is possible to set parameters as to what the boundaries of news subjects will be in any given bulletin. The categories listed above were created for the previous study through an iterative process of refinement during the pilot stage. The final list was reassuringly similar to the 50 categories developed in an earlier study in the mid 1990s by Jackie Harrison.²⁰

Although the vast majority of items could be categorised within this coding frame, a general category ‘Other’ was used in the small number of cases in which this proved problematic. In line with the previous study, this was used only as a last resort where assignment to an existing category would have a distorting effect. As it happened, this was rarely necessary for stories that were classified as falling into the ‘tabloid’ category.

As before, all percentages included in the analysis are the proportion of total news output for that bulletin for each year. This is calculated using the amount of time in seconds devoted to items in each category for each year rather than the number of stories, allowing for an accurate portrayal of the *volume* of each bulletin dedicated to each type of coverage.

²⁰ Harrison, J. (2000), *Terrestrial TV News in Britain*, Manchester University Press, pp216-231

This study has focussed on the provision of news between 1975 and 2009 broadcast by the five terrestrial broadcasters; some monitoring of the two UK-based 24-hour news channels was also undertaken but they do not form a substantive part of this analysis in light of the relatively insignificant numbers viewing these bulletins (as recorded above).

A Note on Definitions

For the purposes of the present study, it was decided that the existing terminology employed in the subdivision of news could be potentially misleading. In particular, the naming of the 'Foreign' category potentially failed to indicate that no "tabloid" stories were coded as 'Foreign' even if they occurred abroad or consisted of foreign footage. The overarching division was between 'Broadsheet' stories (domestic and foreign) and 'Tabloid' stories; the categories have been renamed to reflect this.

In addition, it was not made explicitly clear in the 2000 study that certain categories are used only for 'Foreign' stories. These are: 'European Union Issue'; 'Unrest/Civil Disturbance'; 'War' (even where Britain is involved – special care was taken to distinguish between stories about the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and stories about the British military or policy in relation to the war); and 'Natural Disasters'.

3. Results I: Overall News Trends

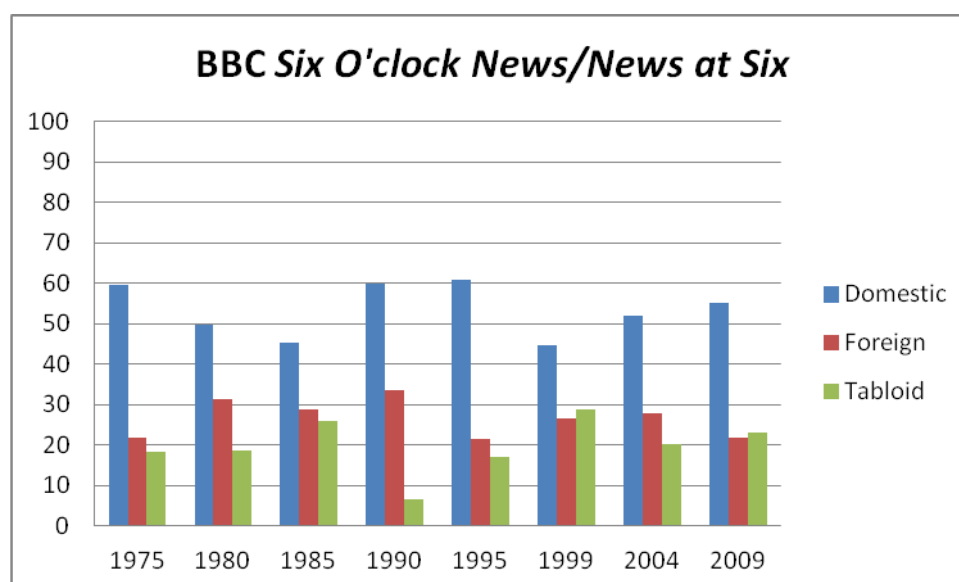
This section records the trend in Broadsheet, Tabloid and Foreign news coverage for the six main terrestrial news bulletins, extending the series first presented in *From Callaghan to Kosovo*, and thereby bringing our longitudinal study up to date. The bulletins are analysed in terms of four categories: the early evening news on BBC One and ITV, late evening news on BBC One and ITV, the main evening bulletins on Channel 4 and Channel 5 and the flagship daily bulletins on BBC News and Sky News. On occasion, the rounding-up of figures means that cumulative percentages do not exactly equal 100%.

To ensure better clarity, one significant change has been made to the way in which the results are presented here in comparison with the earlier study. To reflect the fact (as outlined above) that all foreign stories are also broadsheet, the three main categories have been explicitly labelled “Broadsheet Foreign”, “Broadsheet Domestic” and “Tabloid”.

3.1: Early Evening, BBC One and ITV

3.1.1: BBC News at Six²¹

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
Broadsheet Domestic	59.5	49.8	45.2	59.8	60.7	44.6	51.9	55.1
Broadsheet Foreign	21.7	31.2	28.9	33.7	21.6	26.5	28.0	21.8
Tabloid	18.4	18.8	25.9	6.5	17.0	28.9	20.1	23.2



- 78% broadsheet by 2009
- Little change since 1975

²¹ In early 2008 the rebranding of BBC News involved a change in the titles of the bulletins. The *Six O'Clock News* became *BBC News at Six*.

Prior to 2004, levels of broadsheet coverage on the BBC's news at 6pm fluctuated; a decline throughout the 1980s was reversed in the 1990s, a phenomenon at the time tentatively ascribed to the political upheavals in the run-up to the resignation of Margaret Thatcher – captured during the 1990 sampling period – and to the greater investment in journalism (as well as greater emphasis on a serious journalistic agenda) instituted by John Birt's reforms of the late eighties and early nineties. Equally, the downturn in broadsheet coverage in 1999, while partly dictated by external news events, can be attributed to the BBC's internal Programme Strategy Review (PSR), a comprehensive analysis of its own journalism and news values which resulted, in particular, in a more domestically oriented early evening bulletin with greater emphasis on "personally useful news".²²

Trends in tabloid content to a degree mirrored those of broadsheet: a gradual rise through the 1980s, followed by a sharp decline in 1990 and a steady rise again through the 1990s. The 1999 sample saw the highest yet recorded volume of tabloid coverage on this bulletin, a reflection of the impact of the BBC's PSR and prompting some concern about whether this heralded a longer term shift to a more tabloid agenda.

Foreign news fluctuated around the 20-30% level, with an understandable peak in 1990, given the protracted collapse of the Soviet Union and the spate of 'velvet' revolutions across Central and Eastern Europe. The volume of foreign coverage in 1999 was slightly higher than in 1975, despite the rise in tabloid coverage, suggesting a lasting commitment to coverage of foreign affairs on the UK's most watched television bulletin.

The 1990s data did suggest a sharp divergence between the BBC's early and late bulletins, as the percentage of tabloid coverage on the 6 o'clock rose. The new data from 2004 and 2009 indicate that this divergence has remained, suggesting a continuing and deliberate differentiation in the focus of the programmes. This is explored further in Section 3.2.1 below.

Despite this trend there was still an increase in broadsheet coverage on the BBC's early evening news, indicating that the low of 44.6% in 1999 was something of an aberration. Both sets of data in the 2000s show that over half of all news coverage on the evening news is devoted to 'hard' news topics with a predominantly domestic dimension, rising to over three quarters when combined with foreign news. We explain in Section 4 below how the rise of 'Broadsheet' content is due in part to a rise in political affairs coverage.

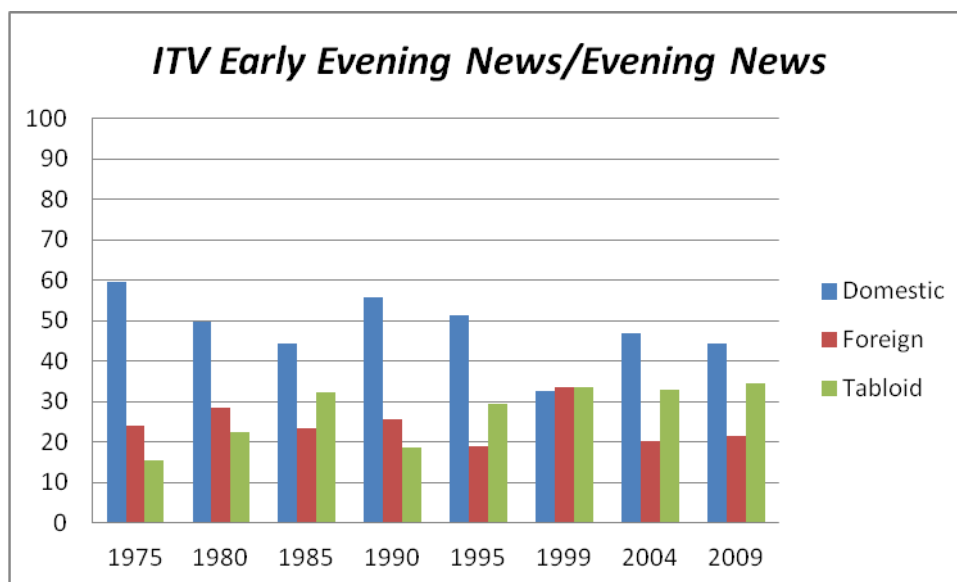
Conversely, tabloid coverage on the bulletin declines by almost one-third between 1999 and 2004, underlining our conclusion that 1999 did not represent the beginnings of a longer term trend. In fact, levels of tabloid coverage in the 2000s have returned to roughly the same levels as 1975/1980.

In the case of foreign coverage, there was only a modest rise between 1999 and 2004 which, although slightly surprising given the ongoing war in Iraq, suggests that the tentative conclusion drawn in the previous study that the conflict in Kosovo may have had an inflationary effect on foreign coverage in that year was correct. This claim is also supported by the decline in foreign coverage to slightly under 22% in 2009.

²² BBC (1998) *BBC News: The Future – Public Service News in the Digital Age*. Its impact is covered in more detail in Barnett, S. (2011), *op.cit.* pp138-9.

3.1.2: ITN Early Evening News/ITN Evening News²³

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
Broadsheet Domestic	59.5	49.8	44.3	55.8	51.4	32.7	47.0	44.3
Broadsheet Foreign	24.2	28.5	23.5	25.6	19.0	33.6	20.1	21.4
Tabloid	15.4	22.6	32.2	18.7	29.5	33.7	32.9	34.4



- 66% broadsheet coverage
- Higher levels of tabloid coverage sustained but not increased

We noted in our earlier study how ITV's early evening news agenda diverged from that of its BBC counterpart over the course of the analysis. The 1975 figures showed identical volumes of domestic broadsheet coverage, at 59.5%. In parallel with the BBC, this fell throughout the 1980s, rose significantly in 1990, and then declined over the following decade.

Tabloid coverage again mirrored the volume of broadsheet content, rising between 1975 and 1985, falling sharply in 1990, then regaining its pre-1990 levels in 1995 and 1999. In comparison with its BBC equivalent, tabloid coverage has, since 1980, accounted for a larger share of ITV's evening news, with particularly sharp divergences in 1990 and 1995.

Foreign coverage on ITV's early evening bulletin between 1975 and 1999 fluctuated, rather than displaying any clear trends. Typically, around a quarter of bulletins were devoted to foreign affairs, with a slight decline in 1995 and a subsequent increase to over one-third of the total in 1999.

In our last report, we expressed concern that the significant rise in tabloid content between 1995 and 1999 – which followed a major relaunch of the bulletin early in 1999 – might presage a continuing upward trend. In fact, the most striking evidence provided by the new data for 2004 and 2009 is the

²³ In early March 1999, during the sample taken for the previous study, *ITV Early Evening News* was relaunched as *ITV Evening News*, and moved from 5.40pm to 6.30pm. This change during a sampling period meant that two separate sets of figures for the different evening news bulletins on ITV were generated (see Barnett, S., E. Seymour and I. Gaber (2000), op. cit pp7-9). In this study, preference has been given to the larger sample; 20 out of 25 bulletins sampled in the previous study were taken from *ITV Evening News*, justifying the inclusion of these figures on the basis that the sample represents the majority of evening news on ITV available to audiences in 1999.

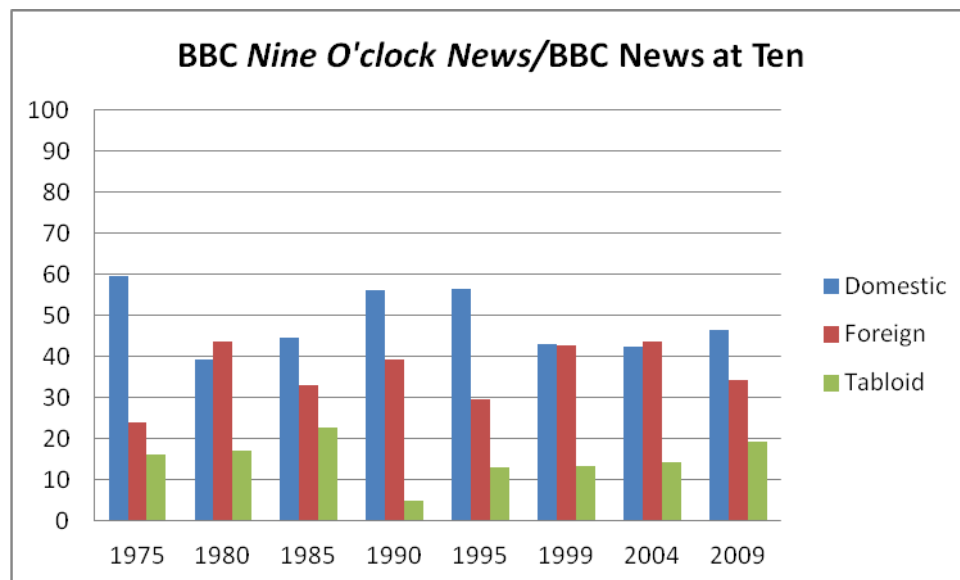
consistency in the volume of tabloid content from 1999 onwards. It has remained broadly steady at around one third of the total across the decade, indicating an apparently established editorial ratio of two thirds broadsheet to one third tabloid for this bulletin.

With tabloid content remaining steady, the balance of broadsheet coverage after 1999 appears to have shifted from foreign to domestic, with only a fifth of the bulletin devoted to foreign news in both 2004 and 2009. This is surprising given the ongoing hostilities in Iraq during 2004, and suggests a conscious editorial decision by ITV to prioritise domestic items on its early bulletin.

3.2: Nightly News, BBC One and ITV

3.2.1: BBC *Nine O'Clock News*/BBC *News at Ten*²⁴

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
Broadsheet Domestic	59.7	39.2	44.6	56.0	56.3	43.0	42.3	46.4
Broadsheet Foreign	24.0	43.6	32.9	39.2	29.7	42.8	43.5	34.4
Tabloid	16.2	17.1	22.6	4.9	13.2	13.3	14.3	19.2



- 81% Broadsheet coverage
- More emphasis on foreign news since 1975/80.

In *From Callaghan to Kosovo*, we noted that on the BBC's late evening news, the volume of 'serious' coverage – Broadsheet and Foreign combined – never fell below three-quarters of total output. This pattern has been sustained in the 2000s, which is testament to an enduring serious approach on the BBC's late evening bulletin even in the face of growing audience fragmentation and related economic and other pressures.

Prior to the present study, we recorded domestic broadsheet coverage dropping sharply between 1975 and 1980, countered by a large increase in foreign coverage. Thereafter, it rose until 1995 before

²⁴ In October 2000, the BBC moved its nightly bulletin from 9pm to 10pm, occupying the space created by ITV's termination of *News at Ten* 18 months previously.

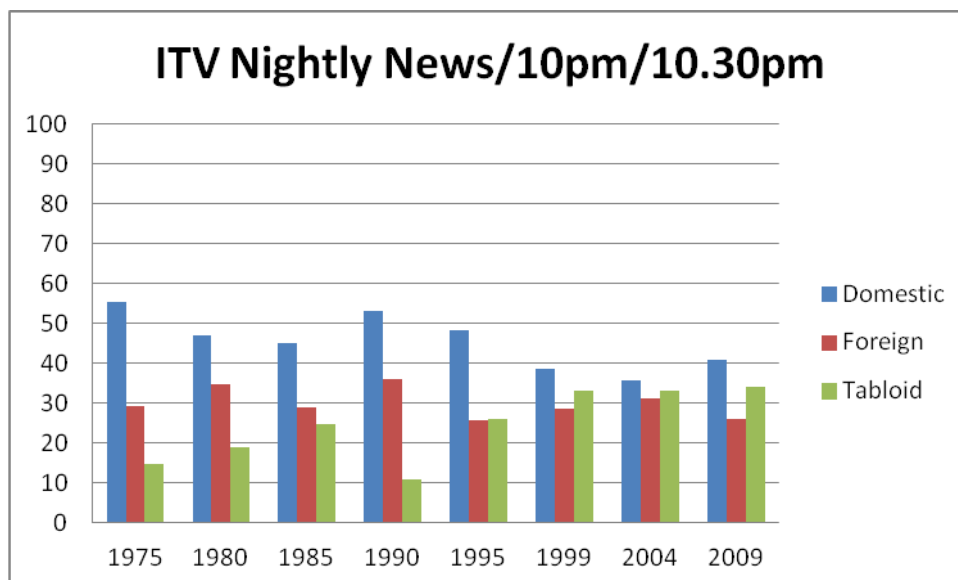
dropping again in 1999 due to a rise in foreign coverage. Throughout the 2000s, broadsheet domestic coverage remained at a consistent level, with a modest rise in 2009.

Tabloid coverage on the BBC’s late evening news has remained consistently low in comparison with all the other BBC and ITV bulletins, only once creeping over the 20% mark in 1985. It rose gradually between 1975 and 1985, before dropping dramatically in 1990 to an all-time low of just 5%, again reflecting a combination of dramatic national and global stories and an institutional shift in editorial agendas under John Birt. Between 1995 and 2004, tabloid coverage remained steady at around 13-14% before rising in 2009 to just below 20%, the highest level since the mid-eighties and the second highest in our 35 year series. It still remains, along with Channel 4, the bulletin with the lowest proportion of tabloid content.

Although fluctuating over time, the BBC late evening news has consistently displayed a tendency towards privileging foreign coverage. Since 1999, it has devoted a greater proportion of its bulletins to foreign affairs than any other news programme, including even *Channel 4 News*. Indeed, in 2004, more time was devoted to foreign news than to any other category for the first time since 1980, a finding which is attributable in large part to the Iraq War. Although foreign coverage declined to just over one-third in 2009, this remained the highest proportion on any bulletin, and reaffirmed a continuing commitment by the BBC to coverage of international issues.

3.2.2: *ITV Nightly News/News at Ten/News at Ten Thirty/News at Ten*

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
Broadsheet Domestic	55.5	46.9	45.0	53.3	48.3	38.5	35.8	40.8
Broadsheet Foreign	29.4	34.7	28.9	35.9	25.6	28.5	31.2	26.2
Tabloid	14.8	18.9	24.9	10.9	26.1	33.0	33.1	34.1



- 67% broadsheet coverage
- Clear differentiation with BBC bulletin has been maintained

As the four different titles in the sub-heading of Table 3.2.2 suggest, the past decade has been a turbulent one for ITV’s late evening bulletin. As already mentioned, *News at Ten*’s long run was brought to an end in March 1999, only to be reinstated in 2001. In February 2004, shortly before sampling began for this study, the bulletin was pushed back to 10.30pm before, in 2008, being re-established in the 10pm slot.

A notable finding of the previous study was the similarity in levels of broadsheet content on the late evening bulletins of the BBC and ITV until 1990. After this point, the two bulletins diverged, with ITV following an increasingly tabloid agenda, culminating in tabloid content accounting for around one-third of this bulletin in 1999.²⁵ Since 1999, domestic broadsheet coverage has remained reasonably steady, dropping slightly between 1999 and 2004, before rising in 2009 to 40.8%. The two ITV bulletins therefore remain less broadsheet-oriented than their BBC counterparts but still devote over two thirds of their time to broadsheet issues.

A second major finding of the analysis between 1975 and 1999 was the rise in tabloid content between 1975 and 1985, a drop in 1990, and subsequent rise again to 1999. Although we speculated in the last study about whether this presaged a continuing shift to a more tabloid agenda, the 2004 and 2009 figures demonstrate a clear levelling off of tabloid coverage at around one third of the total, almost identical to ITV’s early evening bulletin. This has been one of the steadiest trends revealed by our updated study.

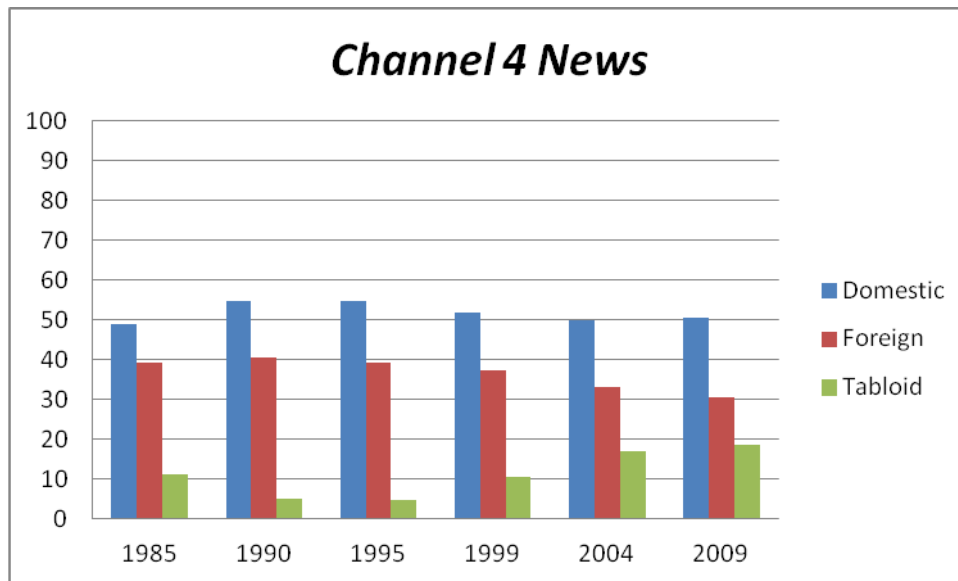
As with the early evening bulletin on ITV, it is surprising that there is no significant increase in foreign coverage in 2004 given the Iraq War. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that overall there has been only a 3 percentage-point decline in foreign coverage on ITV’s late evening news over the entire 34-year period, despite the intense and sustained commercial pressures of the last 20 years.

3.3: Channel 4 and Channel 5 Bulletins

3.3.1: Channel 4 News

	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
Broadsheet Domestic	49.0	54.8	54.8	51.9	50.0	50.5
Broadsheet Foreign	39.4	40.7	39.3	37.5	33.1	30.6
Tabloid	11.1	5.1	4.8	10.6	16.9	18.8

²⁵ As with ITV’s evening news, the figures used here denote the late evening bulletins, following the relaunch in 1999 (see footnote 20 – above, page 13). The figures for 1999 are those given in the earlier study after excluding summaries of the following day’s newspapers which we decided should not be designated as ‘tabloid’ (see Barnett, S., E. Seymour and I. Gaber (2000) op. cit. p9).



- 81% broadsheet coverage
- Slight rise in tabloid coverage, but still the most consistently broadsheet bulletin

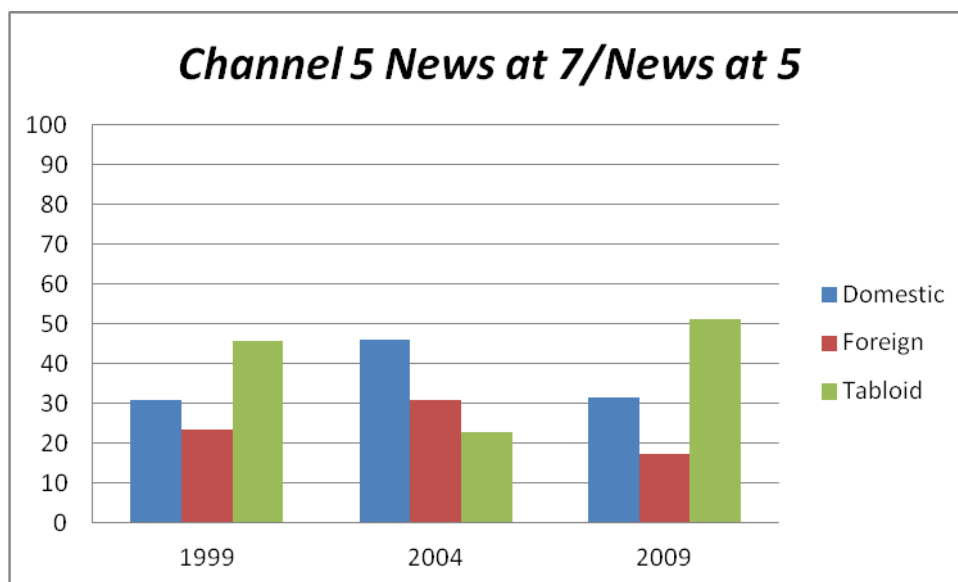
Channel 4 News was noteworthy for the consistency of its coverage between 1985 (the first sampled year after the channel went on-air in 1982) and 1999: approximately 50-55% of the programme was devoted to domestic broadsheet issues, around 40% to foreign affairs, and there were very low levels of tabloid coverage, particularly in 1990 and 1995. Consistent with the channel's mission to provide serious and in-depth news coverage, its agenda was overwhelmingly dominated by 'hard' news, in spite of changes to the channel's funding regime following the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the increase in commercial competitors.

The data from 2004 and 2009 affirm that, despite further changes to the structure of the television market and mounting commercial pressures on the channel's funding model, *Channel 4 News* remains primarily devoted to pursuing a serious news agenda. However, one trend emerges: while broadsheet coverage remains steady at approximately 50%, there has been an increase in tabloid content at the expense of broadsheet foreign news. In Section 4 (below), we look at these changes in greater depth, and suggest that whilst a proportion of 'crime' coverage (which falls into our tabloid category) might possibly be designated as broadsheet, this alone does not account for the decline in foreign coverage, from 37.5% in 1999 to 33.1% in 2004 and 30.6% in 2009.

Given its longer bulletin format, we should remember that *Channel 4 News* still broadcasts the largest amount of foreign coverage by absolute volume, and it is possible that part of the rise in tabloid content is explained by coverage of events surrounding the death of Michael Jackson in 2009 (which was designated as 'tabloid' across all bulletins). It is also possible that, in the context of a one-hour predominantly serious bulletin at the heart of peak-time, a deliberate editorial decision was taken in the 2000s to move towards a slightly lighter agenda.

3.3.2: Channel 5 News at 7/News at 5²⁶

	1999	2004	2009
Broadsheet Domestic	30.8	46.1	31.6
Broadsheet Foreign	23.6	31.0	17.2
Tabloid	45.6	22.9	51.2



- Over half of bulletins tabloid by 2009
- Fundamental shift in news agenda between 2004 and 2009

As Channel 5 came on air in 1997 only one set of figures was available to the previous study, which indicated a more heavily tabloid-oriented agenda (45.6% of coverage), in line with its deliberate targeting of younger viewers. Section 4 gives more information on the breakdown of the tabloid content on Channel 5 news.

Since then, there have been significant changes in the news agenda of Channel 5's later evening news. In 2004, there was an almost complete reversal of the news balance, with tabloid coverage dropping by almost half, to 23%, overtaken by both broadsheet and foreign coverage. This can be ascribed partly to a novel format employed by Channel 5 News during that period: the use of long studio discussions on major news stories (typically the top story of the day) involving two or three commentators. This would have had financial benefits – significantly cheaper than obtaining footage from far-flung locations – and served to boost the overall figures for broadsheet content. However, it could also be ascribed to the programme being then edited by a former BBC Six o'clock News producer.

²⁶ This sample draws from Channel 5's flagship news bulletins in 2004 and 2009: *Five News at 7*. However, for a small number of dates in 2004 and 2009, recordings of these bulletins were unobtainable from any of our sources, and the 5pm bulletin was used instead (see Appendix 2 for details). This was justifiable given the similarities in running orders in the two bulletins on any given day. In 2009, however, *Five News at 7* was replaced by an entirely different format of news and current affairs show, *Live From Studio Five*. Given the format of the new show, it was decided that the 5pm bulletin (as the remaining evening news bulletin on Channel 5) be substituted instead of applying a news coding frame to a predominantly discussion-based show. Therefore, on all sampled dates from 16th September 2009 to the end of the study, the 5pm bulletin was used.

In 2005, ITN lost the contract for supplying Channel 5 news to Sky News. It is not clear whether there is any direct correlation, but by 2009 a full reversal had taken place with tabloid coverage accounting for more than half of all content, while domestic and foreign broadsheet news declined to the same levels as 1999 (when the Channel’s news was still provided by ITN). As Section 3.4 below indicates, the agenda of Sky News does not provide a template for Channel 5 News in 2009, and we should note that the contract for Channel 5 news has recently been restored to ITN.

As we will see in Section 4, the vast proportion of tabloid content on Channel 5 does not consist of sport and crime stories, but of items designated as ‘light’ (royalty, human interest, humour and entertainment/showbiz). This appears to mark a clear editorial direction within the Channel – perhaps consolidating its appeal to a younger audience – which we expect to continue even after ITN takes over the news contract from February 2012.

3.4: 24-Hour News Agendas

For this study, we also sought to analyse news output on the two main 24-hour channels (the BBC News Channel, prior to 2008 branded as BBC News 24, and Sky News) over the same time period as for the main terrestrial bulletins. However, a number of issues concerned with collecting longitudinal evidence of 24 hour channels mean that the figures outlined in this section should be treated as broad indicators, without the full reliability of the data discussed above. The foremost problem is the absence of a full archive of news output from the 24-hour news providers. Whilst understandable, given the present state and cost of digital storage technology, it should be of some concern to scholars and historians that footage is generally only kept for around 18 months before being deleted.

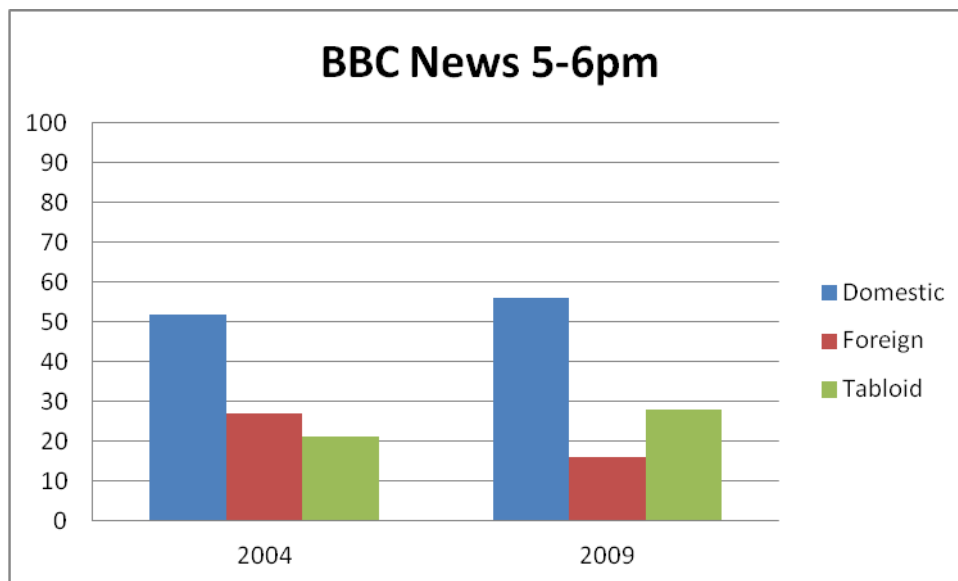
This impacted on the present study in two ways. First, data for the BBC News Channel were obtained from text running orders, rather than on-screen footage. Thus, we cannot say with certainty that the order was followed with 100% accuracy, particularly in respect of the percentage of time allocated to each story (for example, a live interview allotted 180 seconds in the running order may have over- or under-run). We are confident, however, that the running orders from which we derived our analysis were sufficiently close to actual output to provide an adequate indicator of content.

Sky News archives, disks and running orders covered only 9 out of the 25 bulletins for the 2009 sample, again due to the network’s archive deletion policy. Whilst these bulletins could be analysed in the standard fashion, the smaller sample means that the data produced are potentially less representative of coverage for that year. Again, therefore, the figures below should be regarded as indicative only.

3.4.1: BBC News 24, 5pm-6pm/BBC News at Five²⁷

	2004	2009
Broadsheet Domestic	51.9	56.0
Broadsheet Foreign	27.0	16.1
Tabloid	21.2	28.0

²⁷ In 2006, *BBC News at Five* was formally designated the daily (weekday) flagship bulletin to compete with *Live at Five* on Sky News. Since the 6pm bulletin is a simultaneous broadcast of *BBC News at Six* on BBC One, the 5-6pm news hour was also analysed for the 2004 sample.



24-hour news does not perform the same function as the fixed-time bulletins; audience viewing habits differ, and the coverage is geared more towards providing a service that viewers can ‘dip into’, involving repetition of major stories and the continual revisiting of related themes, or sustained live coverage of a major breaking story²⁸. Nevertheless, our analysis of each channel’s flagship evening bulletin offers a broad-brush indicator of the balance of news content over time, and how this compares with the mainstream news bulletins.

The findings for BBC News output between 5pm and 6pm indicate a strong focus on domestic broadsheet content, rising from 52% in 2004 to 56% in 2009 – more than any other bulletin during these years, except for the BBC bulletin at 6pm. Indeed, the similarity between the BBC News Channel at 5pm and BBC *News at Six* figures suggest that story selection (for the first 30 minutes at least) for the two programmes may be closely linked. The similarity in figures for ‘Social Policy’ content in the second order analysis presented in Section 4 provides further evidence of this.

The strong domestic focus may also be linked to the preponderance of live coverage on 24-hour news and the significantly greater amount of airtime to be filled. Pre-recorded packages of major stories are usually linked to live two-ways, or to live or recorded interviews which are used to contextualise the story or to discuss further developments. Logistically, this is easier to achieve with domestic stories than with foreign ones. The inclusion of a business roundup in the second half-hour of the programme also provides a guaranteed daily block of domestic broadsheet news in addition to the standard news agenda.

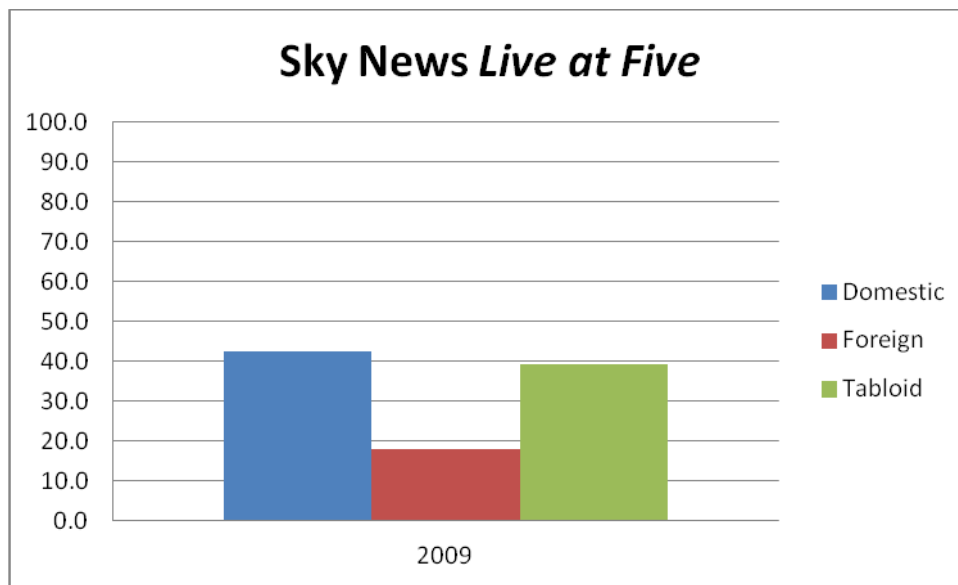
As with most mainstream bulletins, there was a rise in tabloid, and a fall in broadsheet foreign coverage between 2004 and 2009. However, this trend was rather more pronounced on the BBC News Channel, with a significant rise in tabloid coverage from 21.3% to 28%, and a significant decline in foreign coverage from 27% to just 16.1%. The rise in tabloid coverage is due to a significant rise in ‘light’ news content (see Section 4 below), which is at least partially explained by the inclusion, by 2009, of *Film 24* at 5.45pm on Fridays, a 10-minute section offering reviews of cinema releases. The decline in foreign coverage is likely to be related to Iraq war coverage and the mounting global

²⁸ Lewis, J., S. Cushion, and J. Thomas (2005) ‘Immediacy, Convenience or Engagement? An analysis of 24-hour news channels in the UK’, *Journalism Studies*, 6(4), pp461-477

economic crisis rather than any direct editorial shift in priorities, although it is possible that the cost implications of foreign news coverage may have become a further consideration by 2009.

3.4.2: Sky News *Live at Five*

	2009
Broadsheet Domestic	42.6
Broadsheet Foreign	18.1
Tabloid	39.3



Without longitudinally comparative data it is not possible to comment on trends in Sky’s coverage, but the 2009 figures demonstrate immediately a significantly different agenda to that of the BBC News Channel. Tabloid coverage is relatively high at 39.3%, though ‘serious’ news coverage still forms the majority of output. Sky’s sports coverage partially accounts for the difference, as the sports roundup in the second half hour was generally longer than the equivalent on BBC News. Access to footage from the Sky Sports and Sky Sports News channels, and the advantage gained from Sky’s extensive portfolio of exclusive sports rights, meant that sports packages were usually detailed and in-depth. As with the BBC News Channel, foreign coverage was surprisingly low (though at 18%, it was 2% higher than the BBC’s), again suggesting that the cost implications of foreign coverage may play a part in influencing 24 hour channel news agendas.

4. Results II: Subcategory Analysis

As well as analysing news content, in terms of the binary tabloid v broadsheet model, our original study also contained some ‘second tier’ analysis, originally reported in Appendix 3 of *From Callaghan to Kosovo*²⁹. Our objective was to examine some of the sub-categories in a more granular fashion, and in particular to shed more light on news output at either end of the broadsheet-tabloid divide.

Thus, at the broadsheet level we identified two categories that might be classified as having particular citizenship or “democracy-enhancing” value: political affairs news and social policy news. At the tabloid end, in order to understand better the nature of any shift towards a more populist or entertainment-led approach to news provision, we looked separately at three categories - sport, crime and “light” news. Of these five sub-categories, ‘Political Affairs’ comprises all politics/policy stories (concerning Westminster, the devolved assemblies and local government), foreign relations, and diplomacy involving the UK; ‘Social Policy’ consists of all education, health, social affairs, environment, transport, and culture stories³⁰. Within the tabloid category, ‘sport’ and ‘crime’ simply matched the individual subject codes, while ‘light’ news was confined to royalty, human interest, entertainment/show business and humorous stories. In all five cases, we ensured that these subcategory aggregations exactly matched the aggregation which was undertaken in the original study, in order to ensure reliable comparisons over time.

The sub-category figures for each bulletin are presented in Appendix 3. Overall, several conclusions can be drawn from this supplementary analysis:

- In 2004 and 2009, there is strong evidence that Political Affairs coverage has substantially increased on all the mainstream bulletins. Political coverage more than doubled on every channel between 1999 and 2004, most significantly rising from 10.1% of total coverage on ITV’s late-night news, to 28.1%. The 1999 figures for all bulletins appear to be abnormally low, and so by 2009 we see proportions of political coverage somewhat closer to pre-1999 levels, and in most cases back to very similar levels as were found in 1975 (the exception being the ITV nightly news, at 20% compared to 30% in 1975). We are confident that this is a real finding rather than attributable to coding effects between the two studies (see footnote 30). Our initial hypothesis was that this might be partly attributable to the increasing prevalence of live ‘two-way’ segments in political coverage. However, subsequent analysis suggested that this was not the case, and we can therefore conclude with some confidence that political coverage has been sustained at an impressively high level on most channels over the 35-year period. The clear exceptions are, as recorded above, the ITV late evening bulletin and more recently Channel Five news where political coverage plunged from 35% to 10% between 2004 and 2009.
- Fears about an inexorable rise in ‘light’ coverage, driven by market imperatives and a quest for ratings, have not been substantiated. Between 2004 and 2009, every bulletin for which comparative data is available saw an upturn in ‘light’ news coverage, but in only one case (Channel 5, as will be seen) did this comprise anything approaching a substantial proportion

²⁹ Barnett, S., E. Seymour and I. Gaber (2000) op. cit. pp15-16

³⁰ Stories relating to some aspect of social policy were coded as ‘Politics’ where any reference was made to government policy. Where no such explicit policy dimension was present, the code allocated was that pertaining to the subject of the story.

of overall news content. There is, however, a clear divergence between the BBC and ITV: BBC bulletins devote considerably less time to lighter news than they did in the 1980s, and are essentially at the same level as 1975. By contrast, both ITV bulletins devoted approximately 14% of content to 'light' news in 2009, in both cases significantly more than at any time in the last 35 years. It is worth remembering, however, that this still represents a very small proportion of the total bulletin time.

- *Channel 4 News*, as shown in Section 3 above, has seen a rise in its tabloid coverage over the past decade. From the three tabloid indicators in this subcategory analysis, we can see that this rise is attributable to modest increases in the categories of Sport, Crime and 'Light' news which have had a cumulative effect on 'tabloid' content. For instance, sport-themed content in 2004 and 2009 is approximately double the levels recorded in 1999, but remain the lowest of any bulletin; crime and 'light' coverage are all at their highest levels, but still less than all other bulletins apart from the BBC's late evening news programme. Meanwhile, in both 2004 and 2009, approximately half of all content has concerned political affairs and areas of social policy – comfortably the highest of any bulletin in this study.
- Channel 5's news output in 2009 is the clearest indicator yet of the rise of an entertainment-themed news agenda in the UK. As shown in Section 3.3.2 above, there have been two major shifts in Channel 5's news output between 1999 and 2009: a move from a tabloid agenda to more broadsheet news-oriented output between 1999 and 2004, followed by a swing back towards a tabloid agenda in 2009. The subcategory data demonstrate that, within the tabloid output of the channel, 'light' news content has come to dominate, with 38.9% of all output classified as 'light' stories. This is almost four times greater than in 1999, when the channel had a relatively similar proportion of tabloid content. It is evident, then, that between 2004 and 2009 – and following the change of news supplier from ITN to Sky – Channel 5's news output has become heavily weighted towards 'lighter' coverage, making it now the only mainstream bulletin with a majority of its news content categorised as tabloid.
- The two 24-hour news channels – subject to the qualifications set out in Section 3.4 – tend to follow something of a middling course between the BBC and ITV bulletins with slightly fewer stories falling into the Political Affairs, Social Policy, Crime and 'Light' story categories, and slightly more into Sport (which is expected given the substantial sports summary included on both channels at around the 45-minute mark). The slightly lower levels of the other sub-categories may in part be due to the inclusion of business summaries, which usually account for around 3-4 minutes of each bulletin.

5. Qualitative Analysis

The main purpose of this project has been to extend the scope of the previous study, and provide robust empirical evidence that tracks the changing news agenda in British television news – both as a whole, and within each bulletin. However, quantitative analysis has its limitations, and we felt that the injection of a more qualitative comparative element would add an extra dimension to the study and enrich the quantitative data. Since this has been introduced only in the present study, there is no longitudinal dimension to this aspect of the analysis which was undertaken on a purposive basis within the main terrestrial channels.

For this part of the study we set out to select, from across our 2004 and 2009 samples, one major domestic story, one major international story and one entertainment or sports-based story. Apart from meeting these criteria, the three stories were selected on the basis that they had either led the major bulletins, or were given substantial amounts of time, and therefore were being treated by all channels as news items of significance.

5.1: Story selection

In comparing the treatment of stories in the UK's mainstream news bulletins, it is important to remain aware of the contextual conditions within which the channels operate. Given the statutory responsibility placed on all broadcasters to report with “due impartiality” and the constraints on opinionated reporting or editorialising, differences between broadcasters tend to be confined to the choice of stories, their prominence and their presentational style rather than in the substance of how the story is reported.

In addition, two other factors need to be considered. First, most journalists operating within UK newsrooms tend to share a common understanding of ‘news values’. Whilst, as noted above, there are differences between the bulletins monitored, it is only necessary to look at the huge overlap in story selection that this, and the previous, study have found, to appreciate that the notion of a shared news agenda is more than just an academic concept.

Second, the broadcasters' sense of ‘audience’ is also important in understanding differences between the channels' styles of presentation. Although there tends to be a general agreement as to what constitutes the main stories of the day, and also a general acceptance of notions of due accuracy and impartiality, bulletin producers are intensely aware of the different demographic groups they are aspiring to reach. This awareness is reflected in their treatment of particular stories.

As our major international story, we selected the burial of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in November 2004, coinciding, as it did, with Tony Blair's first visit to Washington following the re-election of President George W. Bush (with the Middle East peace process and the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq top of both their respective agendas). For our major domestic story we looked at one particular day in February 2009 when Britain was hit by very heavy snowfalls coinciding with a warning from the Automobile Association that the country was facing a shortage of the salt necessary to de-ice Britain's roads. The third story could loosely be described as a ‘celebrity’ story, though not an obviously ‘soft’ story: the day in March 2009 when three Leicester City footballers were remanded in custody in Spain charged with sexual assault against three women at the resort of La Manga.

5.2: Coverage of the Funeral of Yasser Arafat and the Blair/Bush Washington Summit (12th November 2004)

Although foreign stories can struggle to gain airtime on television news where there is no British dimension, the funeral of Yasser Arafat – a relatively big story in its own right – received more airtime than might have been anticipated, an average of 44% of all news in the selected bulletins. This was due to a number of factors.

First, it coincided with the visit to Washington by Tony Blair. A misconception about news is that, if two linked events are happening at the same time, one story squeezes out the space and time that might have been available for the other. In fact, two linked stories can create extra space for both, as journalists often take the view that the linkage adds salience and creates the ‘big story of the day’; the effect can be to give both stories combined more on-air time than they might have received as single occurrences. We witness this phenomenon with both the Arafat story, which gained added salience by its linkage to the Blair/Bush meeting in Washington, and the snow story which gained added impact because of the warnings from the AA about the looming shortage of salt.

Other factors that accounted for the volume of coverage of the Arafat funeral included:

- The absence of any prominent domestic stories that day. The main domestic stories included new labelling of alcohol to deter binge-drinking (BBC 6), and new statistics for smoking-related deaths (ITV Evening bulletin),
- The pictures from Ramallah were extremely graphic (a major consideration for television news producers),
- The presence of a strong domestic angle due to the Prime Minister meeting the American President, and finally
- The continuing controversy in the UK surrounding the aftermath of the previous year’s invasion of Iraq (a major topic on the Blair and Bush agenda).

All the bulletins led with the Arafat story and linked it to the talks in Washington. In terms of the overall duration of coverage for the two stories, *Channel 4 News* devoted the most time whilst *ITV’s Evening News* devoted the least.

Major differences appear when we look at how the different channels divided their time between the highly visual Arafat funeral and the more predictable press conference-dominated coverage of what was – arguably – the more important story (in international terms) taking place in Washington. *Five News*, which specifically targets the much sought-after demographic of younger men, gave much greater emphasis to the pictures coming out of Ramallah rather than those emanating from Washington; it devoted more than seven minutes, or over a quarter of its total news output, to the story. Conversely, again reflecting the differing profiles of both the programme and its audience, *Channel 4 News* devoted a little less than five minutes, or just over 12.5% of its bulletin, to the Arafat funeral.

Bulletin (total news coverage in seconds)	Total duration (% of bulletin) ³¹	Funeral duration (% of bulletin)	Blair/Bush duration (% of bulletin)	Pieces to camera and live two-ways
BBC 6 (1452)	510 (35.1%)	220 (15.1%)	290 (20.0%)	5
BBC 10 (1584)	739 (46.7%)	329 (20.8%)	410 (25.9%)	5
ITV Evening (1371)	525 (38.3%)	300 (21.9%)	225 (16.4%)	4
ITV Nightly (1188)	727 (61.2%)	280 (23.6%)	447 (37.6%)	5
Channel 4 (2389)	1141 (47.8%)	298 (12.5%)	843 (35.3%) ³²	2
Channel 5 (1574)	558 (35.4%)	438 (27.8%)	120 (7.6%)	7 ³³
Average³⁴	43.9%	19.5%	24.4%	

The Blair/Bush talks received most airtime (as a proportion of total news) on ITV's *News at Ten Thirty*, at over one third, although this again partly reflects the relative brevity of the bulletin. It is, however, worth noting in addition that the total volume of coverage for the Blair/Bush talks was longer than that of the BBC's *News at Ten*. The least time devoted to the Washington summit, at just two minutes, was on *Five News*.

One interesting difference between channels is the use they make of reporter pieces-to-camera (PTCs) and live two-ways (planned conversations between the reporter and the newscaster). Both these techniques have been developed with a number of purposes in mind, summed up by the phrase "Reporter Involvement" or RI. One such purpose is to give the bulletin a sense of drama and to emphasise the fact that "we are there, on the ground, as the action happens". Linked to this is the notion of giving the audience a sense of "nowness" – "here we are getting you the latest news as it happens". Third, it helps the audience identify with the bulletin by getting them to identify with its reporters and newscasters (on really big stories, such as the Iraq War, newscasters anchor the bulletin from the location). Finally, and – in journalistic terms at least – most usefully, PTCs are used to provide the audience with the very latest information, as well as story background, context and explanation. An obvious (and frequent) example is the Political Editor standing outside 10 Downing Street, providing the end-piece to a running political story.

PTCs and two-ways were used for all of these purposes in the coverage of the Arafat funeral. As noted in the table, *Five News* made most use of such techniques, but this was largely because they told the story of the funeral by means of an ongoing two-way between the reporter and the newscaster, interspersed with clips. The two BBC bulletins were also heavy users of PTCs, both using five in the course of their coverage, although in these cases the objective was to explain and contextualise, providing an opportunity for their Middle East and Political Editors to provide summaries for the reports from Ramallah and Washington.

In terms of the overall content of the Arafat funeral packages the most marked divergences were between the BBC's coverage and that of *Channel 4 News* and *Five News*, with both the latter using a more human touch to tell the story. *Channel 4 News* found a family of Palestinians and followed them before, during and after the funeral. *Five News* featured a series of vox pops with mourners, ending with one particularly emotional encounter in which the interviewee broke down in tears. The

³¹ Duration is calculated in seconds, percentage is that of the total news duration, rather than the length of the programme (e.g. funeral duration of BBC 6 = 220s; total news in that bulletin = 1452s; percentage = 15.1%)

³² *Channel 4 News* included a live interview with Tony Blair which ran for approximately 8 minutes.

³³ For this story, *Channel 5 News* used two-ways interspersed with clips.

³⁴ Average percentages are calculated from cumulative totals.

distinguishing characteristic of ITV's coverage was the use they made of 'explainer' packages - a technique aimed at providing context that does not involve a correspondent's PTC. In this case both ITV bulletins ran useful explainers about the background to the Middle East peace process using a combination of archive footage and studio graphics.

5.3: Coverage of the 'Snow and Salt' Crisis (5th February 2009)

In February 2009, in the midst of one of Britain's worst winters, problems on the roads caused by snow were compounded by reports that many local authorities were running low on salt, vital if main roads were to be kept clear of ice and snow. All the bulletins led on the combination of the heavy snowfalls and fears that salt supplies were running perilously low. The story probably achieved its prominence partly because snowfalls were particularly heavy but also because the Automobile Association issued a warning about the looming shortage of salt, describing some roads as "death traps".

Traffic problems caused by bad weather can become 'running stories', and these present news editors with the daily challenge of finding ways to present these stories – which can't be ignored because they have such an immediate and frequently deleterious effect on their audiences - in a new light. In these circumstances strong pictures can provide journalists with a welcome means of maintaining variety and immediacy in their coverage. Most motorists never tire of seeing vehicles spinning out of control, or long traffic queues on familiar roads. In addition heavy snow usually provides pictures of young (and not so young) members of the public enjoying the day off school or work, tobogganing and skiing. This particular story also provided opportunities for pictures of the declining salt stocks and scenes at salt mines and depots, not normally seen.

But perhaps the most important reason why this story received the prominence it did was because it reflected one of the key factors that can influence news editors – impact on audience and in particular an impact that represents a potential 'threat'.³⁵ Virtually everyone is affected by bad weather and such stories are not only intrinsically newsworthy but also enable the channel to perform a genuine public service (which enhances its reputation and value to its audience) by providing information about traffic conditions, school closures and weather forecasts.

There is little to distinguish the coverage of this story between the bulletins monitored; all led on it and all featured reports from salt depots and included interviews with one or more of a spokesperson for the AA, for local councils and for the companies responsible for supplying the salt. The pictures also provided plenty of opportunities for snowbound reporters' pieces-to-camera and two-ways. The BBC News at Six featured four PTCs and two-ways, whilst the later BBC bulletin had no fewer than six. ITV News was more sparing, featuring just two on their early evening bulletin and one on its later show.

It is sometimes said that within a television newsroom the greatest competition is not with bulletins on rival channels but between different bulletins on the same channel. That was clearly not a factor on this particular day, when there was a remarkable similarity in the amount of time devoted to this story

³⁵ Stories which constitute a threat meet one of the six classic news criteria identified by Galtung and Ruge – namely Frequency, Negativity, Unexpectedness, Unambiguity, Personalization and Meaningfulness. See Galtung, J. & Ruge, M. Holmboe (1965): *The Structure of Foreign News. The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers*, [Journal of Peace Research](#), vol. 2, pp. 64-91; [online edition](#)

within channels as well as with the nature and style of presentation; the BBC *News at Six* and the BBC *News at Ten* devoted 418 seconds and 400 seconds respectively, whilst on ITV the split between the early and late shows was 291 seconds against 326 seconds.

5.4: Arrest of Leicester City Footballers in Spain on Sex Assault Charges (5th March 2004)

Sports stories are of constant interest to news programmes – not just in their own right, but also because of their appeal to young men, one of the most difficult demographics to reach. Football stories are of particular interest to this audience, and if they also involve allegations of sexual misconduct in a foreign country then – in news value terms – so much the better.

The story of the arrest and charge of three Leicester City footballers in Spain provided more picture sources than is usual for court-based stories. There were pictures of the players and manager arriving and leaving court, scenes at Leicester City's training ground of footballers training who had earlier returned from Spain, interviews outside the ground with fans and officials, and opportunities for 'celebrity' interviews with former players reflecting on how such situations might arise and the likely consequences for players and team.

This story demonstrated the differing priorities of the bulletins. *Five News* saw it as a major story, leading their bulletin with it and devoting slightly over eleven minutes (nearly half the bulletin) to coverage from Spain and the UK. They also featured more coverage of the fans' perspective than did the other bulletins. *Channel 4 News*, by contrast, ran the story as its fourth item, devoting less than seven minutes to it (less than a quarter of their bulletin). Both ITV bulletins led with the story, devoting around a third of their bulletins to reports from La Manga and Leicester. While the BBC *News at Six* also led with this story, devoting a quarter of its bulletin to it, the BBC *News at Ten* demoted the story to third spot (though still nearly a quarter of the bulletin).

In terms of pieces-to-camera and live two- (and in one case) three-ways, there was some variation. The BBC at 6pm had three such items in its six minutes' of coverage, whilst on ITV the early bulletin squeezed in five PTCs and two-ways. The later bulletins on the main two channels carried three such items apiece whilst *Five News* featured three and *Channel 4 News* just one.

The BBC's *News at Ten* carried an interview with a Spanish lawyer who outlined the legal process in Spain and explained the charges and possible sentences; this contextualising of the story, from a Spanish perspective, was absent from the other bulletin.

5.5: Summary

There are two broad conclusions that can be drawn from this qualitative analysis of stories across different channels and bulletins. First, similarities between the channels are greater than the differences in three respects: priority within running orders; the linking of related stories (as in the case of the Arafat funeral-Blair/Bush talks, and Snow-salt shortage stories); and the use of live two-ways and pieces-to-camera. Second, notions of audience play a significant role in explaining what differentiation there is, particularly on those bulletins with a commercially or institutionally defined remit to appeal to a precise demographic.

Perhaps above all, this small-scale qualitative analysis echoes the main findings of this study that, despite the differences in channel context and their notions of audience, all the mainstream broadcasters adopt very similar approaches to covering news stories, suggesting a shared news culture which has become embedded in the DNA of the majority of British television journalists.

6. Conclusions

Our original study was first conceived as an attempt to investigate empirically whether – as some of its critics were suggesting – television news was ‘dumbing down’. As outlined in the introduction we found little evidence for those fears over most of the 25-year span of that study, but warned that our data for 1999 might herald a strategic shift. We also pointed out a growing trend of differentiation both between, and within, broadcasters in their approaches to editorial strategy in early and later evening bulletins.

This study demonstrates that our concerns were – mostly – unfounded. Perhaps the one overarching conclusion from our study of UK terrestrial television news bulletins over the last 35 years is that, despite enormous upheavals throughout the media and communications industries, peak-time bulletins on the main public service channels are continuing to offer a predominantly serious domestic and foreign news agenda, with Channel 5 providing the only clear evidence of a shift towards a more tabloid approach. Meanwhile, the differentiation trend which we outlined in our last study has continued, with significant variation between the bulletins, reflecting the differing sense of their own identities and audiences.

In that sense, television news on the mainstream channels is clearly fulfilling the democratic and informational roles established by the public service framework of the 2003 Communications Act and the 2006 BBC Charter and Agreement. The fears of those who believed that unbridled competition and the stretching of resources would lead inevitably to a more trivialised or sensationalised television news agenda have not – at least so far – been realised.

6.1 The Future for Television News

It is becoming increasingly common to read about the imminent demise both of television generally and of its relevance as a conduit for news and information. A combination of the proliferation of new channels (in particular 24 hour news channels), fragmentation of audiences which undermines the business model of commercial channels, pressure on the BBC licence fee, and the ease of accessing news through new online sources and mobile platforms, all combine to raise legitimate questions about whether mainstream television news bulletins are losing their primacy as a mass news provider.

In fact, both television itself as a medium and television news are proving remarkably resilient in the face of these enormous economic and technological challenges. According to official industry figures average daily viewing in the UK, which had hovered around 3 hours 45 minutes for most of the 2000s, actually rose to just over 4 hours in 2010.³⁶ As recently recorded in Robin Foster’s study of the role of television news, this is reflected in a rise in average television news viewing, up from 20 minutes per day in 2006 to 22 minutes per day in 2010.³⁷

While average audiences for mainstream news bulletins are certainly lower than 10 years ago, the impact of the 24 hour channels appear to have been minimal and perhaps much less than anticipated

³⁶ Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB), *Trends in Television Viewing 2010*, BARB 2011: Table 2. It is worth noting, though, that the methodology changed slightly from 2010.

³⁷ Foster, R. (2011) *Informing the UK: The role of TV news in the digital world*, p16, available at <http://www.commcham.com/publications/tv-news>.

after over 20 years of operation (Sky News was the first to be launched in 1989). For major events and unfolding stories – such as the Japanese earthquake or Arab Spring demonstrations in 2011 – these are valuable sources of information for many viewers. But they are used sparingly, and are much more likely to be patronised by the ‘news junkies’ and opinion formers of Whitehall and Westminster. In production terms, these channels also provide important economies of scale, helping to justify the use of expensive outside broadcast units, or foreign correspondents, for mainstream news bulletins when they can also be employed for much lengthier items on all-news channels. We cannot, however, see any evidence or likelihood that 24-hour news channels will displace the main evening news bulletins as the preferred source of daily television news for the majority of British viewers.

Equally, there is little evidence to suggest that the plethora of news aggregators and online sources are likely to make serious inroads into television’s attraction as a news disseminator, both in terms of its ease of use and the trust invested in the television medium. Television remains an easy, inexpensive and universally available source of information and entertainment, with wide screen and high definition sets significantly enhancing the main living-room experience. Moreover, we saw at the beginning of this report how television remains by far the most trusted and most frequented source of national and international news. Audience imperatives behind the desire to watch a television news bulletin – to see a succinct but comprehensive, reliable and accessible account of the main events of the day, both domestic and foreign – suggest that in 20 years time, the broad contours of television news production and consumption are likely to be strikingly similar to those of today.

6.2 Implications of our study

Almost from the very beginning of commercial competition to the publicly funded BBC, television news has been promoted and sustained as an integral part of peak-time schedules on the main television channels through successive Acts of Parliament, regulatory structures and, more recently, in the BBC Charter.³⁸ This regulatory structure mandates high quality national and international news on the commercial public service broadcasters in peak-time hours, while the BBC is bound by its public purposes, in particular its role in “sustaining citizenship and civil society.” All are subject to rules of due impartiality, laid down by successive statutes.

At a time when the present coalition government has initiated consultation on a new Communications Act and is preparing to publish a Green Paper, we would emphasise the vital role that this long-standing independent regulatory framework has played in protecting the kind of varied, but predominantly serious and information-rich, television news which is so vital to a healthy democracy. Sustaining this culture of television news also depends, of course, on resources and on continued investment in newsgathering as an integral element of broadcast operations, a commitment that becomes more difficult as competition for money and ratings intensifies further. It also depends on the kind of dedication to journalistic quality which has to date been explicitly endorsed by all the mainstream broadcasters, but could be threatened in the commercial sector under new ownership. In that respect, we have seen with Channel Five how shifts in organisational priorities can have

³⁸ An excellent summary of the current regulatory framework for TV news can be found in Foster’s report (ibid) p13. A full historical account of the statutory and regulatory background can be found in Barnett’s book, *The Rise and Fall of Television Journalism* (op cit).

repercussions for editorial output. This in turn could raise interesting regulatory questions about the definition of "high quality" news which the commercial PSBs are obliged to provide.

Perhaps the most articulate statement of television's democratic contribution to British public life came from Georgina Born in her major study of the BBC in the nineties:

Britain's television journalism has certainly tried to animate something approaching the public sphere ideal; providing information to nurture a responsible citizenry, staging rational debate with the input of specialist expertise, exercising a critical oversight of the state and other powerful institutions, and encouraging participation in collective debates about common concerns and the public good. However imperfectly, it has achieved this in a pluralistic way not only institutionally, but through the deployment of a range of journalistic tones from 'heavy' to 'light', the intellectual and investigative to the familiar and domestic.³⁹

Astonishingly, Born's description appears to be as relevant to the 2010s as it was to the 1990s. Our study suggests that, against all the odds, television news in Britain has continued to fulfil its democratic potential and has resisted what many regarded as an "inevitable" slide into trivialisation and celebrity gossip. We believe that these encouraging, and perhaps counter-intuitive, findings are attributable in large part to the public service framework of regulation for the commercial sector and public funding for the BBC which continue to define Britain's television news ecology. And we are optimistic that over the next 20 years, even as journalism continues to struggle with the legacy of huge economic and technological upheaval, television will continue to fulfil this "public sphere ideal" as long as governments do not attempt to dismantle its over-arching protective framework.

³⁹ Born, G. (2004), *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*, London: Secker and Warburg, p378

Appendices

Appendix 1: Category List

Key: 'Broadsheet Foreign' categories in **Bold**; 'Tabloid' Categories in *Italics*

1. Politics/Economic Policy
2. Industry/Business/City/Finance/Economic Indicators
3. *Crime/Police*
4. Social Affairs: To include drugs, alcohol, prostitution, immigration, home affairs (excluding those related to category 3)
5. Legal Affairs
6. *Consumer Issues*
7. Foreign Affairs involving Britain, or Britain within the European Union (Including diplomacy)/diplomatic or political activity and relations between states, trade negotiations
8. **EU**
9. **Civil Unrest, internal disorder/Civil world demonstrations/Threats or acts of terrorism or violence/State-sponsored murder**
10. **War/Tensions between states**
11. Northern Ireland (troubles or sectarian tension)
12. Health/Medicine/Medical profession
13. Education
14. Employment/Industrial relations/Trade union issues
15. Environment/Ecology/Energy/Planning and Development
16. **Natural Disasters/'Acts of God'**
17. *Human Tragedy/Accident/Disaster (e.g. Plane crash; Factory explosion)*
18. Weather (General)
19. Science/Technology/IT
20. Transport Issues
21. Religion
22. *Sport*

23. Culture, Media and the Arts (including Sport in a cultural context, i.e. Olympics, or sport's role in society)
24. *Royalty*
25. *Show Business/Entertainment/Celebrity*
26. Moral/Ethical issues
27. *Human Interest*
28. *Humour/Quirky Stories*
29. *Expedition/Adventure*
30. Military/Espionage/National Security
31. Other

A Note on the Categories: The categories here are set out in the same order as in *From Callaghan to Kosovo*; there is no hierarchy of importance. However, it should be noted that the reapplication of the coding frame to the 2004 and 2009 samples highlighted some cases in which the categories might be worthy of reformulating for subsequent studies. Most notably, the elevation of Policing (in its practices and performance) as a newsworthy topic – reflecting changes to the reporting of policing issues over the past decade – means that the original Category 3 ('Crime/Police') partially obscures the fact that some instances of policing coverage does not fit into the 'Tabloid' category. The original coding frame was used here to ensure replicability with the previous study (and because the analytical framework had proved such a robust tool in measuring news content between 1975 and 1999) but further data were gathered to provide more information on certain story types, and to improve upon the existing coding frame. This extra data will form the basis of a more in-depth analysis of news content in 2004 and 2009 to be published separately from this report. As the table below shows, though, around 10-15% of Category 3 stories in the 2004 and 2009 samples dealt with policing issues, rather than individual crime stories. In the case of *Channel 4 News*, this accounted for 21.1% of all Category 3 stories. In Sections 3 and 4, above, it was noted that there had been a rise in 'Tabloid' content in Channel 4's news coverage in 2004 and 2009; this may be partly accounted for by this factor in the categorisation of policing stories. However, it should also be noted that the volume of 'Policing-oriented' Category 3-coded content was 2358 seconds, or 1.8% of all *Channel 4 News* content.

‘Policing’ Coverage, 2004 and 2009 Combined⁴⁰

Bulletin	Total Category 3 Stories (instances)	‘Policing’ Stories (instances)	‘Policing’ as % of Category 3 (by duration)
BBC 6	78	9	16.8
BBC 10	34	4	11.7
ITV Eve	88	12	16.1
ITV Night	66	9	15.6
Channel 4	123	14	21.1
Channel 5	91	9	12.6
BBC News	120	10	12.2

A second major development in news coverage is the rise of terrorism as a separate topic of news stories after September 11th 2001 and the subsequent commencement of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. This posed specific problems for the original coding frame. It was decided that, to keep the data presented in this report comparable with the previous study, terrorism should be coded on the basis of the existing categories, rather than to employ a specific new category that could distort results. So, for example, terrorist attacks on foreign soil were coded as ‘Broadsheet Foreign’ and Category 9, whether or not they related to Al-Qaeda or other Islamist groups, or to an unrelated terrorist campaign. Domestic terrorism-related stories were coded as either Category 30 (which includes ‘National Security’), Category 5 (Legal Affairs – where human rights or the Terrorism Act was the subject of the story) or – in a small number of cases where police raids were conducted, or where charges were brought – Category 3. As with the deeper analysis of Category 3 detailed above, further data were gathered about stories concerned with post-9/11 terrorism, which will again be detailed later. As the following table outlines, however, such stories accounted for a small percentage of ‘Broadsheet Domestic’ coverage.

Terrorism-Related Domestic Stories, 2004 and 2009

Bulletin	No. of Terror-Related Stories		% of Broadsheet Domestic Content	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
BBC 6	6	5	3.5	2.6
BBC 10	3	7	1.9	4.7
ITV Evening	10	5	5.6	2.7
ITV Nightly	6	5	6.3	4.3
C4	6	13	1.6	5.8
C5	3	4	1.3	2.6
BBC News	11	5	3.5	1.5

⁴⁰ The reduced Sky News sample from 2009 contained no ‘Policing’ stories, although this cannot be compared with the complete samples for other bulletins.

Appendix 2: Sampling Dates and Problematic Bulletins

The bulletins sampled from 2004 and 2009 were drawn from a variety of sources. The vast majority were obtained from the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC), while any programmes unavailable from those archives were analysed at the British Film Institute (BFI) archives in Central London. The Sky News bulletins sampled in 2009 were obtained directly from Sky. Only in the case of the BBC News Channel bulletins were textual running orders used to obtain data.

In two instances, bulletins were unobtainable from our sources, both from the 2004 sample. On 3rd May 2004, neither 5pm nor 7pm *Five News* bulletins were available. Analysis of schedules using the Television and Radio Index for Learning and Teaching (TRILT) suggests that Channel 5 didn't broadcast any evening news on that Bank Holiday Monday. On 15th September 2004, the 5pm-6pm slot on the BBC News Channel (then BBC News 24) was given over entirely to live coverage of protests outside Westminster prior to the House of Commons vote on the Hunting Bill. As a result, accurate data on the composition of the news content for that hour was impossible to ascertain from the textual running order.

As mentioned in Sections 3 and 5 above, on a number of dates we were unable to obtain the 7pm bulletins from Channel 5, and instead used the 5pm bulletins. Again, using TRILT, it appeared that on certain dates, no 7pm bulletin was broadcast. We checked both the BUFVC and the BFI archives for bulletins on these dates, and failed to find any recordings of *Five News* at 7pm on the dates marked in **bold** in the sample tables below – instead we used the 5pm edition for analysis. We are satisfied that we exhausted all reasonable avenues to obtain the 7pm programmes, and the information on TRILT suggests that no such bulletins exist. From 14th September 2009, *Five News at 7* was dropped in favour of *Live from Studio Five*; in the interests of comparability, we chose to switch to the 5pm bulletin, which remained the only evening news bulletin on Channel 5.

2004 Sample

Thurs 5 th Feb	Tues 10th Feb	Wed 18th Feb	Mon 23rd Feb	Fri 5 th Mar
Wed 7 th Apr	Thurs 15 th Apr	Fri 23 rd Apr	Tues 27th Apr	Mon 3 rd May
Tues 8 th Jun	Thurs 17 th Jun	Fri 25th Jun	Wed 30 th Jun	Mon 5th Jul
Thurs 9 th Sept	Wed 15th Sept	Mon 20 th Sept	Fri 1 st Oct	Tues 5 th Oct
Mon 1 st Nov	Fri 12th Nov	Thurs 18th Nov	Wed 24 th Nov	Tues 30th Nov

2009 Sample

Thurs 5 th Mar	Tues 10th Feb	Wed 18 th Feb	Mon 23 rd Feb	Fri 6 th Mar
Wed 8 th Apr	Thurs 16 th Apr	Fri 24 th Apr	Tues 28 th Apr	Mon 4 th May
Tues 2nd Jun	Thurs 11 th Jun	Fri 19 th Jun	Wed 24th Jun	Mon 29th Apr
Thurs 10 th Sept	Wed 16th Sept	Mon 21st Sept	Fri 2nd Oct	Tues 6th Oct
Mon 2nd Nov	Fri 13th Nov	Thurs 19th Nov	Wed 25th Nov	Tues 1st Dec

Appendix 3: Subcategory Analysis - full tables

I. Political Affairs

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
BBC6	25.6	15.2	14.1	32.6	20.8	14.6	30.0	26.0
BBC9/10	31.6	22.1	19.0	32.8	22.1	15.3	35.6	30.6
ITV Eve	22.2	17.9	16.2	31.3	19.7	12.6	30.0	19.3
ITV Night	30.2	24.7	18.9	30.0	19.9	10.1	28.1	20.0
C4			17.6	33.3	25.4	15.8	35.4	30.0
C5						5.8	35.5	10.5
BBC News							25.0	20.0
Sky News								20.7

II. Social Policy

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
BBC6	5.3	13.8	11.7	7.9	17.2	15.1	13.6	18.1
BBC9/10	5.4	12.3	7.2	3.3	10.8	9.9	10.8	14.7
ITV Eve	2.4	9.4	6.7	8.4	10.1	10.8	10.5	16.6
ITV Night	2.1	10.0	8.3	10.6	8.3	5.4	4.4	11.4
C4						15.5	13.1	20.2
C5						13.5	8.6	11.7
BBC News							12.0	18.3
Sky News								12.3

III. Sport

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
BBC6	3.9	7.7	4.7	3.0	3.3	8.7	6.2	7.0
BBC9/10	5.9	9.5	3.9	1.9	3.0	3.8	6.8	6.7
ITV Eve	4.3	9.9	7.9	5.0	4.6	8.8	6.2	3.7
ITV Night	7.5	9.2	7.1	4.2	5.0	10.8	17.7	9.4
C4			2.4	0.3	0.6	1.6	3.5	3.1
C5						13.5	7.2	5.4
BBC News							11.4	13.4
Sky News								14.2

IV. Crime

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
BBC6	6.3	6.5	5.6	2.1	6.0	6.8	10.5	10.3
BBC9/10	3.9	6.2	5.4	1.2	3.6	5.2	6.2	7.5
ITV Eve	7.1	6.9	7.4	6.4	10.0	6.4	14.9	12.2
ITV Night	6.6	6.8	5.3	3.2	7.8	6.9	10.7	9.4
C4			2.6	3.2	2.0	5.5	8.4	9.2
C5						11.3	10.5	13.4
BBC News							6.9	7.1
Sky News								7.1

V. 'Light' Stories

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009
BBC6	5.2	7.5	7.3	0.8	5.1	4.8	2.3	5.9
BBC9/10	3.9	9.7	8.0	0.5	2.9	0.8	1.3	3.7
ITV Eve	3.6	7.1	7.8	3.1	10.9	9.9	10.2	14.7
ITV Night	2.4	7.2	6.4	2.1	8.8	8.2	3.2	14.2
C4			2.5	0.7	0.8	0.5	3.2	4.5
C5						10.0	4.8	38.9
BBC News							2.6	6.9
Sky News								10.6

Appendix 4: Key Events for Years Covered

1975

- Conservative leadership contest (Thatcher v Heath)
- Industrial disputes – coal, steel, rail, British Leyland, Glasgow dustcarts, etc.
- Cambodian civil war/Laos
- Guildford pub bombings trial, Prevention of Terrorism Act
- Referendum on Common Market
- US withdrawal from Vietnam
- £/inflation
- Industry Bill
- Middle East peace/Kissinger diplomacy
- Mozambique independence
- Conflict in the Lebanon

- North Sea oil
- Portugal/Spain – internal political upheaval

1980

- Industrial action – British Leyland, Rolls Royce, dockers, rail
- Rhodesian independence
- Russia invades Afghanistan – Cold War tension
- Moscow Olympics (diplomatic tensions over Afghanistan)
- Iran – US embassy hostage siege
- Economy in crisis
- Uganda famine
- Labour Party internal strife – Callaghan v Benn
- Iran-Iraq War

1985

- TWA hijack
- War in Lebanon (terror, hostages, hijacking)
- South Africa – unrest/civil disturbance
- US-Soviet diplomacy (Geneva summit)
- Miners' strike
- Anglo-Irish Agreement
- Labour Party v Militant Tendency (Liverpool)

1990

- Political Change in South Africa (rebel cricket tour, Nelson Mandela released)
- Unravelling of Soviet Union (internal Russian upheaval, breakaway republics, unrest in Eastern Europe)
- East-West German reunification
- Iraq invades Kuwait
- Strangeways riot and siege
- Politics: poll tax and supergun
- Salman Rushdie Fatwa

- Soccer World Cup
- Thatcher resignation

1995

- Conflict in Bosnia (siege of Sarajevo, Dayton peace accord)
- Rwandan refugees
- Israeli PM Yitzak Rabin assassinated
- Oklahoma bombing, USA
- OJ Simpson verdict
- 50th Anniversary, World War Two
- Downing Street Declaration on Northern Ireland
- Collapse of Barings Bank
- Blair and internal Labour Party reforms
- John Major leadership challenge
- Hugh Grant caught with prostitute
- Princess Diana (general)
- Rose West murder trial

1999

- Kosovo conflict (Serb-Albanian clashes, Rambouillet negotiations, NATO airstrikes, refugees)
- International Kurdish demonstrations v Turkey
- Indonesian elections (unrest in East Timor)
- Northern Ireland peace negotiations (Mitchell review, etc.)
- Macpherson report on Stephen Lawrence murder
- GM crops
- Jill Dando murder
- Devolution (Scotland, Wales, NI, London Mayor)
- Cardinal Basil Hume dies
- Ban on beef on the bone (GB v France)
- General Pinochet extradition

- Manchester United Champions' League success

2004

- Iraq War and internal civil disorder
- Death of Yasser Arafat
- Government's '45-minute claim' and Hutton Inquiry
- Football: Euro 2004
- Trials of Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein
- Ken Bigley executed in Iraq
- Blair heart operation
- US Presidential election
- Hunting Ban protests/invasion of House of Commons
- Unrest in Ukraine over disputed election
- Deepcut inquiry

2009

- Ongoing worldwide economic collapse (domestic and international repercussions)
- War in Afghanistan
- Swine flu pandemic
- MPs expenses scandal
- Binyam Mohammed claims against British intelligence services
- Death at G20 protests
- Air France plane crash off coast of Brazil
- Environmental summit at Copenhagen
- Iran captures British sailors
- Extreme weather in UK: Snow and Ice in January; Flooding in Cumbria in November