

The Range and Depth of BBC News and Current Affairs: A Content Analysis



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1.0 Context

From the expertise of its journalists interpreting fast-moving events to the sources used to inform complex issues and stories, enhancing audience knowledge about what is happening in the world is a key part of the BBC's public service remit. As the BBC's Royal Charter puts it, "the BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming to build people's understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world". In doing so, it continues, the BBC "should offer a range and depth of analysis and content not widely available from other United Kingdom news providers, using the highest calibre presenters and journalists, and championing freedom of expression".¹

However, as the news ecology has transformed over recent years, connecting with audiences and raising public understanding of complex issues have become more challenging journalistic goals. The ways in which people consume and engage with media is in flux as more people turn to new online and social media platforms for news and information. Broadcasting is no longer the monopoly news provider as media consumption becomes a more fluid and fragmented experience. Moreover, in the digital age the number of television and radio channels has increased, giving people an unprecedented choice of information sources. While this opens up opportunities for journalists to practise journalism in new and innovative ways, it also puts pressure on them to interpret fast-changing issues and events, potentially compromising the accuracy and impartiality of news reporting.

Given this increasingly crowded and competitive media marketplace, concerns have understandably been raised about the range and depth of programming available in today's news ecology. The BBC – the UK's main public service broadcaster – is often the focus of these concerns, not just because its journalism is funded by a public licence fee, but because it is, according to Ofcom, "expected to provide high-quality, creative content that is distinctive across all its output and services; and that includes news and current affairs across all platforms".² While all UK broadcasters have a legal obligation to deliver duly accurate and impartial journalism, the BBC receives the most scrutiny because it has to be accountable to its licence fee payers and is by far the most widely consumed information source in the UK.

By conducting a systematic content analysis of BBC and commercial news and current affairs across TV, radio and online, our project was designed to provide an evidence-based assessment of the *range* and *depth* of journalism across different platforms and news providers. In doing so, we also contributed to Ofcom's review about how audiences perceive and understand news and current affairs programming.³ Our content analysis, in this respect, can be used to help explore people's knowledge of events and issues in order to find ways of raising public understanding of complex subject matter, from the details of Brexit negotiations to debates about education, health, and politics and public affairs more

¹ Quotes taken from the BBC's Public Charter available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577829/57964_CM_9365_Charter_Accessible.pdf

² Ofcom Terms of Reference: News and Current Affairs Review, March 2019;

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/139905/bbc-news-review-terms-of-reference.pdf

³ Ofcom Terms of Reference: News and Current Affairs Review, March 2019

generally.

Working in a world-leading school of journalism, we are acutely aware of the challenges that journalists face in today's multi-platform, 24-hour news culture. While remaining sensitive to the pressures and constraints under which journalists operate, we recognise the need for the BBC to deliver distinctive and high-quality journalism in an increasingly crowded news and information marketplace. Our aim was to provide an objective benchmark for assessing the range and depth of analysis in the BBC's news and current affairs across all platforms, as well as examining how this compares with other UK news providers. In order to supplement the content analysis study, interviews were conducted with either heads of news and current affairs or senior editors from the UK's main public service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5). These organisations all have different licence obligations in the provision of news which are regulated by Ofcom but are subject to the same requirements under the Ofcom Broadcasting Code for due impartiality and due accuracy.

1.1 Brief summary of key findings

We found that almost all BBC news outlets featured a relatively hard news agenda over the three-week sample. This included reporting a high proportion of news about politics, such as the Conservative leadership contest and Brexit, as well as international affairs. On the evening television news bulletins, only Channel 4 had a harder news agenda than the BBC News at Ten. Compared to sites such as the Daily Mail, Sun and Mirror, BBC online featured more hard news topics about politics and international affairs. Similarly, the BBC News app had a harder news agenda than news apps on ITV and Sky News.

Overall, across BBC broadcast, online and news apps, a broadly consistent editorial diet of hard news topics was reported. But on closer inspection the range of topics reported varied both across BBC outlets, and in comparison with other relevant commercial news providers. For example, international news made up over a quarter of airtime on the BBC News at Ten, but just 1.4% of BBC *Five Live Breakfast*. Channel 4 reported the highest proportion of international news – 30.9% of its airtime – across all television news bulletins. When international news was examined more closely, most BBC outlets reported hard news topics (protests in Hong Kong, for example), whereas across many broadcast and online commercial providers there was a greater focus on celebrity and entertainment stories.

On most BBC and commercial outlets, the Conservative leadership contest was the most reported specific topic. Of the BBC outlets examined, only Radio 1's *Newsbeat* did not extensively report the race to be the next Prime Minister. Routine topics such as health, education and crime did not feature substantively in BBC news agendas. For example, on Channel 5 news these topics combined made up 27.5% of its airtime compared to 7.5% of airtime on the BBC *News at Ten*. Another topic on the margins of the agenda was news about climate change. As a proportion of time spent reporting climate change over the three-week sample, the topic made up a tiny fraction of coverage across all BBC news outlets as well as on commercial media.

In the one-year study of current affairs, we found some differences in topic selection between BBC and commercial programming. Health, above all, was biggest focus of *Panorama* and

Tonight, whereas *Dispatches* focused on health and crime in equal measure. On these programmes current affairs output was generally focused on UK domestic issues. Radio 4's *Analysis*, in contrast, was a more internationally-driven current affairs programme. We examined all programmes about education and health in the UK and found that many programmes, on both BBC and commercial media, did not regularly explain the relevance of these topics to the devolved nations.

This analysis of social policy was reinforced by a case study which examined all news about health and education in the three-week sample. While all news outlets could have reported the devolved relevance of health and education more clearly, BBC News outlets took up this opportunity more regularly. When devolved signposting was present – across BBC and commercial news – it was often based on implicit references, such as ‘in England’, which did not explicitly spell out nation-based differences to audiences.

When we examined the comparative use of hyperlinks in BBC and commercial online media, we identified that many outlets, including the BBC news homepage, used internal links heavily, but used external links to a much lesser extent. We therefore carried out an additional one-week study of 12 BBC local, national and international specialised sites on politics, health and science, and this confirmed a predominant use of internal hyperlinks. We established that the BBC's internal hyperlinking differed from that of many commercial providers because the links in its online and news apps were to ‘explainers’ or more analytical forms of news, providing background and context to events and issues.

Our analysis of the BBC's depth of coverage across four case studies revealed that both in its coverage of the Conservative party leadership contest and the day on which the government announced its target to cut carbon emissions to almost zero by 2050, many BBC outlets reported a comparatively high level of policy information and supplied useful background and context to these issues. In reporting the 2050 target, the BBC coverage stood out (along with Channel 4) for challenging the government's plans and dissecting aspects of its policy. Likewise, during the election of the next Conservative leader, most BBC news outlets focused on the policy positions of the candidates rather than their personalities or campaigning tactics. Although most news coverage of Brexit was ‘policy-lite’, when substantive information was reported about the no-deal or future trade agreements, it was primarily by BBC outlets.

However, we also identified areas where the range and depth of BBC reporting could have been enhanced. During the Conservative leadership contest, for example, there were occasions when candidates were given brief soundbites without any challenge to their assertions. Channel 4 News, in contrast, challenged Conservative candidates' positions robustly. In their coverage of Brexit generally, the focus across all news outlets was on partisan, domestic concerns, with journalists often responding to internal UK political events and issues. Only the BBC outlets directly sourced the EU, and when they did, they used only five sources to represent the 27 member states. The range and depth of Brexit coverage would have been enhanced had it more regularly counterbalanced the claims of UK politicians with comments from EU or member state officials.

Taken together, our findings reveal that, over the sample period, most BBC outlets featured a harder news agenda, and supplied a higher level of policy information and analysis than

many commercial news providers. But our study raised a number of important questions that require more research and analysis about the range and depth of BBC reporting. What is the range of political actors that appear in output outside of election time? How far should coverage of political, economic and social affairs be about events rather than policy issues? How regularly does the BBC appropriately challenge claims by politicians in its routine coverage? How far should it use external hyperlinks in online reporting? To what extent do audiences understand the relevance of UK social policy reporting to the devolved nations when BBC reporters make only implicit references to nations?

In raising these and many other questions, we hope our study constructively contributes to debates about the range and depth of BBC and commercial news reporting.

1.2 Overview of sample

In total, 3056 news items were examined across a wide range of television channels, radio stations, online outlets and news apps. This included 1170 television, 1061 radio, 600 online and 225 news app items over a three-week sample period in June 2019. Given the size and scope of online and news apps news across media outlets in our sample, we examined only the top five topics each day. In our analysis of 825 items in online and news apps, 3579 internal and external hyperlinks were examined across 11 outlets. In a follow-up study we assessed an additional 932 hyperlinks across 12 BBC News Online sites. For current affairs, 139 programmes were examined between 25 June 2018 and 21 June 2019. Since current affairs output is generally produced on a weekly basis, the sample period of the content analysis was extended to one year.

Overall, most of our analysis of news used data from a three-week sample period in June 2019. While this represents a relatively small snapshot in time, the content analysis did include a large range of news output across a number of media outlets that can be compared and contrasted. We also analysed the depth of BBC and commercial news in four case studies. Our findings can be interpreted as illustrative but also exploratory, raising questions that require further research and analysis.

1.3 Comparative analysis of the range of news

The comparative range of reporting on BBC outlets and by other news providers was examined by assessing the type of news agenda pursued over a three-week sample period. By comparing the editorial selection of news at one point in time, we gained insights into the range of topics covered, across broadcast, online and news apps. This involved comparing the levels of hard and soft news reported by different outlets, the specific topics reported and the degree of international news. We also explored the current affairs topics covered over a one-year period, and looked more closely at the comparative use of hyperlinks in online news coverage over a four-week period.

1.4 Hard and soft news

In order to paint a broad quantitative picture of the news agenda across BBC and commercial media, we categorised news according to whether it reflected a hard or soft topic. We drew on conventional definitions of these categories of news, well-established in academic literature. Broadly speaking, topics such as politics, international news, education and health were categorised as hard news, while crime, celebrity/entertainment, the royal family, sport and weather were coded as soft news.⁴ In doing this, we were not judging the relative editorial value of these topics. Since the number of discrete topics spanned more than 30 categories, we used the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ labels to provide a broad overview of the news agenda across different media outlets.

Our findings revealed that while the editorial selection of news was broadly similar across TV channels, it did vary on radio, online and news apps from competing outlets. The BBC, however, pursued a consistently hard news agenda across its broadcast and online platforms, with the exception of Radio 1’s *Newsbeat*.

The evening UK national bulletins on BBC, ITV and Channels 4 and 5 had a relatively hard news agenda; all programmes spent more than 79.6% of their airtime reporting hard news topics. Channel 4, at 93.5%, and the BBC *News at Ten*, at 85.7%, supplied the hardest news agendas. *Newsnight*, the BBC’s late-night current affairs programme, featured hard news topics in 99.2% of its airtime. While Radio’s 4 *Today’s* and *News at One*’s hard news agendas made up roughly 90% of their output, the corresponding proportion of time for Radio 5 Live *Breakfast*’s and Radio 1’s *Newsbeat* was 70.1% and 55.1% respectively.

The most striking disparity in editorial agendas was across online news outlets. The BBC, The Guardian and the Huffington Post featured hard news topics in more than 80% of their output. The Daily Mail, The Sun and the Mirror pursued a more tabloid news agenda (reporting more celebrity and entertainment stories, for example) than either the BBC, digital native outlets or traditional broadsheet papers. The BBC News app had a harder news agenda than its commercial news app competitors: 81.3% of its items focused on hard news, compared to ITV’s 73.3% and Sky News’ 65.3%.

1.5 News topics

During the sample period, the D-Day celebrations, President Trump’s state visit and the electoral race to be the next Prime Minister overshadowed much of the news agenda. This influenced how UK politics generally, and Brexit specifically, was editorially framed by news providers. Our findings about news topics, in this respect, should be interpreted in the light of the events that occurred during the sample period.

International affairs was the largest topic category reported on all television news programmes apart from *Channel 5 News*. It made up 30.9% of airtime on *Channel 4 News*, 26.0% on BBC *News at Ten* and 25.1% on ITV *News at Ten*. Channel 5 spent just 6.7% of its total news agenda covering this category. International affairs made up 14.1% and 9.7% of

⁴ We drew on conventional definitions of these categories of news, well-established in academic literature. A fuller discussion of our methodology can be found in section 3.0.

airtime on Sky News and the BBC News Channel respectively, and *Newsnight* spent 8.5% of its airtime reporting international news topics.

Again with the exception of Channel 5, the specific topic most reported during the sample period was the Conservative leadership contest, making up nearly half of *Newsnight*'s airtime (47.2% on *Newsnight*, 18.3% on *BBC News at Ten*, 20.4% on ITV, and 20.3% on Channel 4). Roughly a third of the agenda on the BBC News Channel and on Sky News focused on the Conservative party leader elections.

The 75th D-Day anniversary and Donald Trump's visit to the UK and Europe in the first week of the sample period made up 10-20% of airtime across all television programmes. This may have had an impact on the proportion of time spent reporting routine topics such as health, education and crime, which did not feature substantively in the news agenda. However, on *Channel 5 News* these topics combined made up 27.5% of its airtime. By comparison, health, education and crime together accounted for 7.5% of airtime on the *BBC News at Ten*.

International news was not as widely reported on BBC radio as on UK television news generally. This was strikingly the case on *5 Live Breakfast*, where international news made up 1.2% of total airtime. Once again, the Conservative Party leadership was the most prominent specific topic across radio outlets, accounting for 22.3% on *Today* and 29.8% on *World at One*. Only *Newsbeat* did not extensively report the contest to be the next Prime Minister.

As the D-Day celebrations and Donald Trump's state visit overshadowed the agenda in week 1, these high-profile stories may have had an impact on other news stories about politics and social policy, which did not feature prominently on BBC radio. Coverage of housing, education and transport, for example, accounted for 5.4% of *Today*'s total news airtime, whereas items about art, history and heritage made up a combined share of 6.0%. *Newsbeat* differed from other BBC radio outlets by placing a greater editorial emphasis on crime, health and celebrity/entertainment stories, whereas *Radio 5 Live Breakfast* focused more on sport and UK issues. *Radio 4*'s news agenda, in this respect, differed from the news topics reported on *Radio 1* and *Radio 5 Live*.

The total share of airtime about international news was between 3.5% and 11.4% on commercial radio stations, with the Conservative party leadership the most-reported topic across all channels. Items about celebrity and entertainment featured more substantively on *Heart*, *Capital* and *talkRADIO* than on BBC outlets (with the exception of *Newsbeat*).

For online news, across the eight outlets examined, the proportion of international news was mixed. International affairs comprised an 18.6% share of news topics, whereas on *BuzzFeed* it represented over half of all news items (56.0%) and on the *Huffington Post* just 9.3%. Once again, the Conservative party leadership contest was the most-reported topic across most online outlets, accounting for 17.3% of items on BBC sites, with only *The Telegraph* at 21.3% and the *Huffington Post* at 18.7% reporting it more often. *The Sun*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail* featured entertainment and celebrity items in 24.0%, 17.3% and 14.7% of their respective total news agendas, whereas the BBC had just one item about these topics.

The news apps reported international news affairs prominently, accounting for a third of *Sky News* items (34.7%) while *ITV*'s share was 22.7% and the BBC's 20%. The volume of Conservative party leadership items was broadly similar across the news apps (between

14.7% and 18.7%) along with general news about UK politics. There was little difference between the UK news agendas of the three news apps, although the level of health reporting (9.1%) of the BBC's coverage was much higher than on Sky or ITV, which reported this topic only once each.

News about climate change barely registered across most media over the three-week sample period. Only on the day of the government announcement to reduce emissions to almost zero by 2050 did the issue of climate change cut through the news cycle and feature prominently on the flagship broadcast BBC News programmes and some commercial radio stations.

1.6 International news topics

We examined the international news topics separately to assess what kinds of international news items were covered by different outlets. Coverage of war and conflict made up 39.8% of BBC *News at Ten*'s international news airtime, compared to 26.6% for ITV *News at Ten* and 23.4% for Channel 4. For Channel 5 it was 28.3%, although international news accounted for just 6% of its total airtime. While Sky News Channel spent half its international news airtime on war and conflict stories, the BBC News Channel dedicated 32.4% to this topic. Across the media sample as a whole, many war and conflict items focused on the diplomatic tensions between the US and Iran, after commercial oil tankers were attacked in the Middle East, along with the ongoing civil unrest in Sudan, which featured prominently on the BBC's *News at Ten*.

Coverage of social affairs and human rights, which during the sample period largely centred on protests against new extradition laws in Hong Kong, made up almost a quarter of international news airtime on the BBC *News at Ten* and *Channel 4 News* – 23.4% on both bulletins – while for ITV *News at Ten* it was 6.3%. For the BBC News Channel it was 17.1%, Sky News Channel 20.9%, and for Newsnight 42.6%. International politics, primarily about Donald Trump and US politics, made up 8.7% of international news airtime on the BBC *News at Ten*, 16.7% on *Channel 4 News* and 25.9% on ITV *News at Ten*. On the BBC News Channel it accounted for 11.4% and on Sky News 6.4%.

War and conflict issues dominated the international news agenda on *Today* and *World at One*, at 24.9% and 31.9% respectively, specifically the US/Iran dispute and Sudan's civil unrest. *Newsbeat* spent more time on reporting topics about technology, celebrities and entertainment than on covering war and conflict; these topics made up more than half its international news topic airtime. Radio 5 Live did not feature much international news. Within international news topics, celebrity and entertainment stories made up 22.6% of Capital's agenda, while on Heart these amounted to more than two-thirds of its total airtime. This included stories such as Taylor Swift's starring in a music video (Capital, 7 June 2019) and a US magazine naming Rihanna as the richest female musician (Heart, 5 June 2019).

Just over a quarter of BBC News Online items (28.6%) were about war and conflict, with tensions between the US and Iran the central focus. Coverage of the Hong Kong protests represented the next largest category of international news for the BBC, the Guardian and the Telegraph. While celebrity and entertainment made up 7.1% of the BBC's international news

coverage, for The Daily Mail, The Sun, the Mirror and BuzzFeed it represented 21.4%, 15.4%, 21.7% and 14.3% respectively.

On the news apps, war and conflict amounted to a third of items on the BBC, 29.4% on ITV and 19.2% on Sky News. Items about social affairs and human rights category – which were largely focussed on the protests in Hong Kong – accounted to 20.0% of BBC News items compared to 17.6% on ITV and 15.4% on Sky News. The BBC had one item about celebrity and entertainment stories while ITV had none, while on Sky News these topics made up a fifth of its international news agenda.

1.7 Current affairs

Current affairs programmes were examined over one year (from June 2018 to June 2019). We examined the BBC's *Panorama* and *Analysis*, as well as ITV's *Tonight* and Channel 4's *Dispatches*. We included *Analysis* to represent a flagship BBC Radio 4 current affairs programme, although its format and the style of its journalism is different from other television programmes in the sample.

A third of *Panorama* episodes (33.3%) centred on health or NHS events or issues, while on ITV's *Tonight* the figure was 28.9. Channel 4's *Dispatches* featured health and crime in equal proportion (14.8%) but focused most prominently on housing (which made up 18% of all the topics it examined over the year) with episodes about the Grenfell Tower fire, property costs and homelessness.

The BBC's *Analysis* was by far the most internationally-focused current affairs programme. Half of its agenda dealt with topics beyond the UK. In contrast, five (11.9%) of the *Panorama* programmes were international in scope, while *Dispatches* featured four episodes (14.8% of its current affairs coverage) about international affairs. *Tonight* dealt with one international topic in an episode entitled 'Trump & Britain: love or loathing?'

With the exception of BBC *Analysis*, current affairs programming was overwhelmingly focused on UK issues in the one-year study, with health and education featuring prominently.

We then examined all programmes involving health and education more closely in order to explore how these issues were reported for audiences in a devolved UK. While many of the programmes explored these topics from a general UK perspective, we identified a number of episodes that could have been relevant to devolution. We found it striking that many episodes featured *no reference to any devolved powers* about health and education despite over 20 years of devolution.

Overall, 60% of current affairs programmes about UK health and education did *not* include any devolved signposting, either in the opening credits or in the first five minutes of the episode. BBC programmes, however, did include a reference to devolved powers in more than half of episodes (50% for *Analysis* and 58.5% for *Panorama*) whereas only a quarter did on Channel 4's *Dispatches* and one in ten on ITV's *Tonight*.

We broke down which nation was the primary focus of all current affairs programmes about health and education. After all, since devolution in 1999 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have control over their own health and education policy making. We found that

England was by far the most-referenced nation, with *Panorama* mentioning Scotland once and England and Wales once. Where a devolved reference was made, there was some limited signposting in the opening introduction in *Analysis*, *Dispatches* and *Tonight*, but none in six of the eight *Panorama* episodes. *Panorama* also relied entirely on implicit references to the devolved nations, as did *Tonight* and *Dispatches*, with only the BBC's *Analysis* making explicit references to the devolved nations' powers.

1.8 Hyperlinks

As part of our analysis of online news and news apps, we examined the proportion of internal and external hyperlinks that media organisations used in their coverage, while also assessing the source and format of every link.

BBC News Online included the highest proportion of items with a hyperlink (97.3%) followed by the Guardian at 96.0%, the Mirror at 92.0% and the Telegraph at 90.7%. The site with the lowest proportion of hyperlinks (66.7%) was the Daily Mail, while the Huffington Post and The Sun had 74.7% and 76.0% respectively. For news apps, ITV featured the highest proportion of items with a hyperlink (97.3%) while the BBC had 90.7% and Sky News 81.3%.

The Huffington Post and BuzzFeed included the highest proportion of external hyperlinks – 52.9% and 73.1% respectively – whereas legacy media outlets used a far greater level of internal links. On BBC News Online, 84.8% of hyperlinks were internal, a similar proportion to the Daily Mail, the Sun, the Guardian and the Mirror. This reliance on internal sources was also evident in news apps, with 12.8%, 16.9% and 21.7% of all hyperlinks external on ITV, BBC and Sky News respectively.

For BBC News Online, 41.1% of external hyperlinks connected to Twitter, with 19.6% to business organisations, 12.5% to UK newspapers and 10.7% to international media. The remaining external hyperlinks were sources to sites such as other social media, academic journals, UK legal and political bodies, and international legal and political bodies. Other outlets, such as the Mirror and the Daily Mail, made more use of sources from external media organisations. In total, external media sources made up 83.8% and 84.2% of their share of external hyperlinks, along with sources such as Twitter, social media and business organisations. The BBC News app followed a hyperlinking pattern similar to its online news service, ITV connected to one external media source, whereas Sky connected to none. On ITV, 91.9% of external hyperlinks were to Twitter, while the Sky news app connected to Twitter and to business organisations.

More than half the BBC's online news and news app internal hyperlinks (approximately 55%) were to its own archive of conventional news reportage items, rather than its analysis pieces, live reporting, columns/feature article, news profile pages or other features. Several other commercial outlets linked to a greater extent to their own conventional news reportage items, or to news profiles of individuals and organisations. For example, 81.1% of the Sun's and 72.3% of BuzzFeed's internal hyperlinks were to their own conventional news reporting, while for the Sky News app and the ITV app the proportions were 87% and 77.7%

respectively. The BBC's internal hyperlinking differed from that of many commercial providers: both its online and news apps connected to 'explainers' or more analytical forms of news, providing background and context to events and issues.

As we had identified that the BBC News homepage (like most other online news providers) used internal links heavily but used fewer external links, we developed a follow-up study to systematically analyse a greater range of BBC News websites. In total, 932 hyperlinks were examined across 12 BBC News websites. Our main aim was to compare the proportion of internal and external hyperlinks used across different BBC news sites – local, national and international – as well as more specialised sites, from politics to health and science.

In the three-week sample of BBC and commercial media online sites, we found that 84.8% of all hyperlinks were internal and 15.2% were external. Our follow-up study found a similar pattern of hyperlink use (82.2% internal and 17.8% external) across BBC News Online sites. But there were major differences in hyperlink connections across BBC News websites. As an example, while internal links on the websites for the South East of Wales, and Glasgow and the West of Scotland, comprised 96.9% and 80.2% respectively of the sites' total hyperlinks, on Devon Online they amounted to 34.6%. For the Devon Online site, that meant that 65.4% of its hyperlinks were to external sources, far higher than on all other BBC news websites. The science pages relied most on external material, at 29.5% of total hyperlinks.

Of all external hyperlinks in the follow study of BBC News websites, 60.8% led to the sites of business organisations and Twitter profiles. Of the rest, there was some variation depending on the content of the site. On UK politics, for example, links to newspapers made up 42.9% of sources, whereas on the health and science web pages academic sources made up 25% and 17.5% respectively.

We found that links to external news sites for news, opinion pieces/blogs and features/columns were relatively low across almost all BBC News sites. In other words, BBC News Online used more of its own archive when providing links for news, opinion and features.

Finally, we examined the positioning of hyperlinks – whether they were at the top, middle or bottom of a web page in a news item. We considered the positioning of hyperlinks to explore where they are typically included within a news item. This could reveal where editors think readers are more likely to click on hyperlinks, such as at the top of a news item. We found that the positioning of hyperlinks was generally higher up the page in science and health news items, which may indicate the importance of the sources informing the content of these pages. But when comparing the regional, national and international BBC News sites, we uncovered no consistent pattern in how hyperlinks were positioned.

1.9 Comparative analysis of the depth of news

In order to examine the comparative depth of coverage, we selected four case studies on a range of topics. This included the reporting of the Conservative leadership contest, Brexit, health and education policy in a devolved UK context, and the government's 2050 zero emissions target. This analysis was both quantitative and qualitative in scope, and involved making comparative judgements about the use of sources and the degree to which these were critically assessed by reporters, as well as the level of context and analysis offered by different news providers.

1.10 Case 1 study: The Conservative leadership contest

During the sample period, the Conservative party was in the process of selecting a new leader to replace Theresa May who resigned on 24 May 2019. Given the significance of this event and the level of coverage it received, we decided to more carefully compare the depth of reporting about the Conservative party leadership across news outlets. We assessed the degree of policy information and analysis about the candidates' positions, as well as the sources used to inform coverage. In doing so, we analysed policy-related claims made by Conservative candidates and considered the degree to which their promises and pledges were challenged by journalists or left uncontested within a news item.

All news providers spent more time reporting on policy issues than on the contenders' campaigns. Only Channel 5 News featured more airtime about the campaign than the policy positions of the candidates. Of all the BBC outlets, Radio 5 *Live Breakfast* and *Newsnight* focused most heavily on process, in particular the voting procedures of the Conservative leadership contest, as well as the character of the candidates and their electoral positioning. However, *Newsnight*, together with the BBC News Channel and Channel 4, contained the highest proportion of policy information about the candidates. In the analysis of policy positions, where journalists did not just supply factual information but scrutinised the context and background of candidates, *Newsnight* also stood out for its forensic analysis, as did *World at One*. On television news bulletins, Channel 4 contained the most detailed analysis of the contenders' positions – 37.3% of its airtime was on this topic – compared to 28.8% on *ITV News at Ten* and 24.8% on *BBC News at Ten*. Channel 5 reported this topic just three times, providing some policy analysis in each item.

When we examined the sources used to inform coverage, we found that the majority were Conservative candidates, MPs and party members. BBC outlets featured a wider range of contenders than commercial television news services, but also more than several radio outlets and its own online service. For example, BBC News Online featured 71 sources in the nine items we examined over the sample period (a ratio of nearly eight sources per item).

However, although the BBC featured a wide range of Conservative contenders, with some detailed analysis of their policy proposals, at times journalists did not always supply a great deal of context, analysis or background about these positions. Candidates were often given brief soundbites on the BBC without any challenge to their assertions. Put another way, BBC outlets widely covered the Conservative leadership, but, at times, they did not always *uncover*

the claims and counter-claims of the candidates' competing policy positions. We observed that Channel 4 News challenged Conservative candidates' positions most robustly, notably in live interviews, compared to other outlets examined in the sample.

1.11 Case study 2: Brexit

As Brexit has been the most prominent UK news story since the 2016 EU referendum campaign, this case study paid special attention to the depth of Brexit reporting during the three-week sample. We examined the level of policy information and policy analysis provided across different news outlets and platforms, the main topics addressed, the sources used to inform coverage, as well as the geographic perspective through which Brexit was primarily reported.

Since ongoing Brexit negotiations stalled during the Conservative leadership contest, we found that specific stories about Brexit were pushed to the margins of news agendas. As a consequence, across all outlets we found few items that reported a substantive level of policy information and analysis on issues such as ongoing negotiations between the UK and the EU, future trade deals or a no-deal scenario. Those that did came from BBC outlets, including BBC News Online, its news app, *Newsnight* and *Today*.

When examining coverage more closely, the reporting of Brexit was largely informed by what UK politicians said and did. Only a few BBC outlets directly sourced the EU, and when they did, it was from a narrow cast of five sources representing the EU's 27 member states. While at times, anchors and reporters counterbalanced UK party political perspectives by referencing the EU's position, these were not generally substantive or sustained positions within a news item.

Overall, we found that the reporting of Brexit – on both the BBC and commercial media – was largely framed by partisan, domestic concerns, with journalists often responding to internal UK political events and issues. Since our focus was on UK news media, understanding Brexit almost exclusively through the lens of UK politicians and parties might appear editorially justified. But it meant audiences were mostly reliant on understanding the EU's motives according to UK politicians and journalists, rather than hearing from both sides of the negotiations. More regularly *counter-balancing* the claims of UK politicians with EU or member state officials might, in this respect, have enhanced the range and depth of Brexit coverage.

1.12 Case study 3: Health and education in a devolved UK

Since 1999 Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have had policy responsibilities from the UK parliament devolved to them in key areas such as health and education. Our case study examined the extent to which different news providers *signposted the devolved relevance* of all health and education items during the main three-week sample period.

In all health and education news items, we found that more than half of all BBC news items (51.2%) contained no devolved signposting, whereas on commercial media outlets nearly

two-thirds did not. BBC News Online and the BBC News Channel signposted the devolved relevance of social policy items more often than other news providers. ITV's *News at Ten* provided devolved signposting in more than two-thirds of its items, compared to half the items on BBC *News at Ten*, just over a third on Channel 5 and less than two in ten on Channel 4.

Since social policy was often about the whole of the UK, we assessed whether it was relevant for items with no devolved signposting to have referenced England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, or if devolution was largely irrelevant or peripheral to the topic. In the subset of items about health and education, we identified 45.5% of BBC news items that *could* have made reference to a devolved nation but did not, compared to 58.6% on commercial media. In short, while all news outlets could have reported the devolved relevance of health and education more clearly, BBC News outlets took up this opportunity more regularly.

England was the overwhelming focus of items about health and education, with only the BBC's online service (which in this case study included the BBC News Online homepage and its health and education sites) featuring stories across the four nations. Of the commercial broadcasters, Channel 5 featured the most items beyond England, with five about Scotland. In over nine in ten BBC and commercial media news items, signposting to devolved powers was made up of implicit references, such as 'in England' or 'NHS England'. This meant that the vast majority of news items did not explicitly signpost any devolved powers by referencing the specific nations which are responsible for their own health and education policy.

While devolution may be inferred by mentioning 'England' or 'NHS England', we found that across all signposted items on BBC outlets, just over a quarter did this in the introduction to a news item, with most references being in the main part of the report, compared to a fifth on commercial media. How far audiences pick up on these implicit references to specific nations, either in the introduction or within the story itself, requires further study, but our analysis showed that few items explicitly spelt out the devolved relevance of health and education in the nations of the UK.

1.13 Case study 4: Climate change

Across all outlets in the three-week sample period, as a proportion of all news topics climate change made up a fraction of coverage overall. But the issue of climate change did become a prominent topic on one day of the sample period – when the government announced a net zero emissions target on 12 June 2019. Climate change tends to be reported intermittently, often after a political event or the publication of a report. But when it does make the news agenda journalists have an important role in supplying the necessary background, context and analysis for audiences to understand the subject and the potential impact of any legislative solutions to the problem.

In this case study, we compared how different news providers reported the Government's announcement on 12 June 2019. In doing so, we examined the depth of policy information provided by news providers, the range of sources used to inform coverage, and the degree to which the government's claims were appropriately challenged by journalists. We also

analysed how different news providers independently reported the emissions target, which included assessing the range of perspectives they drew on to interpret the credibility of the proposal, and the level of scrutiny it received from journalists and sources.

With limited time in their top-of-the-hour bulletins, most commercial radio news stations largely repeated the government's plan along with a largely critical counterbalancing perspective. ITV was the only television news bulletin to put climate change at the top of the agenda. All television and BBC radio outlets provided relatively detailed information about the government's plans to cut emissions to zero, but there were differences in the selection of sources and how critical they were towards the proposal. On television news, reporter packages across all outlets gave an overview of the government's policy, but varied in their depth of challenge, analysis and context.

While commercial radio supplied limited scrutiny of the proposal, ITV and Channel 4 provided critical coverage by challenging the government's record on meeting targets, highlighting the cost of inaction to climate change, and examining the impact of energy policy within a specific community. Channel 5 provided a brief overview of the government's announcement before going into more depth about a particular change that was needed to achieve the policy. Across most BBC News outlets, the government's proposal to meet a zero-emission target was challenged by journalists. With the exception of Heart and Channel 5, all news providers provided some criticism of the government's plans. However, only the BBC outlets (and no commercial media), raised questions about the government's plan to review and revise its policy after five years if other countries had not met their targets, as well as pointing out that the UK could offset its own emissions by buying international carbon credits.

2.0 Research aims

The primary aim of this project was to provide a quantitative, systematic and objective assessment of the range and depth of BBC news and current affairs content in comparison with other relevant broadcasters and UK news providers, across TV, radio and online. It drew on a content analysis of a range of sub-genres within news and current affairs content, and a more qualitative assessment of the range and depth of analysis in four news specific subject areas. This included the reporting of the Conservative leadership contest, Brexit coverage, UK health and education stories and climate change on a day when the government announced it would reduce emissions to almost zero by 2050. The samples for each case study differed in size and scope, but in each the BBC was compared with other relevant news providers within and across different platforms.

The sample period of the main content analysis study was from 3 to 21 June (excluding weekends) in 2019. This represented a small but significant time period, and helped paint a picture of the range and depth of news across the BBC and its competitors. In June 2019 a number of high-profile issues and events dominated the news agenda. In particular, the UK Prime Minister's resignation and the Conservative leadership contest, along with coverage of the D-Day 75th anniversary and the US President's visit to the UK and Europe. Our findings should be interpreted in the context of these major stories.

Our analytical framework was based on Ofcom's general terms of reference for its broader review of the BBC's performance.⁵ We were commissioned to carry out a three-week content analysis study and a qualitative assessment of four case studies in June 2019. Our specific brief was to assess the range and depth of BBC news compared to commercial providers in this time period. This informed our two central research questions:

- Across all platforms, how does the range of news and current affairs content on the BBC compare with other relevant news providers, looking at sub-genres of news (e.g. politics, education, health, celebrity/entertainment)?
- Across all platforms, how does the range and depth of analysis of certain news stories covered by the BBC within the news sub-genres compare with analysis from other relevant news providers?

Our study was *not* designed to examine the impartiality of news reporting from the BBC compared to commercial media. This would require a more systematic analysis of how news reporting was informed by sources over a period of time.

In order to help understand the editorial choices and judgments made in the selection and construction of news, interviews were carried out with either heads of news and current affairs or senior news editors from the main UK's public service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5). From the BBC, this included Kamal Ahmed, Editorial Director, James Stephenson, News Editor for News and Current Affairs, Gavin Allen, Head of BBC News output, Katy Searle, Westminster Editor, Nick Sutton, Online Editor (who were all

⁵ Ofcom Terms of Reference: News and Current Affairs Review, March 2019; https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/139905/bbc-news-review-terms-of-reference.pdf

interviewed together) and Paul Royall, the Editor of the Six and Ten television news bulletins. From commercial public service broadcasters, Michael Jeremy, Director of News and Current Affairs at ITV, Dorothy Byrne, Head of News and Current Affairs at Channel 4 and Cait FitzSimons, Editor of 5 News, were interviewed. Interviewees representing different news organisations were selected because they have different licence obligations in the provision of news which are regulated by Ofcom, although they are subject to the same requirements under the Ofcom Broadcasting Code for due impartiality and due accuracy. Interviewees were not informed about any of the findings of the study, but asked broad questions about the editorial selection of news and specific areas of reporting. The interviews were conducted by Professor Stephen Cushion on 9 and 10 October 2019 and lasted approximately 40 to 90 minutes. We are grateful to all the interviewees for their time and editorial insights.

3.0 Content analysis of sub-genres in news programming

Studying news agendas helps convey the editorial character of different news providers. While there are many possible ways of examining the news agenda, most studies include analysing *the range of stories* that routinely feature within a programme. These can be classified into sub-genres of news and current affairs programming (e.g. UK politics, international news, education, health and celebrity/entertainment) in order to reveal the type of agenda routinely pursued over a set period of time. These sub-genres can also be classified into two broad but distinct categories: ‘hard’ news and ‘soft’ news. While categorising stories in this way does not capture the complexity of every news item, it can paint a broad picture of the news agenda over an extended period of time.

We interpreted hard news topics (e.g. politics, business, economics and international affairs) and soft news topics (e.g. crime, sports, royalty and entertainment reporting) according to the opening focus of the item and/or the overall time or space afforded to a single topic. The categories are well established in the academic literature, which we have drawn upon to classify hard and soft news. We acknowledge that hard and soft news categories are not precise and cannot reflect the complexity of how a story is reported. News about crime, for example, may be broadly defined as soft if it is sensationalist and lacking context. But when trends in crime are considered more carefully – perhaps in relation to rising levels of knife crime – this topic may be better classified as hard news. Apart from some commercial radio stations and tabloid newspapers, crime was not a widely reported topic in our period. Consistent with other academic studies, crime was therefore coded as soft news.

While acknowledging the limitations of classifying news as either hard or soft, it can still help paint a broad quantitative picture of news agendas between competing providers and platforms. So, for example, by examining all international news stories in detail, our content analysis revealed which parts of the world were covered by journalists and, importantly, which countries were marginalised or excluded from coverage. This is particularly significant for the BBC, ITV and Channels 4 and 5, which have obligations to produce news about national and international issues across their news and current affairs output. Our content analysis study, in this respect, can contribute to debates about how well UK broadcasters are fulfilling their public service obligations, as well as assess how far, and in what ways, other news providers report international affairs in their news and current affairs programming.

3.1 Sub-genre sample

Our content analysis sample of sub-genres includes BBC news programming/online content and its comparators on TV, radio and online. Broken down by platform and by BBC/non-BBC, this includes:

BBC TV: *BBC News at Ten*, BBC News Channel (5-6pm), *Newsnight* and *Panorama*.⁶

⁶ As explained below, since some current affairs programmes are broadcast over a longer period of time and have a different format to more conventional news programmes, we monitored topics differently and over a longer period of time. These included BBC *Panorama* and *Analysis*, ITV’s *Tonight* and Channel 4’s *Dispatches*. We examined programmes in the sample period via each broadcaster’s online site.

Radio: *Today* (8-9am), *Newsbeat*, (12.45-1pm) and Radio 5 Live *Breakfast* (8-9am).

BBC News Online: Items on the front pages of BBC News homepage each weekday morning.

BBC apps: Items on BBC News app each weekday morning.

Non-BBC television: *Channel 4 News*, *ITV News at Ten*, *Channel 5 News at 5pm*, Sky News Channel 5-6pm, *ITV's Tonight* at 7.30pm and *Channel 4's Dispatches* at 8pm.

Non-BBC radio: Heart, Capital, talkRADIO, and LBC during its main news update at 8am each weekday.

Non-BBC online: Main items on the homepages of the Guardian, the Daily Mail, the Telegraph, the Sun, the Mirror, BuzzFeed, and the Huffington Post each weekday morning.

Non-BBC apps: Items on the Sky News and ITV News apps each weekday morning.⁷

3.2 Justification of sample

Given the large sample size of media and the fluidity of broadcast news, we needed to develop a clear unit of analysis in television and radio output (e.g. identifying when a news topic begins and ends). For broadcast media, our unit of analysis was every *news item* rather than every news story/topic. For online and news apps, items were more straightforward to define and analyse. We needed to be careful about the construction of samples across different-sized outlets and platforms (e.g. how many items we analysed from each news provider). Since it was beyond the resources of the study to examine *all* news items from each news provider's website, we limited the number of items examined to five topics per day for comparative purposes.

News items refer to specific conventions (e.g. anchor-only, reporter package, a live two-way piece etc.) rather than *stories* (crime, health, Brexit, education etc.). within a conventional broadcast news programme e.g. *BBC News at Ten*. We broke down news into items because this allowed us to unpack particular stories in more detail and uncover the sources used to inform coverage. A story about the Prime Minister resigning might take up half the news bulletin, for example, but it could have many facets: a factual account of the resignation speech in a reporter package; a live two-way piece from a political editor interpreting the day's events at Westminster and a reporter package explaining how 'ordinary' people responded to it. Breaking down the story by *convention* allowed a more nuanced appreciation of how news is communicated by providers. For online news, our unit of analysis refers to the stand-alone item on the web page or on an app.

Since current affairs programmes are generally scheduled weekly and have different formats and conventions (for instance, BBC's *Analysis* and ITV's *Tonight*), it would be difficult to compare findings with routine news produced 24/7 or at a fixed time across broadcast and

⁷ Channel 4 no longer has a dedicated news app.

online media. Instead, we analysed current affairs programming separately and according to the overall topic of each programme over the course of 12 months (June 2018 to June 2019).

Since the sample size was large and the time frame for analysis was limited,⁸ we set clear parameters about how much content we could realistically examine and code. For example, we restricted the sample of news media to weekdays, and for some radio programmes, we analysed an hour of monitoring rather than the complete show (Radio's 4 *Today*, for instance, runs from 6am-9am). For the commercial radio stations – Heart, Capital, talkRADIO and LBC – we focused on the main news headlines at 8am each weekday in order to compare them to the news agendas on BBC radio at the same time of day. Analysing the same news updates within these programmes would have resulted in our coding duplicate updates within the hour.

For online news and news apps, we focused on their main homepages and examined their top five topics (not items). We did this because many non-BBC websites have a very large number of stories on their websites (including sidebars, for example). Nonetheless, examining these headline topics provided some insight into each provider's *main editorial priorities* at a key point in the news cycle each day.

Overall, by systematically examining the content of sub-genres across news and current affairs programming, our project was able to reveal the comparative range and nature of items addressed over consecutive weeks between 3 June and 21 June 2019. In order to examine the depth of coverage, subsequent sections of this report will use a more nuanced analytical framework to help assess how different BBC platforms and programmes reported the Conservative leadership contest, Brexit, climate change and UK health and education reporting.

⁸ We conducted the content analysis study between June and August 2019, which influenced the research design of the study and the time we had to analyse data.

4.0 Findings: A big-picture analysis

Overall, we examined 3056 news items across a wide range of television channels, radio stations, online outlets and news apps. Breaking this down, we assessed a total of 1170 television, 1061 radio, 600 online and 225 news app items over a three-week sample period. This included a greater focus on BBC outlets, which made up 45% of the total sample of items. The volume of BBC news output is, of course, considerable across its broadcast, online and social media platforms. The BBC told us that its reporting requires careful editorial judgements about the relative merits of a story for *specific* programmes and their audiences. As the Head of BBC Westminster, Katy Searle, explained:

one of the great strengths of the BBC, editors are allowed to edit, so there are a lot of really strong, independent voices. So of course, there's leadership but...regular meetings are held every single day, twice a day, and it allows everyone to go around on what we are doing. It's an open discussion. As I say, in the end, all the programme editors will make their own mind up about what goes in the programme, having gone through that process, so it's not, necessarily, top-down, it's much more kind of broad than that.

According to the BBC's Editorial Director, Kamal Ahmed, this process of news selection is largely informed by audience needs, rather than reflecting the broader mainstream news cycle. As he put it:

Because our audience research is that not all audiences are driven by the news agenda, they are driven by things they are talking about, or stuff that's going on, so we might be sparked actually in ways that are more sophisticated than maybe we were ten years ago, in ways of thinking...so the audience might be engaged in this.

In practical terms, the BBC's Online editor, Nick Sutton, explained how news output was shaped by exploring what is of interest to audiences:

On a daily basis, particularly on the online teams, we'll look at what people are searching for, looking at Google Trends, looking deeper into Google Trends to see what specific questions people are asking about a news story, and we will make an assessment over is this something that we're able to contribute anything of any value on, or not. Is it something we can just ignore, or is it a subject people are searching for where the BBC can sort of add value to it.

Of course, other organisations will be guided by their own editorial strategies and internal audience research when deciding on what news to routinely include and exclude in coverage across different broadcast, online and social media platforms.

As the Head of News and Current Affairs at Channel 4, Dorothy Byrne, explained:

Everything we cover should be important, but they don't have to slavishly follow the same news agenda as other people. In fact, and you may have found differently, if they do the same stories every night as the BBC or ITV, we're not doing our job, because we are there to bring alternative ideas and alternative stories to light. And so in both our news and current affairs, we aim to cover stories that other people might neglect and groups who get neglected. So some of the stories will be whatever

everybody else is covering and some will be nobody else is covering. I sort of judge it over a period - do I feel we've got a bit too mainstream, or do I feel we've gone a bit too far off a sort of core news that people need to know, so it's a balance.

Our content analysis will examine the news output produced over a three-week period across a wide range of outlets in order to compare and contrast different editorial agendas.

Indeed, our study, when appropriate, is directly comparative across news media and outlets. For example, we can compare the agendas of the main UK evening bulletins – the BBC *News at Ten*, ITV *News at Ten*, Channel 4 at 7pm and Channel 5 at 5pm – since they all adopt a similar length, format and style of news delivery. This was more difficult with radio programming, as the BBC *Today* programme and 5 Live *Breakfast* do not have any direct competitors that produce *routine sustained news* coverage in the same kind of format. In order to gain insight into the agendas of different commercial radio stations, we examined their morning headlines at 8am. Since the analysis of online news and news apps was restricted to the top five topics, we could compare the editorial selection of news across outlets.

For broadcast news, we present our findings by the volume of time afforded to specific topics, since the outlets examined differ in their length of broadcast (so, for example, while *Channel 4 News* is scheduled for 60 minutes, the BBC, ITV and Channel 5 evening bulletins are typically for less than 30 minutes, with the commercial channels also being interrupted by adverts). Although each commercial radio station's morning updates are relatively brief, we still analysed the time allocated to each topic, to ensure that we understood the editorial priority of the different topics. For online news and news apps, we present our findings by the number of items, since we examined only the top five topics per outlet, enabling us to directly compare the most significant editorial stories of the day.

4.1 Hard and soft news

The first part of the quantitative analysis examined the proportion of hard and soft news across different platforms and outlets. As Table 1.0 shows, we drew on the conventional definitions of categories of hard and soft news topics that are well-established in academic literature.⁹

⁹ See, for example,

<https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/download/8f1960fa621b98d00ffe4ad84105db01b305936dff29c0f87b40a4d4d7637de5/1088495/From-Callaghan-To-Credit-Crunch-Final-Report.pdf>

Table 4.0: Hard and soft news criteria

Hard	Soft
UK politics	Crime
International politics	Celebrity/entertainment
War/conflict	Royal family
Terror/defence	Sport
International news/foreign affairs	Weather
Trump visit to the UK / Europe	Accidents /tragedies
Legal/ judiciary (e.g. death penalty, legalising drugs etc.)	
Social affairs/human rights (abortion, LGBTQ+, indigenous people etc.)	
Welfare / social care / benefits system	
Immigration and diversity (multiculturalism, discussions about hijab etc.)	
Housing	
Education (including schools and universities)	
Transport (including infrastructure investments etc.)	
Economy	
Business (manufacturing, heavy industry)	
Employment / jobs	
Foreign trade issues (more business-related than Foreign affairs)	
Financial sector (banking, financial services)	
Environment/energy transition (inc. fracking, fossil fuel)	
Climate change	
Health / healthcare / NHS	
Science / innovation	
Technology	
Art/ history/heritage	
Media (e.g. the Guardian making profit)	
Religion	
Press reviews	

As previously acknowledged, when categorising news items as hard or soft we do not make judgements about their relative editorial value. Since the number of discrete topics totalled over 30 categories, we used the hard and soft news labels to provide a broad overview of the agenda across different media outlets. For all international news items, we also coded a sub-category (e.g. war/conflict) and this topic was then assigned a hard or a soft label.

4.2 Television news

We examined 1170 television news items across seven programmes. This included the main early to late night evening bulletins: *BBC News at Ten*, *ITV News at Ten*, *Channel 4 at 7pm*, and *Channel 5 at 5pm*, plus one hour per day of the *BBC News Channel*, *Sky News* (between 5-6pm) and the *BBC's Newsnight*.

When grouped into hard and soft news categories, it was striking how similar the news agendas were across the UK's evening television news bulletins. As Table 1.1 reveals, with the exception of Channel 5, all programmes spent over 80% of their time on hard news topics.

Table 4.1: Percentage of hard and soft news topics covered in all television news items (by time; N in brackets)¹⁰

	BBC <i>News at Ten</i>	ITV <i>News at Ten</i>	Channel 4 News	Channel 5 News	BBC News Channel	Sky News Channel	<i>Newsnight</i>	Total
Hard	85.7% (129)	80.6% (115)	93.5% (176)	79.4% (162)	86.7% (166)	86.3% (133)	99.2% (104)	88.5 % (935)
Soft	14.3% (39)	19.4% (42)	6.5% (19)	20.6% (111)	13.3% (41)	13.7% (42)	0.8% (1)	11.5% (235)
Total	100% (168)	100% (157)	100% (195)	100% (162)	100% (207)	100% (175)	100% (105)	100% (1170)

The *BBC News at Ten* supplied a harder news agenda than *ITV's* and *Channel 5's* evening bulletins, with 85.7% of its time spent on topics such as politics, the economy and international affairs, compared with 80.6% and 79.4% for the respective commercial broadcasters. Channel 4, however, dedicated the most time to these topics, since 93.5% of its total share of output was hard news. The news channels – *BBC* and *Sky* – provided an almost identical amount of airtime on hard and soft news (roughly 86% and 13% respectively). Meanwhile, an overwhelming 99.2% of *Newsnight* airtime was dedicated to hard news topics.

Compared to a previous study of UK television news which used the same definitions of hard and soft news and covered a five-week period (25 days), our findings show a comparatively harder news agenda than in 2009 (Barnett et al, 2012). For example, in the 2009 study the proportion of hard news items in *News at Ten* was 80.8%, roughly 5% less than in our study a decade later. *ITV's* hard news agenda was 65.9% - approximately 15% less than in 2019 – while across *Channel 4's* politics and public affairs coverage it rose by 12.2% over ten years. However, the most striking transformation was for *Channel 5 News at 5pm*, which dedicated 51.2% of its news agenda to soft news coverage in 2009, but a decade later was on par with its terrestrial competitors, with 79.4% of time spent reporting hard news topics. However, as we explore in the next section, while *Channel 5* had a similar level of hard news, the topics it covered differed from those in the *BBC*, *ITV* and *Channel 4* evening bulletins.

¹⁰ In this and subsequent tables, percentages have been rounded up and may not add up to 100%.

Of course, when comparing news over time it is important to acknowledge the context of the sample period. As our three-week sample period was dominated by major stories about politics (the Trump visit, Brexit and the Conservative leadership contest) as well as the D-Day anniversary, these events and issues may have contributed to a harder news agenda that would have been evident at other times in the year.

4.3 Radio news

Turning next to radio stations, we examined 1061 news items across eight programmes on the BBC and commercial outlets. For the BBC, this included Radio 4’s *Today* and *News at One*, as well as 5 Live *Breakfast* and Radio 1’s *Newsbeat*. We present these separately, since it was difficult to directly compare them with output from commercial radio stations, where our analysis focused on the relatively brief headlines at the top of the hour.

Like television news, Radio 4’s *Today* and *News at One* spent a considerable amount of time (89.1% and 93.5%) on reporting hard news topics. Reflecting the BBC’s general remit for its service, Radio 5 Live *Breakfast*, in contrast, featured a higher proportion of sports-related news, reducing its hard news agenda to a level roughly 20% less than its Radio 4 counterpart. Radio 1’s *Newsbeat* covered hard and soft news topics in more equal proportions (55.1% and 44.9% respectively). As we will see, this was more in line with the news agendas of the commercial radio stations.

Table 4.2: The percentage of hard and soft news topics covered in all BBC radio news items (by time; N in brackets)

	Radio 4 <i>Today</i>	Radio 4 <i>News at One</i>	Radio 5 <i>Live Breakfast</i>	Radio 1 <i>Newsbeat</i>	Total
Hard	89.1% (243)	93.5% (163)	70.1% (117)	55.1% (63)	81.6% (586)
Soft	10.9% (45)	6.5% (23)	29.9% (57)	44.9% (47)	18.4% (172)
Total	100% (288)	100% (186)	100% (174)	100% (110)	100% (758)

Given that many of the commercial radio stations in our sample do not run conventional news items, but instead rely on phone-ins and/or music, we limited our analysis to the news headlines at 8am on LBC, Heart, Capital and talkRADIO.

Compared to television news and Radio 4’s programming, most of the commercial radio stations pursued a softer agenda. LBC and talkRADIO reported the hardest news topics, making up 81.1% and 70.6% of their total items respectively. The proportion of Heart’s hard news items was 66.3%, whereas Capital FM pursued the lightest agenda, with well over a third of items (37.5%) focused on softer news topics.

Table 4.3: The percentage of hard and soft news topics covered in all commercial radio news items (by time; N in brackets)

	LBC	Heart	Capital	talkRADIO	Total
Hard	81.1% (67)	66.3% (45)	62.5% (37)	70.6% (52)	72.2% (201)
Soft	18.9% (21)	33.7% (27)	37.5% (32)	29.4% (22)	27.8% (102)
Total	100% (88)	100% (72)	100% (69)	100% (74)	100% (303)

4.4: Online news

The 600 online news items we examined, across eight outlets, were based on the top five topics featured on their respective homepages. We acknowledge that this represents only a partial picture of the news produced by the BBC News, the Guardian, the Daily Mail, the Telegraph, the Sun, the Mirror, BuzzFeed and the Huffington Post each day, but our aim was to provide an insight into the agenda *of their most editorial significant stories*, rather than a comprehensive picture of daily coverage.

Table 1.3 illustrates some major differences in the editorial selection of hard and soft news topics across the eight outlets. The Guardian published the highest proportion of hard news topics, making up 90.7% of its items, compared to 85.3% at both the BBC and the Huffington Post.

Table 4.4: The percentage of hard and soft news topics covered in all online news items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News	The Guardian	Daily Mail	The Telegraph	The Sun	The Mirror	BuzzFeed	Huffington Post	Total
Hard	85.3% (64)	90.7% (68)	54.7% (41)	78.7% (59)	45.3% (34)	41.3% (31)	72% (54)	82.7% (62)	68.8% (413)
Soft	14.7% (11)	9.3% (7)	45.3% (34)	21.3% (16)	54.7% (41)	58.7% (44)	28% (21)	17.3% (13)	31.2% (187)
Total	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (600)

While the Daily Mail dedicated 54.7% of its news coverage to topics such as politics and international affairs, the Sun and the Mirror both published more soft than hard news items, making up 54.7% and 58.7% of their total coverage respectively. The variations in the editorial selection on online news outlets was more apparent than on radio or TV, with the BBC and the Guardian standing out as pursuing a harder news agenda, while the traditional red-top papers' websites featured softer news topics.

4.5: App news

Finally, we examined the BBC, ITV and Sky News apps, which produced a sample of 225 items. As Table 1.3 shows, the BBC provided a higher proportion of harder news topics than the commercial providers. The BBC's proportion of hard news was 81.3%, whereas on ITV it was 73.3%, and on Sky News just under two-thirds of items (65.3%).

Table 4.5: The percentage of hard and soft news topics covered in all news apps (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC	ITV	Sky	Total
Hard	81.3% (61)	73.3% (55)	65.3% (49)	73.3% (165)
Soft	18.7% (14)	26.7% (20)	34.7% (26)	26.7% (60)
Total	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (225)

ITV and Sky News pursued a lighter news agenda on their news apps than on their TV news bulletins. The BBC app, in contrast, reported a broadly similar level of hard news as its flagship television bulletin, *News at Ten*.

5.0 A content analysis of news topics

While the previous section provided a broad sense of the agendas across television, radio, online and news apps, we now turn to exploring in more detail the topics each outlet reported over the three-week sample. Since international news made up a considerable share of coverage across many platforms, the next section breaks down the topics in this category more closely.

5.1 Television news

With the exception of Channel 5, the international news category made up the largest share of coverage across all UK television bulletins (see Table 5.0). While international news amounted to 30.9% of airtime on *Channel 4 News*, the *BBC News at Ten* and *ITV News at Ten* were not far behind, at 26% and 25.1% respectively. On Channel 5, in contrast, it represented just 6.7% of its total airtime. International news was not a dominant news topic on either Sky News or BBC News Channel, where its share was 14.1% and 9.7% respectively. Meanwhile, *Newsnight* was overwhelmingly focused on UK issues – notably the Conservative leadership contest – leaving 8.5% of airtime for international affairs. As already acknowledged, we break down international news topics in the next section of our study.

Table 5.0: The percentage of main topics covered in all television news items (by time; N in brackets)

	<i>BBC News at Ten</i>	<i>ITV News at Ten</i>	<i>Channel 4 News</i>	<i>Channel 5 News</i>	<i>BBC News Channel</i>	<i>Sky News Channel</i>	<i>Newsnight</i>	Total
International	26% (43)	25.1% (39)	30.9% (54)	6.7% (22)	9.7% (27)	14.1% (33)	8.5% (8)	17.6% (226)
Tory leadership contest	18.3% (23)	20.4% (25)	20.3% (38)	12.6% (13)	33.2% (57)	34.0% (37)	47.2% (50)	28.5% (243)
UK politics	2.6% (6)	3.6% (7)	3.4% (9)	1.8% (5)	3.9% (9)	1.9% (3)	6.8% (8)	3.6% (47)
Brexit	1.6% (3)	1.9% (3)	3.6% (8)	/	2.9% (5)	1.2% (5)	4.1% (6)	2.5% (30)
Terror/defence/security	3.8% (7)	2.7% (2)	1.1% (4)	3.2% (5)	2.9% (7)	0.8% (2)	1.3% (2)	2.0% (29)
Trump visit to UK/Ireland	6.1% (4)	5.5% (8)	7.1% (14)	8.9% (7)	13.6% (9)	13.4% (18)	8.5% (6)	9.5% (66)
Accidents/ tragedies	/	0.6% (1)	/	/	/	0.3% (1)	/	0.1% (2)
D-Day	10.0% (11)	6.4% (9)	9.2% (10)	9.6% (8)	9.7% (17)	8.3% (12)	5.2% (6)	8.4% (73)
Crime/prisons	4.6% (10)	2.8% (6)	2.8% (7)	6.1% (17)	3.2% (15)	5.3% (19)	/	3.3% (74)
Legal/judiciary	2.1% (5)	0.7% (1)	2.6% (5)	0.3% (1)	1.4% (6)	1.4% (2)	/	1.4% (20)
Social affairs/human rights	1.1% (1)	/	0.8% (3)	0.9% (1)	/	1.2% (1)	/	0.5% (6)
Welfare/social care/benefits system	0.7% (1)	/	1.4% (2)	0.8% (1)	0.7% (2)	1.4% (1)	/	0.8% (7)
Housing	2.7% (4)	1.4% (3)	2.5% (5)	2.8% (5)	1.7% (4)	0.4% (1)	/	1.5% (22)
Education	/	1.4% (2)	2.5% (6)	5.1% (8)	0.3% (1)	0.7% (4)	/	1.2% (21)
Transport/travel	0.1% (1)	/	1% (1)	0.8% (1)	0.4% (1)	/	/	0.3% (4)

	BBC News at Ten	ITV News at Ten	Channel 4 News	Channel 5 News	BBC News Channel	Sky News Channel	Newsnight	Total
Economy/business	3.7% (10)	3.9% (6)	2.1% (5)	4.3% (9)	2.2% (8)	2.3% (7)	6.5% (4)	3.3% (49)
Foreign trade issues/financial sector	/	/	/	0.9% (1)	0.4% (2)	0.6% (1)	/	0.2% (4)
Environment/energy	1.3% (2)	1.7% (2)	2.5% (5)	0.9% (1)	0.5% (1)	0.1% (1)	/	1.0% (12)
Climate change	0.7% (1)	1.4% (3)	0.6% (1)	1.3% (1)	/	1.7% (3)	/	0.7% (9)
Health/NHS	4.5% (8)	2.5% (4)	1.5% (5)	16.3% (22)	3.2% (10)	2.3% (5)	2.2% (2)	3.6% (56)
Technology	/	0.6% (1)	0.6% (2)	0.2% (1)	/	/	/	0.2% (4)
Art/history/heritage	0.7% (1)	2% (3)	0.5% (1)	2.5% (3)	/	/	2.2% (2)	0.9% (10)
Media	0.9% (2)	0.6% (1)	1.4% (4)	1.1% (4)	1.5% (3)	1.7% (3)	1.4% (2)	1.3% (19)
Celebrity/entertainment	0.2% (2)	4.2% (7)	0.8% (2)	2.6% (6)	0.04% (1)	0.3% (2)	0.8% (1)	1.0% (21)
Weather (not forecasts)	0.7% (3)	0.7% (1)	0.1% (1)	2.2% (5)	0.6% (4)	0.6% (3)	/	0.5% (17)
Sport	7.3% (17)	7.5% (19)	0.8% (3)	2.3% (6)	7.0% (13)	5.9% (11)	/	4.3% (69)
Royal	0.2% (2)	1.8% (3)	/	3% (5)	0.4% (2)	0.1% (1)	/	0.5% (13)
Other	0.1% (1)	1.2% (2)	/	2.8% (4)	0.4% (3)	0.3% (1)	5.3% (8)	1.1% (17)
Total	100% (168)	100% (157)	100% (195)	100% (162)	100% (207)	100% (176)	100% (105)	100% (1170)

When comparing the proportion of international news airtime between broadcasters, it is important to provide some context about their resources and licence conditions. As the Editor of 5 News, Cait FitzSimons, said:

Our remit from the channel is primarily domestic news, so we have a very small foreign budget - small even by our standards relative to our coverage budget. When I'm talking about foreign news, I'm not really involving Brexit and the EU visits because that's so domestic faced. We tend to be quite focussed in our foreign reporting. It tends to be major events like the World Cup, or the Olympics, disasters that usually British people are contributing to and donating to, so that there is some kind of emotional connection with that story, or often US politics and, particularly in the Trump era, understanding what is happening in America. Those are our main kind of areas.

This helps explain why Channel 5 news had a proportionately lower share of international news than the other terrestrial television news bulletins.

The BBC, by contrast, has far greater resources at its disposal and is able to cover more regions of the world. As BBC's Editor of the Six and Ten News bulletins, Paul Royall, explained:

I think the 10 O'clock News there is obviously what I would call a self-selecting agenda, which probably most news organisations will cover...within that, where the 10 O'clock News is distinctive is the breadth and range of BBC News news gathering and the people and the reach and the resources that we can bring to that story...there is a practical distinctiveness for the 10 O'clock News, which is around our global reach.

Royall went on to add that he closely monitors the proportion of national and international news stories. In doing so, he said:

on a monthly basis it [the balance of national and international news] generally lands in the same place, which is the 10 O'clock News is usually about two-thirds domestic, one-third global, and then the 6 O'clock News might be more like three-quarters, or maybe 80% domestic, 25% / 20% global and that number generally sort of comes out across the course of a month. Of course, at the moment, Brexit is very dominant, and so it could be the period we're in. If we'd run those figures a few years ago, when the rise of IS was kind of hitting its peak, and a lot of our coverage was around, say, the war in Syria and terror attacks that were going on around the world, maybe the balance would have been slightly different but, at the moment, that's kind of where it lands.

All interviewees, however, pointed out that story selection is driven by the editorial value of stories rather than any quota system. As ITV's Director of News and Current Affairs, Michael Jeremy, put it, it is "a balance, a judgement made on the news of the day and a desire to give people a rounded view of the world over time... we have a pretty strong commitment to international news, and not just the stories that are the big headline news of the day".

Similarly, when discussing finding the right balance between national and international news, Gavin Allen, Head of BBC News Output, said:

it does come down to judgement, it does come to our foreign language teams, our bureaux all around the world and us just thinking, what is of interest? Again, going back to the audience, what are they asking about, what is confusing to them, how do we present that in a way that makes it clearer, rather than any kind of, oh we haven't done Somalia recently, let's do a Somalia story.

It is important, in this respect, to interpret our content analysis findings in the context of the sample period. As BBC Editor of News and Current Affairs, James Stephenson, warned:

I think the thing that sometimes it feels like it's worth saying, in relation to content analysis, is that there is such a strong... news imperative to a news organisation that you go to where the news is, and part of the professional skillset of the people in this room now, but the editors and the producers, is they recognise a story...and they want to cover them. I think, sometimes, in the context of content analysis, that can lead you to a position where... for example, in the period you looked at, there were many days on the 10 O'clock News of coverage of Sudan – and there may be other years where there is little or no coverage of Sudan - because it meets the criteria, front and centre, of news in that period. I think that's the overlay that's worth focussing on. It's a kind of diverse conversation, together with a certain amount of shared editorial judgement - is this a story, is it something that the BBC needs to commit a lot of resource now to send Catherine Byaruhanga and Fergal Keane, yes/no, are we going, if we're going we're going to... So I think that's just to paint a bit of a picture about why sometimes things loom very large in one period and not be there, at all, in a different, comparable period.

When considering the findings of our three-week content analysis study, we agree it is important to acknowledge the events and issues that arise in the monitoring period. Our focus, however, is not just on what is reported over the sample period, but the *comparative* editorial selection and construction of coverage between different news organisations at the *same* point in time. For example, to what extent were news agendas shared across different outlets? Did they put the same resources into certain issues and topics? And how was the same story framed between news organisations?

We now turn to the most prominent topics reported on television news over the three week study. Apart from Channel 5's news bulletin, the topic all bulletins gave most airtime to was the Conservative leadership contest (see Table 5.0). In total, this made up 18.3% of airtime on *BBC News at Ten*, 20.4% on ITV, and 20.3% on Channel 4. In contrast, Channel 5 spent 12.6% of airtime on this topic. Both Sky News and the BBC News Channel spent approximately a third of their output on the Conservative leadership election. Since the race to become the next Prime Minister dominated the political agenda, routine coverage about UK politics or news specifically about Brexit (and not prominently tied up with the leadership battle) was in short supply across all programmes, with the exception of *Newsnight*.

As Table 5.0 shows, the 75th D-Day anniversary and the US President's visit to the UK and Europe in week 1 of the sample period made up a considerable share of coverage (10% to 20%) across all television programmes. This may have had an impact on other everyday – health, education and crime – which had lower coverage than shown by previous academic studies of news agendas (e.g. Barnett et al 2012). The exception, once again, was Channel 5 news, which spent the most time reporting health, education and crime. In total, this made up 27.5% of Channel 5's news airtime, whereas for the BBC *News at Ten* it was 7.3%.

Channel 5's emphasis on social policy beyond the conventional Westminster prism was pointed out by the Editor of 5 News. When imaging her audiences, she said:

if you say to them here's a political story, they won't be interested, but if you say to them here's a story about how your local flood defences aren't being funded, or your local hospital is struggling, or even corruption, or things like that, then they'll sit up and take notice. So it's about how you present certain kinds of stories, so you don't shy away from Brexit and politics, but it's where you tell them... And then, in other issues, I always talk about things that feel local to them on their doorstep. So it's about their health services, their schools, crime, those kind of issues, but done in a way that is very much about the actual experience of it rather than led by the policy of it, and I think that's the twist that we do.

As our study showed, Channel's 5 focus on health was far greater than the nightly bulletins on BBC, ITV, Channel 4, which reflects how its editorial agenda differs to other broadcasters.

The BBC's Editor of the Six and Ten Television news bulletins suggested all broadcasters could be more thoughtful about how they routinely covered news to ensure politics does not become too Westminster focussed. In his words:

we have to cover up to a point what goes on at Westminster, but actually the issues that politicians are addressing and grappling over are probably much better reported out of Westminster and around the country in terms of housing, the health service, education, all those inequality, the world of work, all those things. That then takes you to an interesting journalistic place which is we're still, for better or worse – and I think a lot of journalism is like this - more comfortable with a story that may have a Minister in it and a sort of what we would see as a discernible top-line, as opposed to, actually no, we're going to go to Sunderland and cover the world of work from there, and actually the Ministerial announcement will just have to find its way into the coverage somehow around that. That's the sort of braver, better journalism to do. I don't think we're there yet but that's what we aspire to.

However, the BBC has developed new editorial strategies to report politics outside Westminster. For example, the BBC's Westminster Editor pointed out that:

What we've done, over the last couple of years, is to set up a post specifically to report other politics. And I think it has become more important to do that in the last two to three years, when it has been defined every day that the main story has been about Brexit, and so we thought a lot about how we did this. Because in the past there would be scope for a political education story to come outside of Westminster, fully

recognising the need to reflect those audiences, but the reality, to go back to where I started, is that those stories are being driven out of Westminster on Brexit day-by-day. How we get around that is we've put in a post, that Alex Forsyth is currently doing specifically to do this because, we talked about it amongst our group, when I was thinking about it a couple of years ago, just partly as we do, we are informed by our own personal experiences. I was like, god we never talk about education, and that's really important to me, or the health service, we're not doing that; we're not doing that and we need to do more and more of that. So, yes, we've got this post, based out of Birmingham, and her brief is really to try and report, as I call in my casual speak, real-life politics. What are the issues, whether they're policy driven by education or health, or whether they're stories that inform the kind of wider Westminster debate about where parties are growing up from, like the strength of the Labour Party, or Islamophobia that we've done recently. Yes so that, and actually I'm really delighted how effective it has been. Also it allows, clearly, the audience to reflect back to us - one of the issues we're trying to look at, at the moment, is how we get away from the vox pop-itus of talking to one group of people and then another, but staying within our true commitment to impartiality. I think my answer to that is getting better analysis about what we're trying to say the real story piece is; what the entire piece is.

All interviewees agreed original and independent journalism were central to their news making decisions. On the topic of climate change, the BBC's Editorial Director said:

Climate change is one of those wave stories, which has significance in a decade, in two decades, in five decades, so we want to keep it at the top of our agenda. Therefore, when we talk in not just in the nine and the three [meetings] - we have a meeting every week called Editorial Ambitions where we discuss bigger, thematic things that we are doing over the weeks coming, climate change will often be one of those, so we certainly look at it in that way. And we create using data, using original journalism, our own stories on these subjects for that very reason. As I say, some of it is news list; a lot of our work is on, what is our original journalism in these areas.

It is important, in this context, to analyse climate change coverage over a long period in time.

In our three week content analysis study, apart from the day when the government announced a major bill to cut greenhouse gas emissions to zero, the issue of climate change barely registered on television news. However, all interviewees considered climate change to be a significant story that should remain central to their news agendas. The Editor of the BBC's Six and 10 Television News bulletins, for example, said:

I think with climate change, because everyone recognises the magnitude of the issue and the challenge, we have planned and commissioned a lot of coverage which is off-agenda in the sense that it's not pegged to a particular announcement or news event. For example, in the lead up to the UN coverage a couple of weeks ago, we ran a series across the preceding month from the melting ice-sheet to the drying up of the Dead Sea, to how peat bogs in Scotland can be used for carbon capture, and things like that. So, I think, we've done a lot of that and actually again because the scale of the issue is so large and I think audiences can see that, it doesn't sort of need the news-peg element to drive it.

Similarly, ITV's Director of News and Current Affairs outlined the importance of independent climate change reporting, as well as reporting the topic in the daily news cycle:

It's a news programme, so we want to cover the things that are new, but if you never put things in context, you're not serving your viewers well. So we do try to cover the day's development, but also find resource and people to do wider coverage. We've been doing a series recently on climate change, specifically on not its future impact but the impact it has already had, and had reporters around the world doing that.

Meanwhile, Channel 4's Head of News and Current Affairs revealed that a senior journalist was specifically appointed to cover climate change in order to ensure it remained high on the news agenda. In her words:

I think we felt we needed to improve [climate change coverage], so we've put our Chief Correspondent, Alex Thomson, we've made him our Environment Correspondent but he's our Chief Correspondent. He's massively known by the audience and he's also get heft in the newsroom, so if he really wants to do something, he's more likely to get the resources to do it. I think that was because we felt that only if we had a correspondent of great weight, authority and power in the newsroom were we really going to turn around the coverage. I think that is working very well. I think it has transformed the coverage.

The Editor of 5 News pointed out the difficulty of reporting climate change on a daily basis given the resources at their disposal:

it's difficult for us because if we want to do something that's not the day-to-day agenda, that takes time and planning. I mean the Greenland trip, for instance, we first talked about doing that last September. Obviously you have the seasonal thing, so we knew we wanted to do it as soon as it came up but I don't have a dedicated foreign team. Basically, we had a producer who kind of low level worked on it over a long period of time, made contacts and spoke to people, and so we had a very rough plan by about spring this year. Then we actually nailed down when we would be able to go with NASA, and some other people who were giving us facilities, and then there was the calculation of do we still have enough money in the foreign pot to be able to do that. For me, because there are fewer people to work on things, you need a much longer run-up. Then there's just the general... we are quite happy to do things that are slightly off the beaten track, so we will spot a story and say, that's around today but it's quite a good issue, so let's just give ourselves a few days, work on it, and then come back to it. So often that's how we kind of generate things to keep the stories ticking over, but it's quite difficult for us to do, and we can't do it at the volume that I would like because we just don't have the manpower, so it's a strategy thing really.

Overall, all the interviewees indicated a strong commitment to covering climate change, but they revealed a number of structural constraints that limit everyday coverage of this topic.

5.2 Radio

On BBC radio programmes, international news was a far less prominent topic than on television, especially on Radio 5 Live *Breakfast*, where it had 1.2% share of total airtime (see Table 5.1). With the exception of *Newsbeat*, the Conservative party leadership was the most reported topic, notably on Radio 4's news programmes *Today* and *World at One*, where it made up 22.3% and 29.8% of airtime respectively. Once again, given the attention paid to Trump's visit to the UK and Europe, along with the D-Day celebrations, routine social policy issues were relatively low on the news radar. On *Today*, for example, items about art, history and heritage made up, between them, 6.0% of total airtime compared to 5.4% of time spent on housing, education and transport combined.

Table 5.1: The percentage of main topics covered in all radio news items (by time; N in brackets)

	BBC Radio 4 <i>Today</i>	BBC Radio 4 <i>World at One</i>	BBC Radio 5 <i>Live Breakfast</i>	BBC <i>Newsbeat</i>	Heart	Capital	talkRADIO	LBC	Total
International news	13.7% (56)	17.2% (41)	1.4% (4)	17.2% (19)	6.6% (7)	3.5% (3)	11.4% (10)	8.7% (10)	11.5% (150)
Tory leadership contest	22.3% (44)	29.8% (41)	16.2% (22)	3.6 % (5)	18.5% (11)	14.2% (10)	18.7% (12)	20.9% (11)	20.7% (156)
UK politics	6.9% (21)	6.2% (14)	3.9% (6)	1.6% (1)	0.7% (1)	1.1% (1)	4.2% (3)	4.6% (5)	5.5% (52)
Brexit	4.5% (11)	3.7% (6)	0.1% (3)	/	/	/	0.5% (1)	1.5 % (1)	2.5% (22)
Terror/defence/securi ty	1.2% (3)	1.4% (5)	0.8% (2)	/	2.0 % (2)	1.0% (1)	1.8% (1)	0.5% (1)	1.0% (15)
Trump visit to UK/Ireland	6.5% (15)	7.1% (7)	6.9% (8)	8.8% (11)	10.7% (6)	10.0% (3)	4.6% (3)	10.0% (5)	6.7% (58)
Accidents/tragedies	0.1% (1)	0.6% (1)	1.0 % (1)	/	1.6% (1)	2.2% (2)	0.8% (1)	1.2% (1)	0.5% (8)
D-Day	4.9% (14)	8.3% (10)	12.6% (20)	5.9% (6)	5.8% (2)	7.5% (2)	4.9% (2)	6.0% (3)	8.0% (59)
Crime/prisons	1.1% (4)	2.2% (10)	1.0 % (2)	8.8% (10)	14.0% (11)	13.9% (11)	1.8% (3)	7.3% (6)	2.2% (57)
Legal/judiciary	3.4% (9)	2.6% (5)	0.1% (3)	2.4% (2)	/	/	/	0.9% (1)	2.1% (20)
Social affairs/human rights	/	/	0.8% (1)	0.4% (1)	/	/	0.6% (1)	/	0.3% (3)
Welfare/social care/benefits system	0.1% (1)	/	1.0% (1)	2.6% (2)	/	1.1% (1)	/	/	0.6% (5)
Housing	1.4% (4)	1.2% (3)	2.5 % (3)	1.6% (2)	7.9% (7)	6.3% (4)	2.8% (2)	3.4% (3)	1.8% (28)
Education	3.9% (9)	0.1% (1)	0.4% (1)	0.4% (1)	0.5% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.8% (1)	0.6% (1)	1.5% (16)
Transport/travel	1.1% (4)	0.7% (1)	3.0% (3)	/	4.8% (3)	3.3% (3)	1.2% (2)	3.7% (4)	1.5% (20)

	BBC Radio 4 Today	BBC Radio 4 World at One	BBC Radio 5 Live Breakfast	BBC Newsbeat	Heart	Capital	talkRADIO	LBC	Total
Economy/business	1.2% (9)	2.4% (9)	5.3% (14)	2.2% (3)	0.9% (1)	1.6% (2)	5.3% (4)	6.9% (5)	2.8% (47)
Foreign trade issues/financial sector	2.1% (5)	2.6% (2)	1.0 % (2)	0.1% (1)	0.9% (1)	/	1.6% (1)	5.4% (9)	1.8% (21)
Environment/energy	0.9% (3)	1.0% (2)	3.4% (4)	/	/	2.4% (1)	3.3% (2)	1.2% (2)	1.5% (14)
Climate change	1.8% (5)	1.4% (4)	1.0% (2)	2.6% (4)	6.3% (2)	6.7% (2)	3.7% (2)	5.0% (3)	1.7% (24)
Health/NHS	3.7% (17)	2.7% (6)	4.6% (10)	6.9% (8)	3.1% (4)	1.5% (2)	4.8% (5)	1.4% (2)	4.0% (54)
Science/innovation	1.5% (2)	/	2.7% (3)	/	/	/	/	/	1.3% (5)
Technology	1.1% (2)	0.1% (1)	0.5% (2)	1.8% (2)	/	0.9% (1)	0.5% (1)	0.8% (1)	0.8% (10)
Art/history/heritage	6.0% (12)	0.9% (2)	/	/	0.1% (1)	/	/	/	2.3% (15)
Media	0.5% (1)	4.1% (6)	1.6% (2)	0.1% (1)	2.3% (2)	1.0% (1)	1.7% (2)	0.7% (1)	1.7% (16)
Celebrity/entertainment	2.0% (4)	0.1% (1)	2.0% (4)	7.0% (6)	5.7% (4)	11.5% (9)	4.5% (4)	/	2.0% (32)
Weather (not forecasts)	0.4% (2)	0.7% (1)	1.2% (2)	1.3% (1)	5.7% (4)	0.9% (1)	0.9% (2)	2.4% (4)	0.8% (17)
Sport	7.2% (27)	1.8% (5)	24.2 (47)	24.3% (24)	/	6.7% (7)	17.6% (8)	5.8% (7)	12.1% (125)
Royal	/	0.4% (1)	/	/	/	1.3% (1)	0.7% (1)	1.5% (2)	0.1% (5)
Other	0.1% (3)	0.2% (1)	0.4% (2)	/	0.9% (1)	/	/	/	0.4% (7)
Total	100% (288)	100% (186)	100% (174)	100% (110)	100% (72)	100% (69)	100% (74)	100% (88)	100% (1061)

As Table 5.1 shows, a fifth of airtime on Radio 5 Live *Breakfast* and Radio 1's *Newsbeat* was spent on sports news, compared to 7.2% and 1.8% on *Today* and *News at One* respectively. *Newsbeat*'s agenda diverged from the other programmes because of its emphasis on crime, health and celebrity/entertainment stories. Overall, Radio 4's agenda was very different from the news topics reported on 5 Live and Radio 1.

On the commercial news stations, the total share of airtime about international news topics was between 3.5% and 11.4% (see Table 5.1). News about the Conservative party leadership, once again, was the most reported topic across all channels. Compared to most other BBC radio news – apart from *Newsbeat* – commercial radio news spent more time reporting celebrity and entertainment stories. However, they all covered news about climate change, with some relatively lengthy items that made up a small but significant share of total airtime, notably on Heart and Capital.

5.3 Online

As Table 5.2 reveals, the volume of online international news differed markedly across all eight outlets examined. On the BBC it made up 18.6% share of news topics, whereas on BuzzFeed it represented more than half of all news items (56.0%) and for the Huffington Post just 9.3%. As with TV and radio, the Conservative party leadership battle was the most reported topic. For the BBC it made up 17.3% of topics covered, with only the Telegraph at 21.3% and Huffington Post at 18.7% reporting it more often.

While health made up 8% of items on the BBC, no other topics stood out as being prominently reported. A wide range of topics were covered between one and four times over the three-week sample period in areas such as crime, health, education, transport, housing, education, the economy and environment.

Overall, the BBC was clearly different from tabloid news sites, such as the Sun, the Mirror and the Daily Mail, which featured far more entertainment and celebrity stories, making up 24.0%, 17.3% and 14.7% of their respective total news agendas. The BBC, in contrast, had just one item about entertainment or celebrities over the three-week sample.

Table 5.2: The percentage of main topics covered in all newspaper news items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News homepage	The Guardian	The Daily Mail	The Telegraph	The Sun	Mirror	BuzzFeed	Huffington Post	Total
International	18.7% (14)	36.0% (27)	18.7% (14)	24.0% (18)	17.3% (13)	30.7% (23)	56.0% (42)	9.3% (7)	26.3% (158)
Tory leadership contest	17.3% (13)	13.3% (10)	13.3% (10)	21.3% (16)	12.0% (9)	1.3% (1)	13.3% (10)	18.7% (14)	13.8% (83)
UK politics	4.0% (3)	5.3% (4)	5.3% (4)	4.0% (3)	4.0% (3)	2.7% (2)	5.3% (4)	17.3% (13)	6.0% (36)
Brexit	4.0% (3)	4.0% (3)	/	4.0% (3)	/	/	1.3% (1)	5.3% (4)	2.3% (14)
Terror/defence/security	/	/	/	4.0% (3)	/	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.0% (6)
Trump visit to UK/Ireland	2.7% (2)	5.3% (4)	8.0% (6)	4.0% (3)	5.3% (4)	4.0% (3)	5.3% (4)	6.7% (5)	5.2% (31)
Crime/prisons	2.7% (2)	1.3% (1)	13.3% (10)	4.0% (3)	13.3% (10)	16.0% (12)	/	5.3% (4)	7.0% (42)
Legal/judiciary	/	1.3% (1)	/	/	/	/	4.0% (3)	/	0.7% (4)
Social affairs/human rights	/	/	/	1.3% (1)	/	/	1.3% (1)	/	0.3% (2)
Welfare/social care/benefits system	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	/	1.3% (1)	/	1.3% (1)	/	6.7% (5)	1.5% (9)
Housing	2.7% (2)	4.0% (3)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	/	/	/	4.0% (3)	1.7% (10)
Education	4.0% (3)	1.3% (1)	/	/	2.7% (2)	/	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (8)
Transport/travel	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	/	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	1.3% (1)	/	/	1.2% (7)
Economy/business	4.0% (3)	1.3% (1)	/	8.0% (6)	/	/	/	1.3% (1)	1.8% (11)
Foreign trade issues/financial sector	4.0% (3)	2.7% (2)	2.7% (2)	2.7% (2)	/	/	/	/	1.5% (9)
Environment/energy	5.3% (4)	2.7% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	2.7% (2)	1.3% (8)
Climate change	2.7% (2)	5.3% (4)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	2.3% (14)

	BBC News Homepage	The Guardian	The Daily Mail	The Telegraph	The Sun	Mirror	BuzzFeed	Huffington Post	Total
Health/NHS	8.0% (6)	1.3% (1)	/	/	2.7% (2)	8.0% (6)	1.3% (1)	4.0% (3)	3.2% (19)
Science/innovation	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	/	/	1.3% (1)	/	/	/	0.7% (4)
Technology	2.7% (2)	/	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	/	/	/	/	0.7% (4)
D-Day	2.7% (2)	/	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	/	/	1.0% (6)
Art/history/heritage	1.3% (1)	4.0% (3)	/	1.3% (1)	/	/	/	/	0.8% (5)
Media	1.3% (1)	/	5.3% (4)	/	/	4.0% (3)	1.3% (1)	4.0% (3)	2.0% (12)
Celebrity/entertainment	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	14.7% (11)	1.3% (1)	24.0% (18)	17.3% (13)	1.3% (1)	5.3% (4)	8.3% (50)
Weather (not forecasts)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	4.0% (3)	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	1.3% (1)	/	2.7% (2)	1.8% (11)
Sport	1.3% (1)	/	1.3% (1)	8.0% (6)	4.0% (3)	2.7% (2)	1.3% (1)	/	2.3% (14)
Royal	1.3% (1)	/	2.7% (2)	2.7% (2)	2.7% (2)	/	4.0% (3)	1.3% (1)	1.8% (11)
Accident/tragedy	/	/	2.7% (2)	/	/	2.7% (2)	/	/	0.7% (4)
Other	2.7% (2)	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	/	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	/	/	1.3% (8)
Total	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (600)

5.4 News apps

International news, once again, was the most reported topic across the news apps (see Table 5.3). A third of Sky News items were about international affairs (34.7%) while ITV's share was 22.7% and the BBC's 20%. The volume of Conservative party leadership items was broadly similar across the news apps (between 14.7% and 18.7%) along with news about UK politics generally, including Brexit. In other areas, there was little to distinguish the agendas of the three news apps, with the exception of health, which made up 9.1% of BBC coverage, while on Sky and ITV this topic appeared just once each.

Table 5.3: The percentage of main topics covered in all news app items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News app	ITV News app	Sky News app	Total
International	20.0% (15)	22.7% (17)	34.7% (26)	25.8% (58)
Tory leadership contest	14.7% (11)	18.7% (14)	14.7% (11)	16.0% (36)
UK politics	4.0% (3)	5.3% (4)	2.7% (2)	4.0% (9)
Brexit	2.7% (2)	2.7% (2)	2.7% (2)	2.7% (6)
Terror/defence/security	/	/	1.3% (1)	0.4% (1)
Trump visit to UK/Ireland	4.0% (3)	4.0% (3)	2.7% (2)	3.6% (8)
Crime/prisons	5.3% (4)	6.7% (5)	8.0% (6)	6.7% (15)
Legal/judiciary	/	1.3% (1)	/	0.4% (1)
Housing	2.7% (2)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.8% (4)
Education	2.7% (2)	/	/	0.9% (2)
Transport/travel	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	1.8% (4)
Economy/business	4.0% (3)	5.3% (4)	4.0% (3)	4.0% (10)
Foreign trade issues/financial sector	5.3% (4)	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	3.1% (7)
Environment/energy	5.3% (4)	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	3.1% (7)
Climate change	2.7% (2)	2.7% (2)	2.7% (2)	2.7% (6)
Health/NHS	9.3% (7)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	4.0% (9)
Science/innovation	1.3% (1)	/	1.3% (1)	0.9% (2)
Technology	2.7% (2)	/	/	0.9% (2)
Art/history/heritage	/	1.3% (1)	/	0.4% (1)
Media	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	/	1.3% (3)
Celebrity/entertainment	2.7% (2)	5.3% (4)	4.0% (3)	4.0% (9)
Weather (not forecasts)	1.3% (1)	2.7% (2)	4.0% (3)	2.7% (6)
Sport	1.3% (1)	6.7% (5)	4.0% (3)	4.0% (9)
Royal	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (3)
D-Day	1.3% (1)	4.0% (3)	1.3% (1)	2.2% (5)
Other	2.7% (2)	/	/	0.9% (2)
Total	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (75)	100% (225)

6.0 International news topics

As international reporting was the largest genre of news across many of the news outlets examined, we examined the range of topics featured within this category. After all, the topic of international news is broad, and might include reporting on a war-torn country, for example, or the latest Hollywood entertainment news. In order to understand what parts of the world different media outlets included and excluded in routine news coverage we examined the specific topic of every international news item.

6.1 Television news

Table 6.0 shows that war and conflict was the most-reported international news topic on all but two of the news programmes we examined. On the *BBC News at Ten* war and conflict made up 39.8% of its total international news agenda, compared to 26.6% for *ITV News at Ten* and 23.4% for *Channel 4 News*. For Channel 5 the proportion was 28.3%, but international news accounted for only 6% of its total airtime. For the *BBC News at Ten*, war and conflict coverage primarily focused on the dispute between the US and Iran after commercial oil tankers were attacked in the Middle East, as well as the ongoing civil unrest in Sudan. A third of BBC News Channel international news coverage (32.4%) centred on war and conflict, compared to 54.9% on Sky News. Within this topic, both Sky News and the BBC News Channel focused almost entirely on the diplomatic tensions between the US and Iran.

Table 6.0: The percentage of international topics covered in all television news items (by time; N in brackets)

	<i>BBC News at Ten</i>	<i>ITV News at Ten</i>	<i>Channel 4 News</i>	<i>Channel 5 News</i>	<i>BBC News Channel</i>	<i>Sky News Channel</i>	<i>Newsnight</i>	Total
War/conflict	39.8% (15)	26.6% (9)	23.4% (16)	28.3% (6)	32.4% (8)	54.9% (11)	26.3% (2)	30.7% (67)
Terror/defence	2.5% (1)	/	/	1.6% (1)	/	/	/	0.4% (2)
Crime/prisons	6.0% (4)	4.2% (3)	6.5% (4)	21.4% (5)	7.5% (3)	13.5% (5)	/	7.0% (24)
Social affairs/human rights	24.3% (8)	6.3% (4)	24.3% (8)	11.8% (3)	17.1% (3)	20.9% (6)	42.6% (4)	21.0% (36)
Immigration and diversity	2.9% (1)	8.5% (2)	8.5% (2)	/	/	/	/	4.6% (5)
Economy/business	/	0.5% (1)	/	/	5.2% (2)	7.5% (1)	/	2.2% (4)
Financial sector	/	2.7% (1)	1.6% (1)	/	/	/	/	1.0% (2)
Environment/energy	/	/	4.2% (1)	/	/	/	/	1.4% (1)
Climate change	/	/	4.1% (2)	/	/	/	/	1.4% (2)
Science/innovation	0.4% (1)	/	/	/	/	0.9% (1)	/	0.1% (2)
Technology	/	0.5% (1)	/	/	/	0.4% (1)	/	0.1% (2)
Healthcare/NHS	5.3% (2)	9.2% (2)	/	/	1.2% (2)	0.4% (1)	/	2.3% (7)
Media	/	2.0% (1)	1.5% (2)	/	/	/	9.3% (1)	1.4% (4)
Celebrity/entertainment	/	2.5% (2)	/	2.1% (1)	12.6% (2)	0.6% (1)	/	1.8% (6)
Accident/tragedy	3.1% (2)	/	0.5% (3)	13.5% (3)	0.5% (1)	0.4% (1)	/	1.1% (10)
Art/history/heritage	/	/	3.1% (1)	/	/	/	/	1.0% (1)
International politics	8.7% (7)	25.9% (11)	16.7% (11)	2.9% (2)	11.4% (5)	6.2% (4)	21.9% (1)	14.7% (41)
Other	7.0% (3)	11.1% (2)	5.4% (3)	18.3% (1)	11.9% (2)	3.23% (1)	/	6.8% (12)
Total	100% (44)	100% (39)	100% (54)	100% (22)	100% (28)	100% (33)	100% (8)	100% (228)

On UK national television bulletins, there were no major differences in the amount of coverage about *specific countries*. The most sustained international news coverage focused on the US or on relations between the US and China or Iran. However, the *BBC News at Ten* did shine a more prominent light on the civil conflict in Sudan compared to other broadcasters. When it was possible to identify the geographic focus of an international news item, we found that Sudan made up 16.7% of airtime on the *BBC News at Ten*, 7.8% on *Channel 4 News*, 2.6% on *ITV News at Ten*, while *Channel 5 News* at 5pm had no substantive coverage. Given the BBC's unique public service remit, the BBC's Editorial Director acknowledged the importance of reporting international news and singled out its coverage of Sudan and Hong Kong:

I think we do feel we have a different duty, given our public purposes, given our funding, given our network around the globe. Coming here you are very aware of the deep desire in this organisation to cover the world fairly and not to become obsessional...about doing it in a tick box way, but to be out there covering those big and important issues, and even those small but important issues around the world. ...Sudan we did a huge amount on. In our 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock meetings, domestic and international have equal weight - they are discussed in the same way and in the same detail. I think if you look at our bulletin output, the amount of work we do digital/programme output, you will see there the sense of the international coverage that we do, and that we take incredibly seriously as part of our public service remit. We certainly covered it in great depth for many days, because we know it is significant, not just in terms of engaging the audience, but just in terms of some things are just important, and if you look at our coverage of Hong Kong as well.

International news on the topic of social affairs and human rights was widely reported on television. This category was largely made up of news about the protests in Hong Kong after new extradition laws to mainland China were announced (see Table 6.0). It accounted for almost a quarter of international news airtime on *The BBC News at Ten* and *Channel 4* (23.4% on both bulletins) while for *ITV* it made up 6.3%. The *BBC News* and *Sky News* reported a broadly similar volume of coverage about social affairs and human rights (17.1% and 20.9% respectively) while for *Newsnight* this topic made up its largest category of international news at 42.6%.

Finally, international politics made up 8.7% of international news airtime on the *BBC News at Ten*, whereas it was double that on *Channel 4* at 16.7% and three times more on *ITV News at Ten* at 25.9% (see Table 6.0). *BBC News* spent twice as much time as *Sky News* – 11.4% compared to 6.4% - covering international politics. Much of the focus across all television news programmes related to US politics or, more specifically, Donald Trump and the latest updates from the White House. On *Newsnight*, in contrast, there was a lengthy interview with a Chinese ambassador which focused on an array of international political topics.

All interviewees acknowledged the difficulty in covering parts of the world not just because of the heavy resources involved in reporting but in selecting stories relevant to UK audiences. As *Channel 4's* Head of News and Current Affairs put it:

it's really important to us that we cover international news, such as Hong Kong, that people have to know, but we're aware that parts of the world disappear. Every now and again over the years I've drawn a map of the world, according to how it's perceived on TV... Britain's huge and then actually Europe is currently quite big but for many years Europe hardly existed, and then there was the Middle East, and Africa hardly existed, China existed but was only very small, and then Washington was huge but the rest of America was tiny. Donald Trump has been a challenge because almost every day he says something extraordinary that you have to report; you're not reporting the lives of people in the rest of the United States, so they can tend to disappear. Brexit and Trump are skewing news, but it's very important for us to really go and understand what's really happening in Greece. I think our viewers expect us to go into more depth and to tell them about lives and politics in other European countries in a way that they wouldn't expect so much from a half an hour bulletin on the BBC or ITV. I'm not saying that they don't do that. Again it's a balance of what seems to us obviously important internationally.

The BBC's Editor of Six and Ten television news explained how he ensured his bulletins covered a diverse range of international news stories:

As an editor, I look across the year, and this is something you have to do in real-time as well as then review quarterly, and at the end of the year, in terms of that spread of stories, places and issues that we should be covering... We do a daily / weekly / monthly log which, as well as logging diversity questions and issues, also logs domestic versus global stories and also, within the UK, logs where we're telling stories from.

Overall, in discussing the selection of international news topics interviewees revealed the tension between, on the one hand, having the resources to immediately respond to events around the world and, on the other hand, forward planning coverage so major issues would be covered. The financial constraints of reporting beyond the UK along with the editorial drive to cover different parts of the world clearly inform the selection of international news topics.

6.2 Radio

As Table 6.1 shows, war and conflict accounted for roughly a quarter to a third of coverage on *Today* and *World at One* (24.9% and 31.9% respectively). Once again, the escalating tensions between the US and Iran, alongside the internal troubles in Sudan, dominated the international news agenda on both programmes. BBC Radio 5 Live *Breakfast* and *Newsbeat* both spent more time reporting celebrity and entertainment than war and conflict, making up over a quarter of airtime on both stations. So, for example, Radio 5 Live *Breakfast* featured a lengthy interview with a screenwriter of 'Tory Story 4' (21 June 2019), while two of *Newsbeat*'s celebrity/entertainment stories included news about Jay-Z becoming a billionaire and Katy Perry's new single (both on 4 June 2019).

Table 6.1: The percentage of international topics covered in all radio news items (by time; N in brackets)

	BBC Radio 4 <i>Today</i>	BBC Radio 4 <i>World at One</i>	BBC Radio 5 <i>Live Breakfast</i>	BBC Radio 1 <i>Newsbeat</i>	Heart	Capital	talkRADIO	LBC	Total
War/conflict	24.9% (15)	31.9% (12)	/	14.0% (2)	11.9% (1)	/	32.1% (3)	36.1% (4)	22.8%
Crime/prisons	1.2% (2)	3.2% (2)	/	/	/	/	7.1% (1)	/	1.6%
legal/judiciary	/	/	44.7% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	1.3%
Social affairs/human rights	17.9% (9)	11.4% (5)	/	8.5% (2)	/	/	/	/	11.5% (16)
Immigration and diversity	3.9% (2)	/	5.5% (1)	7.9% (1)	/	/	/	/	2.5% (4)
Economy/business	0.9% (1)	2.6% (4)	23% (5)	/	/	/	5.4% (1)	8.4% (1)	11.5%
Financial sector	/	4.0% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	/	1.4%
Environment/energy	4.0% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	1.4%
Climate change	0.9% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	0.3%
Technology	/	/	/	29.7% (5)	/	/	7.1% (1)	/	3.5%
Transport/travel	/	0.2 % (1)	/	/	/	/	/	/	0.1%
Healthcare/NHS	1.2% (2)	4.6% (3)	/	/	/	/	/	/	2.0%
Media	8.8% (2)	/	/	9.7% (1)	/	/	/	/	4.3%
Celebrity/entertainment	1.3% (2)	3.3% (1)	26.7% (1)	25.7% (5)	66.7% (5)	22.6% (1)	/	/	5.8%
Accidents/tragedies	4.7% (3)	1.0% (2)	/	4.2% (2)	21.4% (1)	45.2% (1)	19.1% (2)	6.8% (1)	2.9%
Art/history/heritage	/	9.2% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	/	3.2%
International politics	22.6% (9)	14.4% (4)	/	/	/	32.3(1)	29.1% (2)	48.7% (4)	14.2%
Weather	0.3 % (1)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	0.1%
Other	7.3% (5)	16.8% (7)	/	0.4% (1)	/	/	/	/	8.6%
Total	100% (56)	100% (45)	100% (8)	100% (19)	100% (7)	100% (3)	100% (10)	100%	100%

Capital spent a similar level of time covering celebrity and entertainment stories (22.6%) whereas Heart spent more than two-thirds of its airtime focused on these topics (see Table 6.1). TalkRADIO and LBC both had a similar international agenda as other TV and Radio 4 outlets, with war and conflict and international politics making up the lion's share of their airtime.

6.3 Online news

With the exception of the Mirror, BuzzFeed and the Huffington Post, war and conflict made up roughly 20% to 30% of all online international news coverage (see Table 6.2). For the BBC it accounted for 28.6% of topics, with US and Iran the central focus. As with TV and radio, social affairs and human rights, which was primarily coverage of the Hong Kong protests, constituted the next biggest category of international news for the BBC, the Guardian and the Telegraph. The Daily Mail, the Sun, the Mirror and BuzzFeed had a greater focus on celebrity and entertainment topics than the BBC's 7.1% of total international coverage, at 21.4%, 15.4%, 21.7% and 14.3% respectively.

Table 6.2: The percentage of type of news topics covered in all international news items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News homepage	The Guardian	The Daily Mail	The Telegraph	The Sun	The Mirror	BuzzFeed	Huffington Post	Total
War/conflict	28.6% (4)	29.6% (8)	21.4% (3)	27.8% (5)	30.8% (4)	17.4% (4)	2.4% (1)	14.3% (1)	19% (30)
Terror/defence/security	/	/	7.1% (1)	/		/	4.8% (2)		1.9% (3)
International politics	7.1% (1)	18.5% (5)	7.1% (1)	5.6% (1)		/	7.1% (3)	57.1% (4)	9.5% (15)
Crime/prisons	7.1% (1)	/	7.1% (1)	/	15.4% (2)	21.7% (5)	16.7% (7)	/	10.1% (16)
Legal/judiciary	/	/	7.1% (1)	/		4.3% (1)	2.4% (1)	/	1.9 (3)
Social affairs/human rights	21.4% (3)	22.2% (6)	/	22.2% (4)	7.7% (1)	4.3% (1)	7.1% (3)	/	11.4% (18)
Immigration and diversity	7.1% (1)	/	14.3% (2)	5.6% (1)	/	/	2.4% (1)	/	3.2% (5)
Transport/travel	/	/	/	/	/	4.3% (1)	2.4% (1)	/	1.3% (2)
Economy/business	/	3.7% (1)	/	5.6% (1)	/	/	/	/	1.3% (2)
Financial sector	/	/	/	11.1% (2)	/	/	/	/	1.3% (2)
Accidents/tragedies	14.3% (2)	3.7% (1)	/	5.6% (1)	15.4% (2)	17.4% (4)	2.4% (1)	28.6% (2)	8.2% (13)
Climate change	/	3.7% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	/	0.6% (1)
Health/NHS	7.1% (1)	3.7% (1)	7.1% (1)	/	/	8.7% (2)	2.4% (1)	/	3.8% (6)
Technology	/	/	7.1% (1)	/	7.7% (1)	/	7.1% (3)	/	3.2% (5)
Media	/	7.4% (2)	/	/	/	/	21.4% (9)	/	7.0% (11)
Celebrity/entertainment	7.1% (1)	3.7% (1)	21.4% (3)	5.6% (1)	15.4% (2)	21.7% (5)	14.3% (6)	/	12.0% (19)
Weather (not forecasts)	/	3.7% (1)	/	/	/	/	4.8% (2)	/	1.9% (3)
Sport	/	/	/	5.6% (1)	/	/	/	/	0.6% (1)
Other	/	/	/	5.6% (1)	7.7% (1)	/	2.4% (1)	/	1.9% (3)
Total	100% (14)	100% (27)	100% (14)	100% (18)	100% (13)	100% (23)	100% (42)	100% (7)	100% (158)

6.4 News apps

Finally, Table 6.3 shows that the international news agenda on news apps was broadly similar to TV and radio, with coverage of war and conflict making up precisely a third of items on the BBC, 29.4% on ITV and 19.2% on Sky News. The social affairs/human rights category – which largely reflected the protests in Hong Kong – accounted for a fifth of BBC News items compared to 17.6% on ITV and 15.4% on Sky News. The Sky News app had about a fifth of its international news about celebrity and entertainment stories, compared to just one item on BBC and none on ITV.

Table 6.3: The type of news topics covered in all international news items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News app	ITV News app	Sky News app	Total
Brexit	/	5.9% (1)	/	1.7% (1)
Terror/defence/security	/	5.9% (1)	7.7% (2)	5.2% (3)
International politics	6.7% (1)	5.9% (1)	7.7% (2)	6.9% (4)
War/conflict	33.3% (5)	29.4% (5)	19.2% (5)	25.9% (15)
Crime/prisons	6.7% (1)	/	11.5% (3)	6.9% (4)
Social affairs/human rights	20.0% (3)	17.6% (3)	15.4% (4)	17.2% (10)
Immigration and diversity	6.7% (1)	5.9% (1)	/	3.4% (2)
Economy/business	/	/	3.8% (1)	1.7% (1)
Accidents/tragedies	13.3% (1)	17.6% (3)	7.7% (2)	12.1% (7)
Health/NHS	6.7% (1)	5.9% (1)	/	3.4% (2)
Technology	/	5.9% (1)	7.7% (2)	5.2% (3)
Celebrity/entertainment	6.7% (1)	/	19.2% (5)	10.3% (6)
Total	100% (15)	100% (17)	100% (26)	100% (58)

7.0 Current affairs

In total, we examined 139 current affairs programmes from 25 June 2018 to 21 June 2019. This included the BBC's flagship current affairs programme, *Panorama*, as well as its longstanding Radio 4 show, *Analysis*. We also examined ITV's *Tonight* and Channel 4's *Dispatches*. Our aim was to quantify the main theme of each programme in order to paint a broad picture about which topics were addressed over the course of one year. We included *Analysis* to represent a flagship BBC Radio 4 current affairs programme, although the format and style of its journalism is different from other television programmes in the sample.

Our analysis assessed how many programmes were UK-specific or international in scope over the 12-month period. Since some programmes were broadcast more frequently than others (*Panorama*, for example, broadcast 42 episodes, whereas *Analysis* broadcast 28 episodes), the range of topics covered by each programme should be viewed in this light.

We also carried out an analysis of all programmes about UK health and education in order to consider how well they signposted the relevance of these topics for audiences across the devolved nations of the UK. This sample consisted of 35 current affairs episodes across the four programmes, with five about education and 30 about health. When an episode did provide some signposting about whether health and education policy was relevant to a particular nation, we considered how clearly this was communicated to the audience.

7.1 An analysis of topics over one year

Table 7.0 shows the proportion of topics covered over 12 months on the four programmes we examined. While some programmes reflected a current event, such as *Panorama*'s 'Inside No. 10: Deal or No Deal?', which explored the latest Brexit negotiations, others were based on longer-term investigations, including *Dispatches*' analysis of housing in the UK, 'New Landlords From Hell'.

Taken together, health and crime were the most-examined topics, although there were some variations. On *Panorama*, for example, a third of the programmes (33.3%) focused on health or NHS events or issues, while on *Tonight* the figure was 28.9%. *Tonight* also had the largest focus on the UK economy and environmental issues. *Dispatches* featured health and crime in equal proportion (14.8%), with housing its most prominent theme, including episodes about the Grenfell Tower, property costs and homelessness. After health, crime was the most dominant topic on *Tonight*. *Panorama*, *Tonight* and *Dispatches* all tackled crime from a range of UK perspectives (rising knife crime, drugs and violence), whereas *Analysis* focused on more international issues.

Table 7.0: Main theme of current affairs programme: June 2018 - June 2019 (by frequency percentage; N in brackets)

	BBC <i>Panorama</i>	BBC <i>Analysis</i>	ITV <i>Tonight</i>	Channel 4 <i>Dispatches</i>	Total
Overall proportion of international news	11.9% (5)	50.0% (16)	2.6% (1)	14.8% (4)	18.7% (26)
UK politics	/	12.5% (4)	2.6% (1)	/	3.6% (5)
Brexit	4.8% (2)	3.1% (1)	5.2% (2)	3.7% (1)	4.3% (6)
UK terror/defence/security	/	/	2.6% (1)	3.7% (1)	1.4% (2)
Crime	11.9% (5)	/	13.2% (5)	14.8% (4)	10.1% (14)
Social affairs/human rights	/	3.1% (1)	5.3% (2)	7.4% (2)	3.6% (5)
Welfare/benefits system	2.4% (1)	3.1% (1)	2.6% (1)	3.7% (1)	2.9% (4)
Immigration and diversity	/	/	2.6% (1)	3.7% (1)	1.4% (2)
Housing	4.8% (2)	/	2.6% (1)	18.5% (5)	5.8% (8)
Education	4.8% (2)	6.3% (2)	/	3.7% (1)	3.6% (5)
Transport/travel	4.8% (2)	3.1% (1)	5.3% (2)	3.7% (1)	4.3% (6)
Health/NHS	33.3% (14)	6.3% (2)	28.9% (11)	11.1% (3)	21.6% (30)
Economy	2.4% (1)	6.3% (2)	13.2% (5)	7.4% (2)	7.2% (10)
Business	7.1% (3)	/	/	/	2.2% (3)
Environment/energy/climate change	2.4% (1)	3.1% (1)	7.9% (3)	/	3.6% (5)
Technology	4.8% (2)	/	/	/	1.4% (2)
Celebrity/entertainment/media	2.4% (1)	3.1% (1)	2.6% (1)	3.7% (1)	2.9% (4)
Religion	2.4% (1)	/	/	/	0.7% (1)
Royalty	/	/	2.6% (1)	/	0.7% (1)
Total	100% (42)	100% (32)	100% (38)	100% (27)	100% (139)

Analysis was by far the most internationally-focused current affairs programme; half of its agenda dealt with topics beyond the UK. In contrast, five *Panorama* programmes (11.9%) were international in scope, with two of these centred on Donald Trump and US politics. The other three programmes related to exploring international politics in Russia/Ukraine, Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, *Dispatches* featured four episodes, a 14.8% share of its current affairs topics, addressing issues in North Korea and Yemen, as well as broader topics about the global rise of social media and the international price of milk. *Tonight* dealt with one international topic about US politics entitled ‘Trump & Britain: love or loathing?’

Overall, our findings established some clear differences in national and international focus across the four current affairs programmes. While *Tonight* overwhelmingly focused on domestic issues, *Dispatches* and *Panorama* featured an international topic in roughly one in

every seven to eight programmes respectively. Half of the *Analysis* programmes, in contrast, focused on international topics, with the large majority of these episodes addressing global issues rather than being tied to a particular country or countries. So, for example, it ran programmes entitled ‘Will humans survive the century?’ and ‘Are we heading for a mass extinction?’, which provided viewers with a distinctive agenda of issues that explored global issues, albeit largely from a Western perspective.

7.2 UK Health and education

With the exception of BBC *Analysis*, current affairs programming was overwhelmingly focused on UK issues in the one-year study, with health and education the most prominent topics. We decided therefore to look more closely at episodes specifically about health and education in order to consider how well they signposted the relevance of these topics for audiences in the devolved nations of the UK.

Since 1999 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have had devolved responsibility for health and education, and each has pursued different policy strategies compared to England. However, public knowledge about devolved responsibilities remains low in the devolved nations. In order to compare the degree of context and background in current affairs output, we analysed the extent to which broadcasters explained the geographic relevance of policy issues to audiences across the UK. We examined, in short, how much devolved signposting was provided in each episode, and the clarity of any references to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

As Table 7.1 shows, the sample consisted of 35 current affairs episodes across the four programmes, with five about education and 30 about health, which included topics about social care. All health and education episodes which were international in scope and not substantively about the UK were excluded from the sample, since *Analysis* and *Dispatches* featured only four episodes each about either education or health. *Panorama* and *Tonight* together made up more than two-thirds of the sample.

Table 7.1 Sample of current affairs programmes about health or education (by frequency percentage; N in brackets).

	Education	Health/social care	Total
<i>Panorama</i>	12.5% (2)	87.5% (14)	100% (16)
<i>Dispatches</i>	25% (1)	75% (3)	100% (4)
<i>Tonight</i>	/	100% (11)	100% (11)
<i>Analysis</i>	50.0% (2)	50.0% (2)	100% (4)
Total	14.3% (5)	85.7% (30)	100% (35)

Devolution signposting

We began by examining whether an episode in a current affairs programme about health or education provided *some degree of devolved signposting*. We assessed this by seeing whether an episode - either in the opening credits or in the first five minutes of the programme - conveyed any geographic reference to either England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. In doing so, it would, at the very least, *signal* that there were potential policy differences between the nations. If an episode did *not* contain any references to a geographic location or referred to the UK generally, this was classified as containing no devolved signposting.

In total, 60% of the sample (21 programmes out of 35) did not include any devolved signposting, either in the opening credits or in the first five minutes of an episode (see Table 7.2). The proportion of episodes that did do this was far higher on the BBC (half on *Analysis* and 56.3% on *Panorama*) than the 25% on ITV's *Dispatches* and 9.1% on *Tonight*.

Table 7.2: The degree of devolved signposting in current affairs programming (by frequency percentage; N in brackets)

	No signposting	Signposting in opening credits	Signposting in first 5 mins	Signposting in both opening credits and first 5 mins	Total
<i>Panorama</i>	43.7% (7)	12.5 % (2)	37.5 % (6)	6.2 % (1)	100% (16)
<i>Dispatches</i>	75.0% (3)	25.0% (1)	/	/	100% (4)
<i>Tonight</i>	81.8% (9)	9.1 % (1)	/	9.1 (1)	100% (11)
<i>Analysis</i>	50.0% (2)	/	25.0% (1)	25.0% (1)	100% (4)
Total	60.0% (21)	11.4% (4)	20.0% (7)	8.6% (3)	100% (35)

Table 7.3 lists the 21 episodes that did not contain any devolved signposting. As the titles of the programmes suggest, many episodes were covered from a UK-wide perspective, which were broad in scope, such as exploring healthcare research. So, for example, in an *Analysis* episode entitled 'The Replication crisis' the focus was on psychological research, while another entitled 'Do children of married parents do better?' had a comparative focus on the UK and US.

Table 7.3: List of current affairs programming with no devolved signposting

Programme	Date	Topic	Title of episode
Panorama	16.07.18	Health/social care	Fighting for my child
Panorama	30.07.18	Health/social care	Get rich or die young
Panorama	06.08.18	Health/social care	Online doctors uncovered
Panorama	13.08.18	Health/social care	Doctors on trial
Panorama	26.11.18	Health/social care	The Great Implant Scandal
Panorama	21.01.19	Health/social care	Killed in Hospital
Panorama	01.05.19	Health/social care	GPs: Why Can't I Get an Appointment?
Dispatches	30.07.18	Health/social care	Breastfeeding Uncovered
Dispatches	10.06.19	Health/social care	Britain's Toxic Air Scandal
Dispatches	17.06.19	Health/social care	How Safe Are Your Medicines?
Tonight	13.09.18	Health/social care	Fighting Fat: Back to Basics
Tonight	25.10.18	Health/social care	What's In Our Meat?
Tonight	01.11.18	Health/social care	Frontline Care: Saving The NHS?
Tonight	29.11.18	Health/social care	Food Allergies: What's Really In Your Food?
Tonight	03.01.19	Health/social care	Losing Weight: Six Months to Save a Life
Tonight	10.01.19	Health/social care	Losing Weight: Six Months To Save A Life (Part 2)
Tonight	24.01.19	Health/social care	Food Challenge: Meat vs Vegan
Tonight	31.01.19	Health/social care	What is stress doing to your body?
Tonight	28.02.19	Health/social care	Back Pain: Britain's Unseen Crisis?
Analysis	11.11.18	Health/social care	The Replication Crisis
Analysis	02.02.19	Education	Do children of married parents do better?

However, there were episodes across the four programmes that *could* have included some devolved signposting, given the subject matter and the potential differences in policy-making across each nation. A *Dispatches* programme entitled 'How safe are your medicines?', for example, was an investigative episode exploring unsafe/falsified medicines supplied to the NHS. Since the supply of medicines is a devolved responsibility, the episode could have compared and contrasted the NHS strategies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In an ITV *Tonight* episode entitled 'Food Allergies: What's Really in Your Food?' there was also an opportunity to consider the devolved consequences of food standards. While food labelling is regulated largely by EU law¹¹, there is also devolved regulation, such as the Food

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/food-labelling-changes-after-brexid>

Hygiene Rating (Wales) Act 2013¹². Viewed from this perspective, a comparison of how the devolved nations ensure high quality food standards may have been relevant to the *Tonight* episode.

Tonight featured a two-part programme entitled ‘Losing Weight: Six Months to save a Life’, which was largely the personal perspectives of three people fighting obesity. Since the nations in the UK have different NHS strategies to deal with obesity, some devolved signposting may have been relevant. Similarly, in the episodes entitled ‘Killed in hospital’ on *Panorama* and ‘Frontline Care: Saving the NHS’ on *Tonight*, although both programmes largely focused on England, there was no reference to NHS England or to the devolved NHS bodies in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Overall, given the amount of general UK topics covered by current affairs programming over the year, including devolved signposting would not have been appropriate for *every* episode. However, it was striking that in a large proportion of episodes (50% for *Analysis*, 42.5% for *Panorama*, 75% for *Dispatches* and 90.9% for *Tonight*) there was *no reference to any devolved powers* about health and education, despite England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland having increasingly different NHS, school and university systems, as well as contrasting outcomes in patient care and pupil and student performance. Devolved signposting was more consistently present on BBC current affairs programming than on Channel Four or ITV.

The clarity of devolved signposting

Of the 14 programmes which provided some devolved signposting, four communicated this in the opening credits only and seven in the first five minutes of the episode. Three signposted the devolved nation in both the opening credits and in the first five minutes of the programme. All signposting was communicated by the presenter, not an external source (in one episode of *Dispatches*, the Children’s Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, was the presenter and so was not considered an external source). Her own introduction at the beginning of the programme, as the Children’s Commissioner for England, was the only implicit reference to devolved powers about education (a point we develop below).

Table 7.4 shows that England was by far the nation most frequently signposted, both in the opening credits - six times overall and at least once per programme – and in the first five minutes (eight times). Scotland was signposted once in the opening credits and in the first five minutes in of a *Panorama* episode entitled ‘These Pills Could Kill You’. Finally, England and Wales were signposted together in the first five minutes of the *Panorama* programme entitled ‘Trans Kids: Why Medicine Matters’. Given the relatively few episodes isolated for devolved signposting, it would not be appropriate to draw broad conclusions about the findings. That said, in two *Tonight* episodes and one *Dispatches* programme limited signposting was supplied in the opening credits on health topics, while *Analysis* did this clearly in one of the two programmes we examined. Six of the nine *Panorama* episodes,

¹² <https://law.gov.wales/environment/food/what-is-devolved-food/?lang=en#/environment/food/what-is-devolved-food/?tab=overview&lang=en>

however, did not supply any reference to devolved powers in the opening credits of programmes about either health or education.

Table 7.4: The presence of devolved signposting and references to specific nations in current affairs programming (by frequency percentage; N in brackets)

Programme	Date	Topic	Title of episode	Signposting in credits	Signposting in first 5 mins	Signposting in both credits and first 5 mins
Panorama	10.09.18	Education	Profits before Pupils? The Academies Scandal	/	England	
Panorama	24.09.18	Health/social care	Kids in Crisis	/	England	
Panorama	25.02.19	Health/social care	Trans Kids: Why Medicine Matters	/	England & Wales	
Panorama	04.03.19	Health/social care	These Pills Could Kill You	Scotland	Scotland	Scotland
Panorama	25.03.19	Education	The Academy Schools Scandal	England	/	
Panorama	22.05.19	Health/social care	Undercover Hospital Abuse Scandal	/	England	
Panorama	29.05.19	Health/Social care	Crisis in Care - Part 1: Who Cares?	/	England	
Panorama	05.06.19	Health/social care	Crisis in Care - Part 2: Who Pays?	/	England	
Panorama	10.06.19	Health/social care	Britain's Drink Problem	England	/	
Dispatches	04.02.19	Education	Skipping School: Britain's Invisible Kids	England	/	
Tonight	20.09.18	Health/social care	Britain's silent epidemic: the growing addiction to prescription painkillers	England	/	
Tonight	02.05.19	Health/social care	Is violence and aggression towards NHS and frontline staff getting worse?	England	England	England
Analysis	23.07.18	Health/social care	What's Fair?	/	England	
Analysis	22.10.18	Education	The Pupil Premium	England	England	England

Looking more closely at the clarity of devolved signposting, we classified whether it was implicitly or explicitly communicated in the opening credits or in the first five minutes of the programme. By implicit, we refer to items where a nation is referenced – “in England” or “NHS England” – but with no further context or background about the devolved relevance of the story or issue. By explicit, we refer to items where one or more nations are referenced so the devolved relevance is more clearly communicated.

Table 7.5: The proportion of implicit and explicit references to devolution in current affairs programmes (by frequency percentage; N in brackets)

	Implicit	Explicit	Total
<i>Panorama</i>	100% (10)	/	100% (10)
<i>Analysis</i>	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)	100% (3)
<i>Dispatches</i>	100% (1)	/	100% (1)
<i>Tonight</i>	100% (3)	/	100% (3)
Total	88.2% (15)	11.8% (2)	100% (17)

As Table 7.5 shows, *Panorama* provided the most implicit references to devolved powers – ten in total – compared to three on *Tonight*. *Dispatches* and *Analysis* each supplied one. In a two-part *Panorama* episode entitled ‘Crisis in Care’, for example, in England is mentioned in the first few minutes of both programmes.

Reporter: I’ve come to Somerset because of the growing demand for social care here. Each year, local authorities *in England* spend nearly £15bn on providing people with day-to-day support. More than half of that is spent on younger adults living with complex conditions.

(*Panorama*, 29 May 2019)

Reporter: *In England*, you only get council funding if you have less than £23,250 in savings or assets. When you’re in residential care, your home is included in the calculations.

(*Panorama* 5 June 2019)

In both cases there was a *degree of devolved signposting*, since the reporter distinguished between the nations. However, these differences – or their implications – were not clearly spelt out.

Similarly, on *Tonight* a programme called ‘Britain’s silent epidemic: the growing addiction to prescription painkillers’ began by referencing England in the introduction:

Reporter: Just what is it with Britain and painkillers? Studies suggest we’re among the biggest consumers of opioids in Europe, with doctors prescribing them *in England*

alone at a rate of 2,700 per hour. With record numbers being treated for addiction to these drugs, experts are warning of a public health crisis and are now urging a radical re-think of how we manage pain.

(*Tonight*, 20 September 2018)

However, five minutes into the programme the reporter referenced “in Britain” when exploring the rise of prescription painkillers. The conflation of England and Britain, in this context, meant that the different approaches to tackling this issue in the devolved nations was not explored. Moreover, England was used to represent Britain when there might have been a different picture about the (mis)use of painkillers in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

A *Dispatches* episode also made it difficult to interpret the devolved relevance of a social issue policy when examining home education in the UK. In an episode entitled ‘Skipping School: Britain's Invisible Kids’, the only devolved signposting was in the opening credits of the programme which began: “My name is Anne Longfield and I’m the Children’s Commissioner for England”. Within the first five minutes it was also stated by the reporter that:

In Germany home education is outlawed. But in the UK all you need to do to teach your child at home is to write a letter informing the school of your decision, and then you’re free to educate however you like.

(*Dispatches*, 4 February 2019)

However, this did not explain the rules on home schooling, either from a UK perspective or for those in the devolved nations. There does not appear, for instance, to be any requirement to notify a school in England about educating a child at home. The Department for Education guidelines read: “If your child has never been enrolled at a school, you are under no legal obligation to inform the local authority that he or she is being home educated, or gain consent for this.” Further, it states “If your child is currently on the roll of a school you are not obliged to inform the school that he or she is being withdrawn for home education or gain consent for this”.¹³ Since education is devolved, there are different systems in place to monitor home education. In Scotland, for example, a local council can issue what is known as an ‘attendance order’ if it believes a child is not being taught to a high enough standard after a visit to a family home.¹⁴

Only two programmes in the sample – both from *Analysis* – provided more explicit signposting of the devolved powers. So, for example, an episode entitled ‘Pupil Premium’ began:

Reporter: “A bold vision to address growing inequality of opportunity by targeting children in poverty. The pupil premium was set up to close the gap in achievement between rich and poor children by giving extra money to *English schools*...

¹³ Both quotes taken from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791528/EHE_guidance_for_parentsafterconsultationv2.2.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.mygov.scot/home-schooling/>

A few minutes later the reporter then said:

“The principle that disadvantaged children need more money for their education has become generally accepted across all parties. It is this that gave birth to the pupil premium idea in England. *Similar schemes also operate in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland...* Last year in English schools, 71% of pupils overall achieved a good pass for English and Maths GCSE compared to just 44% for those on pupil premium.”

(*Analysis*, 22 October 2018)

While the focus of the programme was about an English school policy – the pupil premium – the reporter explicitly referenced the devolved nations, which have different systems. Of course, while these ‘similar’ schemes could have been explored further, the signposting did acknowledge audiences beyond England.

In another *Analysis* programme entitled ‘What’s Fair’ the issue of social care was examined in detail. Although Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were not mentioned by name, the reporter did explicitly spell out that social care was different across the nations.

We Brits care a lot about fairness. That I think is why we love the NHS so much... But when it comes to social care - the NHS sister service - we seem rather less sure. *In fact, we do things quite differently on social care in the different nations of the UK.* We have no legacy to hold on to. In the 70 years since the NHS was created, we suffered a kind of policy paralysis in *England* leading to genuine misery and suffering. In the last two decades, politicians have commissioned report after report, they've bickered, they even legislated. But *in England* they've implemented nothing... because the one thing everyone seem to agree on is that social care in England is broken.

(*Analysis*, 23 July 2018)

Although *Analysis* signalled the devolved relevance of social care, the programme did not take up the opportunity to compare the ways in which Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland implement provision.

Overall, 60% of current affairs programmes about UK health and education did *not* include any devolved signposting, either in the opening credits or in the first five minutes of the episode. BBC programmes, however, more regularly included a devolved reference within an episode. So, for example, devolved signposting was present in half of *Analysis* programmes and 56.3% of *Panorama* episodes, compared to a quarter on Channel 4's *Dispatches* and less than one in ten on ITV's *Tonight*. While many of the topics explored health and education from a general UK perspective, we identified a number of episodes that could have been relevant to devolution.

England was by far the most referenced nation, with *Panorama* mentioning Scotland, and England and Wales, once. Of the 14 programmes which provided some devolved signposting, four communicated this in the opening credits only, seven in the first five minutes of the episode only, while three signposted the devolved nation in both the opening credits and in the first five minutes of the programme. There was some limited signposting in the opening

introduction to *Analysis*, *Dispatches* and *Tonight*, but none in six of the nine *Panorama* episodes. *Panorama* also relied entirely on implicit references to the devolved nations – as did *Tonight* and *Dispatches* – with only the BBC’s *Analysis* making explicit references to the devolved nations’ powers.

We develop our analysis of UK news about social policy in Case Study 3 by examining how clearly the devolved relevance of health and education was signposted across all news outlets in the main three-week study.

8.0 Hyperlinks

As part of our analysis of online news and news apps, we examined the extent to which media organisations used hyperlinks in their coverage. We looked at how often they linked to their own internal sources or to external sources, while assessing the type of hyperlink (e.g. to news reporting, analysis pieces, social media platforms etc.) and the source of any third-party material referenced.

In response to a question about balancing the proportion of internal and external hyperlinks in everyday news output, the BBC's Online Editor stated:

every week we drive hundreds and thousands of page views to external publishers, which we think it's a good thing for us to do. We publish on the website the bit where we talk about, we strive to credit sources and things like that. We link to the original source, wherever possible. We also do specific things every day to drive links externally, so we do a paper review, and that also includes other non-paper websites as well. And, even if they are reporting on the story we'd covered the day before, we won't link to our version of the story, we'll link to their version of the story, deliberately. We've also got this daily email which is largely internal links, but we have a section in it, deliberately, which is the best of the web type stuff, deliberately pointing to four other things we've seen elsewhere that we think people might be interested in... I'm sure there are probably some cases where we wouldn't feel it was editorially appropriate to link to someone, because they might not have the same editorial standards as us, or sometimes we don't link to people because there would be offensive content. Broadly, I think we try to recognise the value, digitally, of linking to the original sources and providing that to audiences, wherever possible... on our local and regional pages that there are specific modules we've got as well that point people to regional and national newspapers... That's a module again we think is important to have to drive to external publishers.

Our focus on sourcing and attribution is particularly significant for the BBC, as Ofcom's operating licence states that BBC Online must "ensure that it provides adequate links to material provided by third parties."¹⁵ In the light of this regulatory condition, we asked how often BBC News Online linked to third-party material, compared to its competitors, and when it does, which external sources does it draw on?

8.1 The role of internal and external hyperlinks

The first part of our analysis drew on 825 items from the three-week sample (3 to 21 June 2019). This included the homepages of the BBC News, the Daily Mail, the Sun, the Guardian, BuzzFeed, the Huffington Post, the Mirror and the Telegraph, as well as the BBC,

¹⁵ Operating Licence for the BBC's Public Services, regulatory condition 2.17.
https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/107072/bbc-operating-licence.pdf

ITV and Sky News apps. Since our analysis focused on the top five topics per day, overall the sample of online/news apps was 825 items (75 per news organisation). While this cannot represent all the news output delivered by each news site per day, focusing on the top five topics gives us an insight into whether the sites provided hyperlinks in their most significant stories. We acknowledge that in covering major stories during the sample period news organisations may have provided several items on each topic; this would not have been part of our analysis. Our study, in this sense, should be seen as exploratory, raising questions that require more systematic research using a larger sample of online media. Although still exploratory, given the focus of our work, we undertook a more detailed analysis of the BBC's online news provision in the second part of our analysis of hyperlinks. Throughout, we only examined hyperlinks that appeared within the text of the particular item and not those that might be listed at the bottom of the page, since these can often be tangential to the focus of the item.

Tables 8.0 and 8.1 show how widespread hyperlinking has become in the UK's leading news media. For online news, the BBC included the highest proportion of items with a hyperlink, at 97.3%, with the Guardian at 96.0%, the Mirror at 92.0% and the Telegraph at 90.7%. The Daily Mail contained the lowest proportion of hyperlinks; 66.7% of its online output contained a link, while the Huffington Post and the Sun came in at 74.7% and 76.0% respectively. For the news apps, ITV had the highest proportion of items with a hyperlink (97.3%) with BBC News at 90.7% and Sky News at 81.3% (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.0: Proportion of top five online topics that include a hyperlink in item (by percentage; N in brackets)

	Yes	No	Total
BBC News	97.3% (73)	2.7% (2)	100% (75)
The Daily Mail	66.7% (50)	33.3% (25)	100% (75)
The Sun	76.0% (57)	24.0% (18)	100% (75)
The Guardian	96.0% (72)	4.0% (3)	100% (75)
BuzzFeed	85.3% (64)	14.7% (11)	100% (75)
Huffington Post	74.7% (56)	25.3% (19)	100% (75)
The Mirror	92.0% (69)	8.0% (6)	100% (75)
The Telegraph	90.7% (68)	9.3% (7)	100% (75)
Total	84.8% (509)	15.2% (91)	100% (600)

Table 8.1: Proportion of top five news app topics that include a hyperlink in item (by percentage; N in brackets)

	Yes	No	Total
BBC News	90.7% (68)	9.3% (7)	100% (75)
ITV News	97.3% (73)	2.7% (2)	100% (75)
Sky News	81.3% (61)	18.7% (14)	100% (75)
Total	89.8% (202)	10.2% (23)	100% (225)

Looking at the 711 items that included a hyperlink, we examined whether the source was internal or external to the news organisation. After all, this can indicate whether the major UK news sites were using their platform and reach to national audiences to link to other regional or local news sites, or were seeking to be transparent about specific information sources that informed a particular issue or event.

Table 8.2 reveals a mixed picture about the extent to which UK sites are linking to third-party material. In hyperlinks featured in digital native media outlets – the Huffington Post and, strikingly, BuzzFeed, 52.9% and 73.1% respectively were external sources of information. In contrast, hyperlinks on BBC News Online were overwhelmingly dominated by internal sources, with 84.8% connecting to the site’s own online material

Table 8.2: Proportion of online items including an internal or external hyperlink (by percentage; N in brackets)

	Internal	External	Total
BBC News	84.8% (312)	15.2% (56)	100% (368)
The Daily Mail	83.7% (169)	16.3% (33)	100% (202)
The Sun	88.8% (285)	11.2% (36)	100% (321)
The Guardian	80.9% (288)	19.1% (68)	100% (356)
BuzzFeed	26.9% (83)	73.1% (225)	100% (308)
Huffington Post	47.1% (122)	52.9% (137)	100% (259)
The Mirror	84.2% (229)	15.8% (43)	100% (272)
The Telegraph	75.6% (235)	24.4% (76)	100% (311)
Total	71.9% (1723)	28.1% (674)	100% (2397)

The BBC was not alone in relying largely on internal hyperlinks. With the exception of the Telegraph, where a quarter of hyperlinks were external, the hyperlinks on the websites of the other newspapers in the sample – the Daily Mail, the Sun, the Guardian and the Mirror – were between 80.9 and 88.8% of internal sources.

The reliance of the broadcasters on internal hyperlinks was also evident in our analysis of news apps. While 12.8% of ITV’s hyperlinks were external, on BBC and Sky News the proportions were 16.9% and 21.7% respectively.

Table 8.3: Proportion of news app items that include an internal or external hyperlink (by percentage; N in brackets)

	Internal	External	Total
BBC News	83.1% (294)	16.9% (60)	100% (354)
ITV News	87.2% (251)	12.8% (37)	100% (288)
Sky News	78.3% (423)	21.7% (117)	100% (540)
Total	81.9% (968)	18.1% (214)	100% (1182)

Overall, our findings indicate that the BBC, along with most other legacy media outlets, relies heavily on internal rather than external sources to inform its online news reporting. Under the terms of its operating licence, the BBC must provide adequate links to third-party online material, particularly within its news stories. Such links help provide its users with a

wealth of information and can support the industry more generally. However, in doing so, the BBC “should exercise careful judgment about the links it offers”.¹⁶ The BBC, therefore has to consider the editorial justification for providing a link to an external source.

Of the 884 external links in the sample, we examined the source of each to establish the range of third-party material that was being linked to by the different online outlets. As Table 8.4 shows, Twitter was the dominant source, representing 88.2% of external hyperlinks in the Telegraph, 75.0% in the Sun and 62.8% in the Huffington Post.

On the BBC site, 41.1% of all its external hyperlinks connected to Twitter, with 19.6% to business organisations, 12.5% to UK newspapers and 10.7% to international media. The Daily Mail and the Mirror relied most heavily on other media for hyperlinks. If we combine links to UK broadcasters, newspapers and online media, as well as international media, these represented 83.8% of external hyperlinks for the Mirror and 84.2% for the Daily Mail. This suggests that the BBC does not send its users to external news organisations to the same extent as several other major UK outlets.

¹⁶ Operating Licence for the BBC’s UK Public Services, paragraph 1.24.4.
https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/107072/bbc-operating-licence.pdf

Table 8.4: Sources of external hyperlinks in online news items (by percentage; N in brackets)

	UK broadcast media	UK newspapers	UK online media	International media	Twitter	Social media (excluding Twitter)	Academic journal	Business/ Organisation	UK legal/political body	International legal/political body	Other	Total
BBC News	/	12.5% (7)	/	10.7% (6)	41.1% (23)	1.8% (1)	7.1% (4)	19.6% (11)	1.8% (1)	3.6% (2)	1.8% (1)	100% (56)
The Daily Mail	/	43.8% (14)	9.4% (3)	31.3% (10)	9.4% (4)	3.1% (1)	/	3.1% (1)	/	/	/	100% (33)
The Sun	/	5.6% (2)	/	16.7% (6)	75.0% (27)	/	/	/	2.8% (1)	/	/	100% (36)
The Guardian	1.5% (1)	5.9% (4)	2.9% (2)	16.2% (11)	26.5% (18)	2.9% (2)	2.9% (2)	32.4% (22)	5.9% (4)	1.5% (1)	1.5% (1)	100% (68)
BuzzFeed	2.2% (5)	9.3% (7)	1.8% (4)	20.9% (47)	39.6% (89)	10.2% (23)	0.9% (2)	8.4% (19)	2.7% (6)	2.2% (5)	1.8% (4)	100% (225)
The Huffington	1.5% (2)	15.3% (21)	4.4% (6)	5.1% (7)	62.8% (86)	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)	6.6% (9)	2.2% (3)	0.7% (1)	/	100% (137)
The Mirror	7.0% (3)	34.9% (15)	7.0% (3)	34.9% (15)	4.7% (2)	2.3% (1)	/	4.7% (2)	/	/	4.7% (2)	100% (43)
The Telegraph	/	2.6% (2)	1.3% (1)	2.6% (2)	88.2% (67)	1.3% (1)	/	3.9% (3)	/	/	/	100% (76)
Total	1.6% (11)	12.8% (86)	2.8% (19)	15.5% (104)	46.8% (316)	4.5% (30)	1.3% (9)	10.0% (67)	2.2% (15)	1.3% (9)	1.2% (8)	100% (674)

Table 8.5: The sources of external hyperlinks in news app items (by percentage; N in brackets)

	UK broadcast media	UK newspapers	UK online media	International media	Twitter	Social media (excluding Twitter)	Academic journal	Business/organisation	UK legal/political body	International legal/political body	Other	Total
BBC News app	/	10.0% (6)	/	10.0% (6)	48.3% (29)	1.7% (1)	6.7% (4)	15.0% (9)	3.3% (2)	3.3% (2)	1.7% (1)	100% (60)
ITV News app	/	2.7% (1)	/	/	91.9% (34)	5.4% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (37)
Sky News app	/	/	/	/	42.7% (50)	4.3% (5)	/	53.0% (62)	/	/	/	100% (117)
Total	/	3.3% (7)	/	2.8% (6)	52.8% (113)	3.7% (8)	1.9% (4)	33.2% (71)	0.9% (2)	0.9% (2)	0.5% (1)	100% (214)

The use of hyperlinks in news apps was broadly similar to online media. Twitter was once again the dominant source, representing 91.9% hyperlinks on ITV, 48.3% on BBC News and 42.7% on Sky News. Unlike ITV or Sky News, The BBC News app had a number of hyperlinks both to UK newspapers and to international media.

We developed our analysis of hyperlinks by examining in more detail the type of external and internal sources that the BBC News Online and news apps drew on, compared to their competitors. After all, hyperlinks can vary in scope from sending users to its own, or third-party, news articles or columnists, or directly to information sources informing the topic, such as government departments, think tanks and academic journals.

As Table 8.4 and 8.5 show, Twitter received by far the most hyperlink traffic from online and news apps. When the types of Twitter sources are broken down, we see (Table 8.6) that the BBC drew most heavily on political sites, with almost a quarter (23.2%) of its hyperlinks leading to politicians or political parties. The BBC drew next most heavily on news articles (16.1% of its external hyperlinks) but less so than many commercial outlets. For example, The Daily Mail and the Mirror's links to external news articles amounted to 60.6% and 76.7% respectively.

Table 8.6: Percentage of source types in external hyperlinks in all online news items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News	The Daily Mail	The Sun	The Guardian	BuzzFeed	The Huffington Post	The Mirror	The Telegraph	Total
Political Twitter account	23.2% (13)	/	44.4% (16)	14.7% (10)	11.1% (25)	20.4% (28)	/	26.3% (20)	16.6% (112)
Journalist Twitter account	8.9% (5)	3.0% (1)	2.8% (1)	2.9% (2)	4.0% (9)	8.0% (11)	/	18.4% (14)	6.4% (43)
Public figure Twitter account	1.8% (1)	/	2.8% (1)	4.4% (3)	7.6% (17)	5.1% (7)	2.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	4.6% (31)
Individual Twitter account	1.8% (1)	6.1% (2)	16.7% (6)	1.5% (1)	15.6% (35)	16.8% (23)	/	9.2% (7)	11.1% (75)
Media Twitter account	1.8% (1)	3.0% (1)	/	1.5% (1)	0.9% (2)	5.1% (7)	/	19.7% (15)	4.0% (27)
Business/ organisation Twitter account	3.6% (2)	/	5.6% (2)	1.5% (1)	1.8% (4)	8.0% (11)	2.3% (1)	13.2% (10)	4.6% (31)
Conventional news reportage	16.1% (9)	60.6% (20)	19.4% (7)	17.6% (12)	29.3% (66)	18.2% (25)	76.7% (33)	3.9% (3)	26.0% (175)
Press release	3.6% (2)	3.0% (1)	/	8.8% (6)	1.3% (3)	0.7% (1)	/	/	1.9% (13)
Business/ organisation website	12.5% (7)	/	2.8% (1)	22.1% (15)	7.1% (16)	2.9% (4)	4.7% (2)	1.3% (1)	6.8% (46)
Columns/feature article	5.4% (3)	15.2% (5)	/	4.4% (3)	4.9% (11)	4.4% (6)	/	/	4.2% (28)
Journal article	7.1% (4)	/	/	2.9% (2)	0.9% (2)	0.7% (1)	/	/	1.3% (9)
Official government document	3.6% (2)	/	2.8% (1)	2.9% (2)	1.8% (4)	2.2% (3)	/	/	1.8% (12)
Other	10.7% (6)	9.1% (3)	2.8% (1)	14.7% (10)	13.8% (31)	7.3% (10)	14.0% (6)	6.6% (5)	10.5% (72)
Total	100% (56)	100% (33)	100% (36)	100% (68)	100% (225)	100% (137)	100% (43)	100% (76)	100% (674)

In terms of news organisations' transparency about the information sources informing their coverage, our analysis suggests that most did not link widely to external organisations or individuals. However, the BBC did stand out by providing hyperlinks to four peer-reviewed journal articles, while commercial media did not rely on any academic sources. The Guardian, BuzzFeed and the BBC linked directly to six, three and two press releases respectively, whereas the other media referenced one or none. By linking directly to press releases, where appropriate and relevant, news organisations could be more transparent about the origins of a news story.

The BBC's News app's use of hyperlinks was in line with its online service (see Table 8.7). While ITV relied heavily on Trump and other politicians' twitter feeds in its hyperlinks, Sky News offered alternative destinations, sending users to a variety of external podcasts for more information, analysis and comment.

Table 8.7: Percentages of category type in external hyperlinks in all news app items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News app	ITV News app	Sky News app	Total
Political Twitter account	31.7% (19)	48.6% (18)	4.3% (5)	19.6% (42)
Journalist Twitter account	5.0% (3)	10.8% (4)	10.3% (12)	8.9% (19)
Public figure Twitter account	1.7% (1)	5.4% (2)	0.9% (1)	1.9% (4)
Individual Twitter account	1.7% (1)	5.4% (2)	6.0% (7)	4.7% (10)
Media Twitter account	5.0% (3)	2.7% (1)	11.1% (13)	7.9% (17)
Business/organisation Twitter account	5.0% (3)	21.6% (8)	10.3% (12)	10.7% (23)
Conventional news reportage	13.3% (8)	/	/	3.7% (8)
Podcast	/	/	52.1% (61)	28.5% (61)
Press release	5.0% (3)	/	/	1.4% (3)
Business/ organisation website	8.3% (5)	/	/	2.3% (5)
Columns/feature article	3.3% (2)	/	/	0.9% (2)
Journal article	6.7% (4)	/	/	1.9% (4)
Official government document	5.0% (3)	/	/	1.4% (3)
Other	8.3% (5)	5.4% (2)	5.1% (6)	6.1% (13)
Total	100% (60)	100% (37)	100% (117)	100% (214)

Finally, we examined the type of internal hyperlinks the BBC and other outlets used in their online coverage. Table 8.8 reveals that more than half the BBC's hyperlinks (55.2%) were to its own news articles (defined here as conventional news reportage), rather than to its analysis pieces, live reporting, columns/feature article, news profile pages or other features. Several other commercial outlets relied to a far greater extent on their own news articles, or to news profiles of individuals and organisations. Compared to other news providers, the BBC connected far more often to what can be described as 'explainer' items, with more than one in five (20.2%) of its internal hyperlinks used to provide context to specific events or issues. With the exception of BuzzFeed, the BBC also provided the most hyperlinks to analysis or features items, which between them made up 16.6% of its internal sources.

The BBC's emphasis on context and analysis in internal hyperlinks was also evident in its news app coverage. Whereas the vast majority of ITV's and Sky News' internal links (77.7% and 87% respectively) connected to its own news reporting, just over half (55%) on the BBC News app did so (see Table 8.9). Once again, the BBC often used 'explainers' and analytical pieces, representing 21.6% and 8.6% respectively of all its internal hyperlinks.

Table 8.8: Percentage of category types of internal hyperlinks in all online news items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News	The Daily Mail	The Sun	The Guardian	BuzzFeed	The Huffington Post	The Mirror	The Telegraph	Total
Conventional news reportage	55.8% (174)	58.0% (98)	81.1% (231)	46.9% (135)	72.3% (60)	50.8% (62)	62.9% (144)	56.2% (132)	60.1% (1036)
Explainer article	20.5% (64)	/	6.7% (19)	1.4% (4)	/	0.8% (1)	2.6% (6)	3.4% (8)	5.9% (102)
Analysis article	9.6% (30)	/	/	1.4% (4)	14.5% (12)	/	/	0.4% (1)	2.7% (47)
Live reporting	2.9% (9)	/	0.4% (1)	1.4% (4)	/	/	0.4% (1)	2.1% (5)	1.2% (20)
Columns/feature article	6.1% (19)	2.4% (4)	/	4.9% (14)	/	0.8% (1)	0.4% (1)	31.5% (74)	7.0% (120)
News profile page	0.3% (1)	39.1% (66)	11.9% (34)	40.6% (117)	8.4% (7)	44.3% (54)	32.8% (75)	1.7% (4)	20.4% (351)
Other	4.8% (15)	0.6% (1)	/	3.5% (10)	4.8% (4)	3.3% (4)	0.9% (2)	4.7% (11)	2.7% (47)
Total	100% (312)	100% (169)	100% (285)	100% (288)	100% (83)	100% (122)	100% (229)	100% (235)	100% (1723)

Table 8.9: Percentage of category types of internal hyperlinks in all news app items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	BBC News app	ITV News app	Sky News app	Total
Conventional news reportage	54.4% (160)	77.7% (195)	87.0% (368)	74.7% (723)
Explainer article	21.1% (62)	8.0% (20)	3.1% (13)	9.8% (95)
Analysis article	8.8% (26)	1.2% (3)	3.1% (13)	4.3% (42)
Live reporting	3.7% (11)	/	1.9% (8)	2.0% (19)
Columns/feature article	6.1% (18)	4.0% (10)	0.7% (3)	3.2% (31)
News profile page	0.7% (2)	8.8% (22)	2.8% (12)	3.7% (36)
Other	5.1% (15)	0.4% (1)	1.4% (6)	2.3% (22)
Total	100% (294)	100% (251)	100% (423)	100% (968)

8:2 BBC News Online hyperlinks

As we identified that the BBC News homepage, along with other online news providers, was heavily using internal links, and external links to a much lesser extent, we developed a more systematic analysis of the BBC News websites.

This follow-up study included examining 12 BBC News sites: Devon (England), England, Glasgow and West (Scotland), Health, Northern Ireland, Politics, Science, Scotland, South East (Wales), United Kingdom, Wales and World – over the course of five days (1 July to 5 July 2019). Our aim was to assess whether a range of news sites – local, national and international – as well as more specialised sites, on politics, health or science, relied to a greater or lesser extent on internal or external hyperlinks to inform their audiences. We examined the top five 5 items on each website each day, generating a sample of 300 items. In total, 932 hyperlinks were examined across 12 BBC News websites.

Overall, we found that almost eight in ten BBC online items featured a hyperlink (see Table 8.10). There was a relatively high use of hyperlinks – in more than three-quarters of all items – with the exception of England and Glasgow and West site in Scotland, where more than half of the items did not contain a hyperlink.

Table 8.10: Proportion of top five online topics that include a hyperlink in item (by percentage; N in brackets)

	Devon (England)	England	Glasgow and West (Scotland)	Health	Northern Ireland	Politics	Science	Scotland	South East (Wales)	United Kingdom	Wales	World	Total
Yes	64% (16)	44% (11)	44% (11)	92% (23)	72% (18)	92% (23)	88% (22)	72% (18)	88% (22)	88% (22)	92% (23)	100% (25)	78% (234)
No	36% (9)	56% (14)	56% (14)	8.0% (2)	28% (7)	8% (2)	12% (3)	28% (7)	12% (3)	12% (3)	8.0% (2)	/	22% (66)
Total	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (25)	100% (300)

Our three-week study of the BBC News homepage identified that 82.2% of all hyperlinks were internal and 17.8% were external. Table 8.11 shows that this pattern of hyperlinks was broadly consistent across the 12 BBC websites examined over five days.

Table 8.11: Proportion of online items that include an internal or external hyperlink (by percentage; N in brackets)

	Internal	External	Total
Devon (England)	34.6% (9)	65.4% (17)	100% (26)
England	91.4% (32)	8.6% (3)	100% (35)
Glasgow and West (Scotland)	96.9% (62)	3.1% (2)	100% (64)
Health	84.3% (86)	15.7% (16)	100% (102)
Northern Ireland	96.4% (53)	3.6% (2)	100% (55)
Politics	88.2% (105)	11.8% (14)	100% (119)
Science	70.5% (55)	29.5% (23)	100% (78)
Scotland	76.5% (39)	23.5% (12)	100% (52)
South East (Wales)	80.2% (73)	19.8% (18)	100% (91)
United Kingdom	81.6% (80)	18.4% (18)	100% (98)
Wales	87.5% (98)	12.5% (14)	100% (112)
World	73.3% (74)	26.7% (27)	100% (101)
Total	82.2% (766)	17.8% (166)	100% (932)

However, there were some variations between the BBC News websites in their use of internal and external hyperlinks. While internal links on the sites of South East of Wales and Glasgow and West in Scotland made up 96.9% and 80.2% of their hyperlinks respectively, on Devon Online they amounted to 34.6%; the lowest ratio of all the BBC News websites examined. Of all the other BBC News websites, the Science pages used links to external material the most, representing 70.5% of hyperlinks.

Taken together, six in ten external sources (60.8%) were links to the sites of business organisations and Twitter profiles (see Table 8.12). With the exception of Glasgow and West in Scotland, all the BBC sites mostly used Twitter accounts to inform their reporting. Similarly, all the BBC News webpages apart from two sites linked to a wide range of businesses and organisations. These tended to be links to a local organisation or a specialist body such as the Hawk and Owl Trust, the British Trust for Ornithology, Street Games, North Wales Police, the Giant Magellan Telescope, the International Whaling Commission, the ESRC Party Member page, the Association of Optometrists and the Plymouth Museum Galleries Archive.

Table 8.12: Sources of external hyperlinks in online news items (by percentage; N in brackets)

	Devon (England)	England	Glasgow and West (Scotland)	Health	Northern Ireland	Politics	Science	Scotland	South East (Wales)	United Kingdom	Wales	World	Total
UK newspapers	/	25.0% (1)	/	/	/	42.9% (6)	/	16.7 (2)	11.1% (2)	11.1% (2)	7.1% (1)	/	8.4% (14)
UK online media	/	/	/	/	/	7.1% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	/	1% (1)
International media	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	25.9% (7)	4.2% (7)
Twitter	52.9% (9)	50.0% (2)	/	31.3 (5)	50.0% (1)	7.1% (1)	26.1% (6)	16.7 (2)	16.7% (3)	27.8% (5)	28.6% (4)	48.1% (13)	30.1% (51)
Social media (excl. Twitter)	23.5% (4)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	5.6% (1)	11.1% (2)	7.1% (1)	7.4% (2)	6% (10)
Academic journal	/	/	/	25.0% (4)	/	/	17.4% (4)	8.3% (1)	/	/	/	3.7% (1)	6% (10)
Business/ organisation	23.5% (4)	/	100% (2)	31.3 (5)	/	14.3% (2)	43.5% (10)	41.7% (5)	55.6% (10)	27.8% (5)	50.0% (7)	3.7% (1)	30.7% (51)
UK legal/political body	/	25.0% (1)	/	12.5% (2)	50.0% (1)	28.6% (4)	/	16.7% (2)	11.1% (2)	11.1% (2)	7.1% (1)	3.7% (1)	9.6% (16)
International legal/political body	/	/	/	/	/	/	13.0% (3)	/	/	11.1% (2)	/	7.4% (2)	4.2% (7)
Total	100% (17)	100% (4)	100% (2)	100% (16)	100% (2)	100% (14)	100% (23)	100% (12)	100% (18)	100% (18)	100% (14)	100% (27)	100% (167)

Beyond Twitter and business organisations, a variety of sources were used by the different news sites. On UK politics, for example, links to newspapers made up 42.9% of sources, whereas on the health and science web pages, academic sources made up 25% and 17.5% respectively.

Table 8.13 breaks down the types of hyperlink in more detail, revealing the types of source informing BBC coverage. 'Twitter sources' are the Twitter accounts of journalists, politicians or organisations and business/organisations. After Twitter, the websites of businesses and organisations represented the second largest type of hyperlinks.

Table 8.13: Percentage of category types in external hyperlinks in all online news items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	Devon (England)	England	Glasgow and West (Scotland)	Health	Northern Ireland	Politics	Science	Scotland	South East (Wales)	United Kingdom	Wales	World	Total
Political Twitter account	/	/	/	12.5% (2)	/	7.1% (1)	/	8.3% (1)	/	11.1% (2)	/	18.5% (5)	6.6% (11)
Journalist Twitter account	/	/	/	/	50.0% (1)	/	17.4% (4)	/	/	5.6% (1)	/	/	3.6% (6)
Individual Twitter account	52.9% (9)	/	/	18.8% (3)	/	/	8.7% (2)	/	/	5.6% (1)	/	18.5% (5)	12% (20)
Business/organisation Twitter account	/	50.0% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	8.3% (1)	16.7% (3)	/	21.4% (3)	11.1% (3)	7.2% (12)
Conventional news reportage	/	/	/	/	/	28.6% (4)	/	16.7% (2)	16.7% (3)	5.6% (1)	7.1% (1)	14.8% (4)	9% (15)
Columns/features	/	/	/	6.3% (1)	/	14.3% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	7.4% (2)	3% (5)
Blog/comment	/	25% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	8.3% (1)	/	5.6% (1)	/	3.7% (1)	2.4% (4)
Business/organisation website	5.9% (1)	/	100% (2)	12.5% (2)	/	14.3% (2)	43.5% (10)	8.3% (1)	33.3% (6)	22.2% (4)	35.7% (5)	3.7% (1)	20.4% (34)
Press release	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	5.6% (1)	5.6% (1)	7.1% (1)	3.7% (1)	2.4% (4)
Journal article	/	/	/	25% (4)	/	/	21.7% (5)	8.3% (1)	/	/	/	3.7% (1)	6.6% (11)
Official government document	/	25% (1)	/	18.8% (3)	/	21.4% (3)	/	16.7% (2)	11.1% (2)	11.1% (2)	7.1% (1)	3.7% (1)	9% (15)
Non-government report	/	/	/	6.3% (1)	/	/	/	25% (3)	5.6% (1)	/	7.1% (1)	/	3,6% (6)
Legal document	/	/	/	/	50.0% (1)	7.1% (1)	4.3% (1)	/	/	5.6% (1)	/	3.7% (1)	3% (5)
Video	29.4% (5)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	3% (5)
Other	11.8% (2)	/	/	/	/	7.1% (1)	4.3% (1)	/	11.1% (2)	22.2 (4)	14.3% (2)	7.4% (2)	8.4% (14)
Total	100% (17)	100% (4)	100% (2)	100% (16)	100% (2)	100% (14)	100% (23)	100% (12)	100% (18)	100% (18)	100% (14)	100% (27)	100% (167)

Table 8.13 shows that links to external news sites (i.e. non-BBC) for news, opinion pieces/blogs and feature/columns was relatively low, across almost all BBC News sites. As already identified, the BBC drew to a large extent on its own archive for news, opinion and features, and to a much lesser degree on third-party material. As we had established in the three-week sample, there were few direct links to press releases, which would have revealed the information that often informs a news item. In the BBC's health and science pages, however, there were four or five hyperlinks to academic journals from each site, allowing audiences to directly source the origin of the story.

In terms of the type of internal hyperlinks on BBC sites (Table 8.14), we found that well over half of the BBC's hyperlinks (60.9%) were to news articles, slightly higher than the 55.8% on the BBC homepage over the three-week study. In our analysis of 12 BBC News sites over one week, 'explainer' items were used slightly less than on the BBC News homepage, featuring in just over one in ten rather than two in ten, but on the politics webpage they were present in over a third of items.

Table 8.14: Percentage of category types in internal hyperlinks in all online news items (by frequency; N in brackets)

	Devon (England)	England	Glasgow and West	Health	Northern Ireland	Politics	Science	Scotland	South East	United Kingdom	Wales	World	Total
Conventional news reportage	22.2% (2)	64.5% (20)	87.1% (54)	55.8% (48)	71.7% (38)	50.5% (53)	58.2% (32)	64.1% (25)	75.3% (55)	57.5% (46)	67.3% (66)	36.5% (27)	60.9% (466)
Explainer	/	3.2% (1)	8.1% (5)	17.4% (15)	18.9% (10)	35.2% (37)	7.3% (4)	12.8% (5)	2.7% (2)	6.3% (5)	4.1% (4)	18.9% (4)	13.3% (102)
Blog/comment	/	3.2% (1)	/	9.3% (8)	3.8% (2)	7.6% (8)	3.6% (2)	/	/	1.3% (1)	1% (1)	1.4% (1)	3.1% (24)
Analysis	/	3.2% (1)	/	2.3% (2)	/	1.9% (2)	/	/	1.4% (1)	11.3% (9)	2% (2)	2.7% (2)	2.5% (19)
Live reporting	77.8% (7)	9.7% (3)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	1% (1)	2.7% (2)	1.7% (13)
Question and answer	/	/	/	/	1.9% (1)	/	/	/	/	1.3% (1)	1% (1)	/	0.4% (3)
Features	/	9.7% (3)	/	2.3% (2)	1.9% (1)	/	27.3% (15)	12.8% (5)	5.5% (4)	15% (12)	15.3% (15)	31.1% (23)	10.5% (80)
Business/ organisation	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	2.7% (2)	/	/	1.4% (1)	0.4% (3)
Radio broadcast	/	/	3.2% (2)	1.2% (1)	1.9% (1)	2.9% (3)	/	7.7% (3)	1.4% (1)	2.5% (2)	/	1.4% (1)	1.8% (14)
Video	/	6.5% (2)	1.6% (1)	11.6% (10)	/	1.9% (2)	/	2.6% (1)	11% (8)	2.5% (2)	7.1% (7)	1.4% (1)	4.4% (34)
Other	/	/	/	/	/	/	3.6% (2)	/	/	2.5% (2)	1% (1)	2.7% (2)	0.9% (7)
Total	100% (9)	100% (31)	100% (62)	100% (86)	100% (53)	100% (105)	100% (55)	100% (39)	100% (73)	100% (80)	100% (98)	100% (74)	100% (765)

Finally, we examined the position of hyperlinks – at the top, middle or bottom of a webpage – in a news item. To be more precise, if a hyperlink was present in roughly the first two to three paragraphs of an item it was classified as being at the top of a webpage, whereas if it was in the last two to three paragraphs it was classified as being at the bottom of page. All hyperlinks in between were categorised as being in the middle of an item. We excluded all hyperlinks not connected within the text of an item. We considered the positioning of hyperlinks to explore where they are typically included within a news item. This could reveal where editors think readers are more likely to click on hyperlinks, such as at the top of a news item.

As Table 8.15 shows, more than six in ten hyperlinks were positioned in the middle of a BBC News item.

Table 8.15: Position of hyperlinks within a news item (by frequency; N in brackets)

	Top	Middle	Bottom	Total
Devon (England)	15.4% (4)	42.3% (11)	42.3% (11)	100% (26)
England	5.7% (2)	80.0% (28)	14.3% (5)	100% (35)
Glasgow and West (Scotland)	7.8% (5)	28.1% (18)	64.1% (41)	100% (64)
Health	14.7% (15)	75.5% (77)	9.8% (10)	100% (102)
Northern Ireland	18.2% (10)	74.5% (41)	7.3% (4)	100% (55)
Politics	8.4% (10)	87.4% (104)	4.2% (5)	100% (119)
Science	35.9% (28)	48.7% (38)	15.4% (12)	100% (78)
Scotland	37.3% (19)	54.9% (28)	7.8% (4)	100% (51)
South East (Wales)	26.4% (24)	60.4% (55)	13.2% (12)	100% (91)
United Kingdom	17.3% (17)	63.3% (62)	19.4% (19)	100% (98)
Wales	18.8% (21)	61.6% (69)	19.6% (22)	100% (112)
World	24.8% (25)	41.6% (42)	33.7% (34)	100% (101)
Total	19.3% (180)	61.5% (573)	19.2% (179)	100% (932)

Interestingly, the hyperlinks were higher on the page in Science and Health online items, which indicates the importance of the source informing the story. Comparing the regional, national and world pages of BBC News sites, we found no consistent pattern of positioning hyperlinks at either the top or bottom of pages.

9.0 Case studies

To supplement the quantitative content analysis of news across BBC and commercial providers, we carried out a qualitative assessment of the range and depth of analysis in four news-specific subject areas. This included the reporting of the Conservative leadership contest, Brexit coverage, UK health and education stories and climate change (on the day when the government announced it would reduce net carbon emissions to almost zero by 2050). The sample for each case study was different in size and scope, but in each the BBC was compared with other relevant news providers within and across the different platforms.

9.1 Case Study 1: *The Conservative leadership contest*

During the sample period, the Conservative party was in the process of selecting a new leader following Theresa May's resignation on 24 May 2019. The race to become the next PM was widely reported, representing a considerable share of news output across almost all news outlets examined over the three-week study. Given the significance of this event, we decided to more carefully compare the range and depth of reporting about the Conservative party leadership across news outlets.

We assessed the degree of policy information and analysis about the candidates' positions, as well as the sources used to inform coverage. In doing so, we analysed policy-related claims made by Conservative candidates and considered the degree to which their promises and pledges were challenged by journalists or left uncontested within a news item.

We limited our analysis to three important days of the leadership race – 10 June to 12 June 2019 – when ten candidates were vying to secure enough votes from Conservative MPs to reach the next round of the contest (on 13 and 14 June coverage was largely about the MPs' voting process). In total, this generated 102 items *specifically about the Conservative Party leadership contest*. Since our main online news sample was limited to the top five topics per day, we supplemented the analysis of BBC News Online by identifying six more items about the Conservative leadership election during the three-day sample period. We excluded commercial online media outlets because some of their coverage may not have not been included in the main sample, which examined the top five *topics* per day, as well as commercial radio stations, because they broadcast relatively brief items, making it difficult to compare with BBC radio news.

We began by assessing whether news about the Conservative leadership race primarily focused on the candidates' policy positions or on the processes of the electoral contest. Table 9.0 shows that across all outlets more time was spent reporting policy issues (81.5% of all airtime) than on stories about the processes of the contenders' campaigns.

Table 9.0: Proportion of news about the Conservative leadership that was either policy or process related (by percentage time; N in brackets; BBC News Online by N only)

	Policy	Process	Total
BBC News Online	100% (9)	/	100% (9)
BBC News at Ten	84.2% (6)	15.8% (2)	100% (8)
Channel 4 News	96% (11)	4% (1)	100% (12)
Sky News	100% (8)	/	100% (8)
BBC News Channel	89.6% (9)	10.4% (4)	100% (13)
ITV News	88% (4)	12% (1)	100% (5)
Channel 5 News	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)	100% (3)
Newsnight	57.4% (6)	42.6% (5)	100% (11)
Radio 5 Live Breakfast	63.2% (8)	36.8% (2)	100% (10)
Radio 4 World at One	86.7% (7)	13.3% (1)	100% (8)
Newsbeat	74.1% (1)	25.9% (1)	100% (2)
Radio 4 Today	74.3% (6)	25.7% (7)	100% (13)
Total	81.5% (76)	18.5% (26)	100% (102)

However, there were some variations between the BBC outlets in the proportion of airtime focused on process and on policy. On *Newsnight* and *5 Live Breakfast*, for example, items primarily about Conservative leadership policy issues made up 57.4% and 63.4% of airtime respectively. On *5 Live Breakfast*, the emphasis on electoral process was influenced by a number of items that focused on revelations about Michael Gove taking cocaine, interviews with MP supporters and brief biographies of the candidates; these did not examine policy in any detail. On *Newsnight*, discussion often centred on the campaign tactics of candidates or electoral positioning, rather than their competing policy positions.

With the exception of Channel 5, where two-thirds of coverage focused on the process of winning the electoral contest rather than on the issues, BBC and commercial television news featured a similar level of news (above 84.2%) about the Conservative leaders' policy positions. All the Sky News coverage focused principally on policy news, compared to 89.6% on the BBC News Channel.

In order to compare the depth of coverage in more detail, we considered the quality of information provided about the policy positions of the candidates. Table 9.1 shows that across all news providers 77.4% of airtime was spent supplying information about policy positions. The BBC News Channel stood out; it had the most informative coverage of the Conservative Party leadership, spending 50.3% of its time reporting a high level of policy information, followed by *Newsnight*, where this made up 41.9% of total coverage.

Table 9.1: Proportion of news about the Conservative leadership which had almost none, some, or detailed policy information (by percentage time; N in brackets; BBC News by N only)

	Almost none	Some	Detailed	Total
BBC News Online	/	100% (9)	/	100% (9)
BBC News at Ten	16.6% (2)	58.6% (4)	24.8% (2)	100% (8)
Channel Four News	10.7% (2)	52% (6)	37.3% (4)	100% (12)
Sky News	13.4% (1)	54.1% (6)	32.5% (1)	100% (8)
BBC News Channel	10.0% (4)	39.7% (7)	50.3% (2)	100% (13)
ITV News	12.0% (1)	59.2% (3)	28.8 % (1)	100% (5)
Channel 5 at 5	/	100% (3)	/	100% (3)
Newsnight	23.5% (3)	34.6% (5)	41.9% (3)	100% (11)
Radio 5 Live Breakfast	63.2% (3)	16.6% (6)	20.2% (1)	100% (10)
Radio 4 World at One	/	86.1% (7)	13.9% (1)	100% (8)
Newsbeat	25.9% (1)	74.1% (1)	/	100% (2)
Radio 4 Today	8.6% (4)	56.1% (6)	35.2% (3)	100% (13)
Total	22.6% (21)	58.1% (63)	19.3% (18)	100% (102)

Of the television news bulletins, Channel 4 featured the most policy information about the candidates, at 37.3%, compared to 24.8% on *News at Ten*. Over 60% of 5 Live *Breakfast* contained no policy information about the leadership contest, which was largely explained by a lengthy interview with Conservative Baroness Warsi on the complicated rules that govern the various stages of electing a new leader.

When we examined the level of policy analysis of every item (see Table 9.2), where journalists did not just supply policy information but scrutinised the context and background of the Conservative leadership contest, we found that *World at One* and *Newsnight* provided the most detailed analysis (48.2% and 42.0% respectively).

Table 9.2: Proportion of news about the Conservative leadership which had almost none, some, or detailed policy analysis (by percentage time; N in brackets; BBC News by N only)

	Almost none	Some	Detailed	Total
BBC News Online	/	88.9% (8)	11.1% (1)	100% (9)
BBC News at Ten	25.1% (3)	58.5% (4)	16.4% (1)	100% (8)
Channel 4 News	11.1% (3)	63.4% (6)	25.5% (3)	100% (12)
Sky News	20.8% (3)	46.7% (4)	32.5% (1)	100% (8)
BBC News Channel	19.8% (6)	47.5% (6)	32.8% (1)	100% (13)
ITV News	12.0% (1)	88.0% (4)	/	100% (5)
Channel 5 at 5	/	100% (3)	/	100% (3)
Newsnight	42.6% (5)	15.4% (3)	42.0% (3)	100% (11)
Radio 5 Live Breakfast	63.2% (3)	16.6% (6)	20.2% (1)	100% (10)
Radio 4 World at One	25.7% (3)	26.1% (3)	48.2% (2)	100% (8)
Newsbeat	25.9% (1)	74.1% (1)	/	100% (2)
Radio 4 Today	8.6% (4)	66.9% (7)	24.5% (2)	100% (13)
Total	24.6% (32)	44.8% (55)	30.6% (15)	100% (102)

BBC Radio 4 *World at One* on 11 June featured in-depth policy analysis from two journalists. As the following examples illustrate, in one item a reporter analysed candidates' claims about how the UK would leave the EU, while the other provided important contextual scrutiny from the EU point of view, which was often lacking in Brexit reporting more generally (as Case study 2 examined).

Anchor: "John, what do you make of what you've heard from these two [Leadsom and Harper] today?"

Reporter: "Well more promises [from] both of them, in this case, coming from different directions, but the overall effect and the summation of where we are seems pretty uniform across the board. We are getting one promise after another, after another, from the various candidates to be our next Prime Minister in the space of the next few weeks and they look in a certain light, absolutely any light frankly, to be very, very implausible. Andrea Leadsom is telling us that we have, as far as she's concerned, that we have a hard red line, we will leave the EU on October 31st. Mark Harper says, well look, it might take longer than that, would take longer than that, you can't leave on that date but, in his words, by busting a gut, the EU will come back

with a better deal. Well Theresa May busted more than a gut, she busted her premiership making the same attempt and Parliament shows no sign whatever of accepting the idea of allowing the Government to leave with no deal. They would rise up and find a way, no doubt with the help of the Speaker, to stop it. So plenty of promises but no clear route to the kind of destination that's being mapped out."

Reporter: "Okay, so how do things play out now, through this contest? What are the next steps?"

Anchor: "Well, they carry on campaigning. Today we have another round of hustings here at Westminster before the Tory MPs en masse. That will go on again with another round tomorrow and then we start voting, well, they start voting, on Thursday, so we start to see the beginning of the elimination of this long list of runners. You have to have 16 supporters to survive. They'll start knocking them off from the bottom and next week carry on with that Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday until at last, there will be two and then it's up to the mass membership, around, no one's quite sure, but maybe around 160,000 of them to decide who the Prime Minister is. We know the character of that electorate, that electorate, they're a Brexiteer crowd hence the tone of much of these promises. But, of course, at some point these are the promises will have to be addressed, including the big, big spending promises that are being thrown in along the way to the dismay, frankly, of a lot of people at the Treasury."

(Radio 4 *World at One*, 11 June 2019)

Anchor: "How flexible are the EU likely to be? Adam Fleming joins us from Brussels. (Matt Hancock insisted) he could secure an endpoint on the backstop. How is that thought viewed in Brussels?"

Reporter: "Well, we've just had the daily press briefing from the European Commission, where their spokesman, Margaritis Schinas, has just said, the election of a new Prime Minister will not change the parameters of what's on the table. I think that's a not-so-subtle attempt to push back this idea that if you just change the personality and someone tries a bit harder, is a bit more bombastic or a bit more imaginative, they'll be able to get something out of Brussels that Theresa May failed to do and when you talk to diplomats privately they just have a real sense of déjà vu. They think the UK is going through the same arguments that have been exhausted over the last couple of years, and that's happening either because the leadership candidates don't know the detail of why we've ended up where we have or they are choosing to ignore why we've ended up where we have. And they eye the calendar in London quite nervously too, thinking there's not a lot of Parliamentary sitting days between the new Prime Minister being chosen, then summer holidays, then the party conference season and then the new Brexit deadline of the 31st of October."

Sarah Montague: “OK, but the timetable in Brussels for leadership changes there also plays into this.”

Adam Fleming: “Yes. So the first thing that officials here always push against is this idea that Brussels packs up for the whole summer and everyone disappears. That is true in the sense that it becomes much quieter here and there’s not a lot of people around but, in the past, there have been rounds of Brexit negotiations in the depths of August. There’ve even been emergency summits on various topics in August before and I think there’s probably a bit of a warning to people who think there might be a clear out at the top of the EU and that there might be a new Commission President and a new Council President. The fact is, some of those new faces, might be old faces drawn from the people who have been dealing with Brexit already. And, remember, there will still be 27 prime ministers, presidents and chancellors of the other countries who will still remain signed up to the EU’s fundamental Brexit principles that were drawn up in the days after the referendum. And it’s worth looking at where the options for change is, the Withdrawal Agreement, which contains the backstop, that is closed and looks very, very difficult to get reopened. The Political Declaration...which sketches out the aspirations for the future relationship. EU leaders are prepared to change that, but they were prepared to change it to make it a closer future relationship, more ambitious one than Theresa May had been pursuing, then you hear talk about could there be a separate document...this idea you could have a side document that gave some aspirational dates for when you’d sign agreements that could get rid of bits of the backstop, like a veterinary agreement. But then we’ve seen the fate of side documents to the Withdrawal Agreement Theresa May negotiated, they didn’t work either.”

(Radio 4 *World at One*, 11 June 2019).

Of the television news bulletins, Channel 4 supplied the most detailed analysis (37.3% of total airtime, compared to 28.8% on *ITV News at Ten* and 24.8% on *BBC News at Ten*). We identified no detailed policy analysis on Channel 5 News. On *5 Live Breakfast*, 62.3% of airtime about the Conservative leadership contained no policy analysis (largely explained, as acknowledged previously, due to a lengthy interview with Baroness Warsi).

While all the BBC online news items were about policy, we found just one that contained policy analysis. As we will now explore, while several outlets BBC featured a high level of policy information about the candidates’ competing perspectives, at times journalists did not always supply a great deal of context, analysis or background about these positions.

BBC News Online on 11 June featured a round-up of contenders’ views on Brexit, for example, but it lacked any analysis of the credibility of their plans.

“In all circumstances we are leaving the European Union on 31 October”, Mrs Leadsom told her official campaign launch. “Our country and our party cannot afford any more indecisiveness.”

The Brexiteer MP set out her plan for what she calls a "managed exit" from the EU, which included striking a "temporary trade agreement" and a plan to negotiate contingency arrangements with Brussels over the summer recess.

She said these could be discussed at a summit with the new incoming EU commissioners and heads of government in September.

But at his official campaign launch, Mr Harper - an outsider in the race - said it was "not possible or credible" to leave on the terms of a new deal by the existing deadline of 31 October. Renegotiating and getting a deal past MPs would take longer, he said.

He said there could be a majority in the Commons to leave without a deal, but only if ministers demonstrated they had "strained every sinew" to get a new one.

Meanwhile, Health Secretary Mr Hancock - who was also competing for the top job - told BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme his plan was "eminently deliverable" by 31 October, as the EU was open to changing the political declaration part of the agreement.

"We need to solve Brexit and we cannot do it by threatening no deal," he said, adding: "Parliament will not allow a no-deal Brexit to happen."

Home Secretary Sajid Javid reiterated that although he wanted a revised deal, "if we got to end of October and the choice was between no deal or no Brexit, I'd pick no deal."

(BBC News Online, 11 June 2019)

Over the three-day period, we also examined all sources – either directly quoted or indirectly involved by a journalist – that were used to inform reporting of the Conservative Party leadership contest. With the exception of some vox pops with Conservative party members and members of the public, a Conservative historian, a protestor, a few opposition politicians and journalists, as well as three think tanks and one academic, all sources were Conservative leadership contenders or Conservative MPs/MSPs.

Table 9.3 shows the number of Conservative leadership candidates and Conservative MPs sourced in coverage over the three-day sample period.

Table 9.3: Number of candidates and Conservative MPs sources in Conservative party leadership contest

	Conservative leadership candidates	Conservative MPs	Total
BBC News at Ten	35	/	35
Channel 4 News	32	10	42
Sky News	43	6	49
BBC News Channel	44	5	49
ITV News	17	4	21
Channel 5 News	13	4	17
Newsnight	37	13	49
Radio 5 Live Breakfast	10	2	12
Radio 4 World at One	27	7	34
Newsbeat	13	/	13
Radio 4 Today	25	8	33
BBC News Online	63	8	71
Total	359	67	425

We examined both news channels over one hour, and *Newsnight* is broadcast for approximately 45 minutes, so this explains why most of these programmes featured *more* Conservative sources than did other news outlets. However, *Today* and *5 Live Breakfast* had far fewer Conservative sources – despite also being examined over one hour – primarily because they spent more time *interviewing specific candidates* than reflecting a wider range of views from the ten candidates.

When we compared programmes in the sample that were on air for roughly 30 minutes, we found that the *BBC News at Ten* and *World at One* had far more sources – 33 and 34 respectively – than ITV’s count, at 21, and Channel 5’s, at 17. This was in part explained by the greater number of BBC items. So, for example, the *BBC News at Ten* featured eight items, compared to five on ITV and three on Channel 5. But the BBC’s three lengthy packages included the perspectives of between eight and nine candidates, compared to just five across two ITV items and one Channel 5 item. BBC News Online featured 71 sources in the nine items we examined over the sample period (a ratio of nearly eight sources per item).

As the BBC outlets tended to feature a larger number of Conservative candidates in their coverage than did commercial media, it may have had the effect of allowing more source claims to go unchallenged than other news providers, since more time was spent reflecting the views of the leadership contenders.

In order to explore the extent to which the Conservative candidates were held to account by different news providers, we considered the degree to which claims about their policy

positions were challenged – directly or indirectly – by a journalist or allowed to go uncontested. We only considered *claims about policy issues*, which focused mostly on dealing with Brexit, rather than the processes of the candidates’ campaigns. We also excluded claims about the candidates’ character, such as Michael Gove’s alleged use of cocaine, or suggestions that Jeremy Hunt’s entrepreneurial experience might help him renegotiate a better Brexit deal.

Above all, we observed that Channel 4 most often appeared to question or further scrutinise a Conservative candidate’s position. For example, in a live interview on Channel 4 the following exchange between the news anchor Cathy Newman and Andrea Leadsom illustrates a series of claims being challenged by the journalist:

Anchor [introduction to interview]: “I put it to her [Andrea Leadsom] that there was no such thing as a managed no-deal exit from the European Union.”

Andrea Leadsom: “No, I’m not talking about a no deal, I’m talking about a managed exit. So no deal is if you have no arrangements and a managed exit, actually you would have sensible measures in place that would be in our interests and the EU’s interests.”

Anchor: “But you haven’t got time to put those sensible measures in place. Because if you became Prime Minister you would have a maximum of three months, probably less to do all sorts of IT systems, negotiate agreements with the EU on various different things. You would have to pass, I think, from the last count, seven bills. It’s not going to happen is it?”

Andrea Leadsom: “No, what I’m proposing is we would introduce two bills. One that would deal with citizens’ rights and one that would look at sensible measures, things like the future for Gibraltar, the future for goods already in circulation at the time of exit. We would do second readings before summer recess and then, really importantly, we would have the time, in the September sitting and during October, to get those bills through to legislation, to Royal Assent by the end of October.”

Anchor: “It’s basically saying, you’ll have a deal, just not Theresa May’s deal and the EU has made it clear they are not going to reopen that deal, they are not going to give you another deal, so it is a fancy way of saying it’s no deal, which MPs have specifically said repeatedly they would block so you would have to go to the country, wouldn’t you?”

Andrea Leadsom: “No, I’m specifically saying I would not be seeking the EU to reopen their deal that they’ve said they will not reopen. What I would be doing is...”

Anchor: [interrupting]: “It’s a fancy way of saying no deal which MPs have said they wouldn’t want.”

Andrea Leadsom: “No, no, not at all. No, what it is is saying that we would take the sensible measures, the measures around citizens’ rights and issues like air transport and security relationship from the Withdrawal Agreement and seek to legislate for

those in the UK subject to agreeing those with the EU and put it to them that we could put in place these sensible measures that are very much in their interests and ours by the end of October to ensure we have a smooth transition. That's very different to a no deal exit."

Anchor: "Which is preferable to you, though. General Election or second referendum?"

Andrea Leadsom: "Neither. I'm not prepared to contemplate a second referendum that would deny the will of the people. I think it would break our politics and of course a General Election right now would be terrible for the country. It would give so much more uncertainty..."

(*Channel 4 News*, 10 June 2019)

In another illustration of Channel 4's robust scrutiny of candidates, *Channel 4 News* covered Boris Johnson's campaign launch which included voice-over comments by a journalist and clips of other reporters asking questions at the press conference.

Unnamed/out-of-shot reporter: "Do you regret any of the mistakes that you made in your political and your personal life"

Boris Johnson: "Do I do what I promise I'm going to do as a politician? That is the issue, that is the issue that you legitimately raise, Paul, and the answer to that is yes, you look at what we did in City Hall"

Unnamed/out-of-shot journalist reporter: "Already in this campaign you are telling some supporters you'll do everything to avoid leaving the EU without a deal and others that you would gladly do that. It's a simple question, if you want to be Prime Minister can the country trust you?"

Boris Johnson: "You think that I've been somehow inconsistent Laura in saying that I don't want a no deal outcome but I think it is right for our great country to prepare for that outcome"

Reporter (voice-over): "On the very day the EU repeated there would be not renegotiation of the divorce deal agreed with Theresa May, he said, under him, there would be."

Boris Johnson: "I think they will rapidly come to see that they will have a new Government with a new mandate, a new earnestness, a new determination to get things done. A new optimism and a new confidence about what Britain can do and I think they will respond to that and I think there will a symmetrical enthusiasm on the other side of the Channel about getting this thing done and moving forward."

Unnamed/out-of-shot reporter: "People who have worked closely with you do not think you're fit to be Prime Minister"

Boris Johnson: "Well Beth I delighted that many of my former colleagues seem to dissent from that view but..." - cut to cheering, standing ovation from supporters

(*Channel 4 News*, 12 June 2019)

Both Radio 4's *Today* and *World at One* also regularly challenged Conservative leadership claims in live interviews. So, for example, in one *Today* interview the presenter robustly probed Matt Hancock about his Brexit position.

Matt Hancock: "I've set out a Brexit delivery plan, in detail, unlike some of the other candidates, in fact unlike most of the other candidates. I've set out in detail what I'd do and this is a deal that can both pass the House of Commons and is acceptable and negotiable with the European Union and there's a reason for that because ultimately this debate too often gets dragged into the weeds of the vehicle of our exit and isn't enough about the long-term future relationship that we want to have and be setting that out as a free trade agreement, a comprehensive free trade agreement including on having agreements on, for instance, security, on data transfer, instead of being a customs type relationship and negotiating with the EU an end point, a time limit on the backstop which is negotiable, which is negotiable (sic), and we know that it is..."

John Humphrys: "Even though Brussels has said that it isn't"

Matt Hancock: "No, no they haven't. They have said they are open to changes to the political declaration."

John Humphrys: "They are not open to changes to the Withdrawal Agreement."

Matt Hancock: "So I would add the time limit to it. After all their lawyers say that the backstop has to be temporary and my proposal is to put a figure on that and that way we can get a deal that can both be delivered through the House of Commons and can be delivered through the European Union."

John Humphrys: "Forgive me if this sounds just a wee bit cynical but if you've got all the answers, as you claim, why aren't other people saying 'um, yeh, right'? Unless you assume that everybody else is, kind of, doesn't care about the future of this country and is prepared not just to jeopardise not just the Tory government but jeopardise the economic future of this country."

...

How long would it take to persuade a) Parliament, that it is viable, because they remain unpersuaded so far, and, more to the point, how long would it take Brussels? In other words, we are meant to be out on October 31st clearly, we could not conceivably be out on October 31st with the sort of deal that you are proposing re-writing the backstop and so on and so on. Clearly that couldn't happen, right, you'd agree with that?"

Matt Hancock: "It's eminently deliverable by the 31st October."

John Humphrys: "Really"

Matt Hancock: “Let me give you the timetables. Firstly there is going to be a new Prime Minister before the end of July and that Prime Minister is likely to be tested (inaudible) immediately”

John Humphrys: (interrupting) “And then everyone goes off on holiday. Everybody’s on holiday Westminster and Brussels”

Matt Hancock: “Well it’s quite hard to set out a timeline John if you get interrupted after you’ve put in the first point in that timeline”

John Humphrys: “I was only offering you the thought that they are all going on holiday”

Matt Hancock: “That’s all right, your job is to interrupt, mine is to...”

John Humphrys “No my job is to (inaudible) the objections that there are obvious...”
(Radio 4 *Today*, 11 June 2019)

Similarly, *Newsnight* carried out a number of live interviews, including with Mark Harper, where the presenter robustly pressed the candidate about his Brexit proposals:

Mark Harper: “My argument is I’m the only person running in this context who’s got cabinet experience but hasn’t been part of the cabinet team who have sat round the table and shared in making the mistakes that have got us to where we are now. The Prime Minister bears most of the responsibility, but people who have been in the cabinet over the last three years have shared in those misjudgements and I think we need a fresh approach if we are going to get Brexit done and get on to doing the domestic policy that is so important.”

Emily Maitlis: “When you talk about cabinet experience and misjudgements, you failed to get through the House of Lords reform bill, people will remember, as cabinet office minister, you failed to hit the immigration targets as immigration minister and then you got sacked in that job for employing an illegal immigrant, and Theresa May chose not to...”

Mark Harper: “Well no. Just to be clear. I wasn’t sacked actually. I did make a mistake. I carried out the checks that other employers do. I actually left my position because I took the view that despite having followed the law I felt that as a minister and taking through the immigration bill I should hold myself to a higher standard than others and I resigned from my position.”

Emily Maitlis: “It’s not glittering is it. You made a mistake by employing an illegal immigrant as immigration minister.”

Mark Harper: “And took responsibility for it which is, I think, the definition of leadership, Emily.”

Emily Maitlis: “I think it would be incomprehensible for most people that with that kind of track record you should assume you could be Prime Minister.”

Mark Harper: “No I think if you look at my positions in government I delivered a lot of the work that I did as constitutional reform minister a number of very significant bills. Got through the legislation for boundary changes in the AV referendum...”

Emily Maitlis: “PIPs were delayed and held up as well.”

Mark Harper: “When I was disability minister I inherited as position where, as you just said, the Personal Independence Payments system wasn’t working well and I fixed it. Got us back on track to delivering those benefits to people within the period of time they were supposed to be. And I was a Chief Whip who got through very successfully the Conservative agenda after the 2015 election with quite a modest majority so I think that’s actually a record of success, Emily.”

Emily Maitlis: “You said at the end of last month ‘the Conservatives must restate the case for austerity’. Where would you make the next round of cuts?”

Mark Harper: “No I don’t think I said that. What I said was that we have to continue to leave within our means.”

Emily Maitlis: “It was quoted in the New Statesman. You must restate the case for, I think you said ‘I prefer to call it the A word, austerity’.”

Mark Harper: “No I don’t think I said that. I said I prefer to say it’s living within your means. We always must live within our means. Taxpayers work very hard for their money. The tax burden is at a 50-year high.”

Emily Maitlis: “Just clarify that. What does that mean? Is it more cuts you see, or...?”

(*Newsnight*, 2 June 2019)

On BBC, ITV and Channel 5 news bulletins, which each lasted less than 30 minutes, there was less time to interrogate Conservative candidates than on Channel 4, *Newsnight* or most of the other BBC radio news items we examined. Moreover, these outlets often used interviews (not generally used in bulletins) as a vehicle for challenging claims. Bulletins therefore appeared to question claims in less depth than other programmes. However, there were moments – such as the opening day of the Conservative leadership contest – when statements were directly rebuffed by BBC journalists at press conferences.

Dominic Raab: “We won’t deliver Brexit with bluff and bluster. I’m the conviction Brexiteer with a plan, the discipline and the focus to lead us out by the end of October.”

Laura Kuenssberg: “You say that you could get a different deal with the EU which they have completely ruled out again and again or leave without a deal which Parliament probably wouldn’t allow unless you really are serious about suspending the House of Commons.”

Dominic Raab: “The one thing I haven’t done, which other candidates have, is take things off the table which only weaken our negotiating leverage in Brussels.”

Jeremy Hunt: “We need tough negotiation, not empty rhetoric. Having talked to many European leaders I believe that if we show determination, ingenuity and confidence there is a deal to be done.”

Laura Kuenssberg (voice-over): “He’d try to change the Brexit deal again.”

Laura Kuenssberg (direct question to Jeremy Hunt): “What is it that European leaders are saying to you privately about the possibility of a new deal that is the opposite to what they say publicly, which is that there cannot be?”

(BBC *News at Ten*, 10 June)

But not all BBC coverage was as combative in tone. In a studio package a BBC reporter on the *News at Ten* outlined the candidates’ policy positions but offered limited context or explanation about their credibility.

“Well, it’s a pretty crowded field. And here they all are, all hoping to be our Prime Minister. The first round of voting for MPs is on Thursday and before that many are using campaign launches to lay out some of their key messages. Now, of course, their approach to Brexit is one of their most scrutinised areas. One group argues that the UK must leave the EU on the 31st of October, with or without a deal. They include Boris Johnson, Dominic Raab and Andrea Leadsom. There are those who say they would consider a delay if a deal is close but would be willing to leave without a deal – this group includes Michael Gove and Jeremy Hunt. And two of the candidates say we should only leave with a deal, they are Rory Stewart and Matthew Hancock.

Now, what about life beyond Brexit? Well, there’s a pretty lively debate under way about other policies. Boris Johnson wants a tax cut for those earning over £50,000. He says he’d use money currently set aside for a no deal Brexit.

What about Jeremy Hunt? Amongst his promises, a pledge to provide 1.5million new homes for young people. And then there’s Michael Gove. He wants to replace VAT with a lower, simpler sales tax. Then there’s the home secretary Sajid Javid. He wants to delay balancing the books and pump billions into schools instead. Dominic Raab, he wants to reduce employees’ National Insurance, so they pay less. And then Matthew Hancock. He wants to increase the national living wage to more than £10 an hour.”

(BBC *News at Ten*, 10 June 2019)

The number of unchecked claims in this example reflected the BBC’s propensity to source a wide range of Conservative leadership perspectives, which gave the journalist limited time to interrogate all of them. As previously acknowledged, while the BBC *News at Ten* featured 35 perspective Conservative leader sources – either directly or indirectly via a journalist – ITV and Channel 5 included 17 and 13 sources respectively. Both also drew on four Conservative MPs, who were often used as proxy sources for prospective candidates.

The BBC's coverage of a higher proportion of Conservative sources in the run-up to the election meant that at times, journalists gave candidates a brief soundbite without contesting their claims. So, for example, Andrea Leadsom claimed on *BBC News at Ten* that: "What we need now is a leader who can deliver on Brexit by the end of October and then take us into the amazing future that awaits the United Kingdom" (10 June 2019). The cumulative effect of uncontested claims about 'smoothly exiting' the EU – particularly when they are widely rejected by a range of experts – could impede public knowledge about the consequences of either a negotiated or a no-deal Brexit.

When journalists on the *BBC News at Ten* did have the time to comment on the claims and counter-claims of the Conservative leadership contest, they voiced concerns about their pledges and commitments. In one piece to camera with a BBC journalist, this was said:

Reporter: "This campaign is about inflated promises and unrealistic plans to sideline Parliament with big pledges to spend billions and cut taxes thrown in that the Commons simply wouldn't approve. In politics the seemingly impossible can happen but can anyone remember a campaign that stretched belief quite like this one? Another election or referendum are being increasingly discussed here as possible outcomes especially with Brussels still insisting Britain must take or leave the divorce deal struck by Mrs May."

(*BBC News at Ten*, 11 June 2019)

Overall, while *BBC News at Ten* journalists questioned the competing policy positions of Conservative leadership candidates, they sometimes also gave the candidates a platform – even if only briefly – to articulate claims that went unchallenged.

On BBC News Online, for example, we identified a number of Conservative leadership plans that went uncontested.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock told his launch on Tuesday that the Conservatives and the country "need a fresh start", announcing one of his key pledges - to increase the national living wage to more than £10 an hour.

Ex-Brexit Secretary Dominic Raab said he was "a committed Brexiteer" who could be trusted to secure the UK's departure. He also unveiled plans to redirect £500m a year from the aid budget to create an international wildlife fund.

Former Work and Pensions Secretary Esther McVey outlined her campaign at a think tank event, saying "we have nothing to fear" from a no-deal Brexit, and pledging to give a pay rise to public sector workers (unchallenged claim).

International Development Secretary Rory Stewart faced callers' questions during a live phone-in on BBC Radio 4's *World at One*. He called for compromise over Brexit, and said he would give Parliament "a final chance" to vote through the existing deal that Mrs May negotiated with the EU. But he ruled out supporting a further referendum, arguing "it wouldn't resolve anything".

Earlier, leadership frontrunner Boris Johnson pledged to cut income tax bills for people earning more than £50,000 a year if he wins the race to succeed Mrs May.

He has not conducted any broadcast interviews about his campaign, but is facing accusations from within his own party and without that focusing a tax cut on the better off would be the wrong thing to prioritise as leader.

Mark Harper and Andrea Leadsom also plan campaign launches. Earlier, Mrs Leadsom said she would find a way to bring about a "managed exit" from the EU, even without a deal Sam Gyimah says as prime minister he would help young people get on the housing ladder by slashing stamp duty and creating at least a million new homes in five years.

(BBC News Online, 10 June 2019)

From pledges about the living wage, aid budget, pay rises to public sector workers, Brexit negotiations and tax cuts, the BBC News Online item featured a lot of perspectives with limited context or background about their competing claims.

Similarly, in a BBC News item about the competing stances regarding the Irish backstop in relation to Brexit, we found Conservative leadership positions outlined at length but with only partial interpretation about the credibility of their competing claims. It was left to two sources – from the European Commission and the Irish government – to very briefly and generally rebuke these claims (one of which was taken from a tweet).

Summary

Across almost all outlets, there was a greater focus on reporting policy issues than on stories about the processes of the contenders' campaigns. *Channel 5 News* at 5pm, however, supplied the largest proportion of airtime about the campaign rather than candidates' policy pledges. Of all the BBC outlets, Radio 5 Live *Breakfast* and *Newsnight* focused most heavily on process, in particular the voting procedures, as well as the candidates' characters and their electoral positions. But overall, *Newsnight*, as well as the BBC News Channel and *Channel 4 News*, all contained a high degree of policy information about the candidates. In their policy analysis, where journalists did not just supply factual information but scrutinised the context and background of candidates, *Newsnight*, along with *World at One*, stood out for its forensic analysis. Of the television news bulletins, a detailed level of analysis was most apparent on Channel 4 – where it represented 37.3% of its total coverage – compared to 28.8% on ITV *News at Ten* and 24.8% on BBC *News at Ten*. Channel 5 reported this topic just three times, providing some policy analysis in each item

The coverage, understandably, was dominated by Conservative candidates, MPs and party member perspectives. BBC outlets tended to feature the widest range of contenders within their lengthier news packages. For example, BBC News Online featured 71 sources in the nine items we examined over the sample period (a ratio of nearly eight sources per item).

But while several BBC outlets featured the voices of a wide range of Conservative contenders and supplied a high level of policy information about the candidates' competing perspectives, journalists did not always supply a great deal of context, analysis or background about these positions. Occasionally the BBC reported very brief soundbites from candidates without contesting their assertions. In other words, the BBC covered the Conservative leadership, but did not always *uncover* the claims and counter-claims of the candidates' competing policy positions. We observed that Channel 4 most often appeared to question or scrutinise a Conservative candidate's position.

Of course, BBC and Channel 4 bulletins operate under different constraints. The former is approximately 25 minutes while the latter is 55 minutes. The BBC's Six and Ten television news Editor, for example, acknowledged the importance of covering Westminster politics, but also outlined the challenges of covering complex events with limited time. In response to a question about how far Westminster politics should shape news selection, he said:

It's keeping that balance, and then there are fairness questions. If a political party is making what is perceived as a big announcement over wages, or the world of work, or whatever it is, then yes we may be obliged that we've got to sort of cover that primary announcement and the things they're saying, and it might then be we've got to do another piece perhaps out of Westminster, that then sort of reflects on some of that and goes deeper...from a TV bulletin perspective, you've only got finite time, and so things can get squeezed. Does the process, the Westminster announcement win because you've got to get some other stories in as well?... Obviously, in bulletin forms, in bulletin terms, we're in the business of compression. We're in the business of stripping things out and getting to the essential claim, or the kernel of what the story is about, and so it's really zeroing in on that. Whereas longer news programme can spend five minutes talking about it, we've got to boil it down into perhaps 30 seconds, or Katya Adler or Laura Kuenssberg, in half of their live two-way, are going to address that particular point.

The head of News and Current Affairs at Channel 4 News pointed out the importance of going beyond the soundbite in political coverage. But she observed that politicians were increasingly avoiding scrutiny in extended interviews. In her words:

Newsnight and Channel 4 News are long-form programmes, so politicians don't want to come on to them because, as I said, they say they hate the soundbite. Well, they like it more than they like being cross-examined for 20 minutes, I can tell you that. There is a real problem of politicians not any longer thinking it is their duty to put themselves through the wringer, I suppose you could say... Democratic debate doesn't work if lots of the key players in democracy don't want to come on and be questioned and then answer the question truthfully.

Balancing the degree to which politicians are allowed to air their views while ensuring robust journalistic scrutiny of their statements is clearly difficult generally but particularly in shorter news bulletins. But while half hour bulletins have less time to probe and challenge politicians than longer programmes, they still remain widely watched and trusted by audiences.

In order to inform all BBC news output about ensuring all claims and counter-claims are accurately understood and communicated by journalists, its Editorial Director explained one recent editorial development:

we now have a statistician who looks at all these things [announcements by political parties and politicians] and supports us in making decisions, which is a relatively new addition to how we work...we've got Reality Check... Audiences consume content, and they consume content from the BBC via the bulletin, which has a certain role, and via online, which has a different role, and that checking, reality checking, making sure that the audiences are clear on what's right and what's wrong, as far as we can call that, is very clear.

Clearly, editors and journalists across different organisations are exploring new ways of ensuring audiences receive accurate news and information in an increasingly crowded digital media environment.

Case Study 2: Brexit

Brexit has been the most prominent UK news story since the referendum to leave the EU was called in 2016, so this case study paid special attention to the range and depth of Brexit reporting over the three-week sample. We examined coverage at a critical point in time: the approach to reporting Brexit changed in the UK news media during our sample period. Once Theresa May had resigned on 24 May 2019, the focus of coverage shifted from reporting her negotiated Withdrawal Agreement to considering the future plans of the candidates vying to be the next PM. This meant that during the period of analysis a significant proportion of Brexit coverage became entangled with the Conservative leadership contest, which made up the single biggest category of news in the three-week sample period.

Nevertheless, the main sample also uncovered a small but significant subset of news *primarily about Brexit* rather than the Conservative leadership contest or UK politics more generally. Since we examined only the top five topics per day in online media, we excluded all commercial online items from this sample. However, in order to consider BBC News Online in more depth we identified five additional items that appeared during the three-week sample period (3 to 21 June 2019). In total, this case study comparatively analysed 66 news items about Brexit across BBC radio, TV and online, and commercial radio and television news.

We examined the level of policy information and policy analysis provided across different news outlets and platforms, the main topics addressed, the sources used to inform coverage, and the dominant geographic perspective through which Brexit was reported. Since research has shown that public knowledge about EU membership is often inaccurate¹⁷ and that many people have struggled to understand the government's position during the Brexit negotiations¹⁸, the news media have a critical role in explaining on what trade and policy terms the UK might exit the EU.

Indeed, all interviewees acknowledged the importance of constantly explaining the complexity of exiting the EU when asked about the challenges associated with Brexit reporting. As the Director of News and Current Affairs at ITV said, its

an age-old dilemma - explaining Middle East peace, or Northern Ireland during the Troubles, and it applies to Brexit. I remember in the summer of 2016 - this really does show how long ago it was - we didn't use the word Brexit without explaining what it meant, and at some point we took the view that viewers knew what it mean. Likewise we've done a number of pieces, including dedicating an entire edition of the Tonight programme, explaining what the Backstop is and what the consequences around the Irish border are. You can't remind people enough about what some of these terms mean.

¹⁷ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/public-wrong-on-key-facts-around-brexit-and-impact-of-eu-membership>

¹⁸ <https://www.bmgresearch.co.uk/bmg-independent-public-unclear-governments-plans-brexit/>

Similarly, the BBC's Editor of Six and Ten television news bulletins said:

with Brexit, and with other complicated stories, you've just got to keep explaining and clarifying all the time. To me if, at the end of a 10 or 12 minute sequence on the 10 O'clock News about Brexit, you are sitting there at the end scratching your head thinking, I didn't really understand a lot of that, or I didn't really follow that, or it didn't make a lot... then we have failed. Particularly with Brexit, we want to make it engaging, we want to make it watchable, and we want to make it interesting, but in the end, the most important thing we've got to do is make it intelligible and help the audience understand the latest phase of the story. So that's always in the forefront. We would try and not talk about the backstop without qualifying what it is. Obviously, the challenge then is qualifying what it is in five or ten seconds can be quite hard and you might need 45 seconds to do that, and you haven't got 45 seconds and you did it the night before, so you're thinking we did it the night before so maybe we don't need to do it tonight, and it's a bit repetitious, and all of that. So that's kind of where the challenge comes in. ... And then there will be days where we're using our shorthand to just try and give you bitesize explanations of the key terminology we're talking about, or we're directing to the website, so you can get into that glossary of terms if you want to find out more, or if it hasn't been as clear as perhaps you required. I'm sure most editors and journalists in the country would agree, nothing is less satisfying than a Brexit sequence where, at the end of it, you're just thinking what was all that about, and so it has kind of forced us to go down that route.

According to its Editor, Channel 5's Brexit coverage was self-consciously distinctive from other broadcasters. As she put it:

My viewers don't wake up to the Today Programme and they don't go to bed with Newsnight. My programmes are probably the only news programmes they watch in a day, so we don't assume knowledge. A lot of Brexit reporting is very much like, oh so there's this latest comment... and who really cares if Barnier has tweeted something, or how big a deal is it, how much has it changed people? We look at it from that perspective rather than, oh my god this amazing... have you seen this spat? It's about that kind of focus rather than it being an insider's storytelling; it's like, why is this important today?

In discussing Channel 4's coverage, its Head of News and Current Affairs explained the difficulties behind producing output understandable for audiences:

One of the biggest challenges is that it is very difficult to understand... Because it is very hard to understand and, therefore, our tendency is, well, I explained the Backstop to you yesterday, to not explain it again today, and actually you can't have enough explanation. We've done these big explainers online which I think are really good. It's just a whole load of white men quarrelling with each other about something that hasn't happened yet. I mean that is difficult. Also, people aren't always telling you the truth... I feel strongly that we should all put more of our fact checking stuff into our television reports. One of the problems is that politicians on day A say something and

it's very difficult for us, in time for 7 o'clock, to have really dissected the truth of that, so quite often we dissect it later in the Fact Check, which is online. There is an argument - should we be coming back to that story the next day and saying, you know we reported those statistics yesterday, well, we've looked into them further... That goes against our natural instincts because we think that's not news, but it is news because we didn't tell it to you yesterday. So, with all these claims and counter-claims flying around, us keeping up with them ourselves and also informing the viewers of how they judge the truth of them, that's a huge challenge.

Of course, our interviewees were discussing Brexit reporting generally. Our findings, however, have to be interpreted in the context of what happened in the three week monitoring period.

Our comparative analysis of Brexit coverage began with a focus on the level of policy coverage supplied by the news providers. Table 9.4 shows the time spent on Brexit reporting that contained almost none, some, or detailed information about Brexit policy.

Table 9.4: Percentage of policy information by item time (N in brackets)

	BBC News Online	LBC	talkRADIO	BBC News at Ten	Channel 4 News	Sky News	BBC News Channel	ITV News	Newsnight	Radio 5 Live Breakfast	Radio 4 World at One	Radio 4 Today	Total
Almost none	/	/	/	/	8.7% (1)	9.2% (2)	25.0% (1)	29.4% (1)	/	30.9% (1)	5.8 % (1)	13.1% (4)	18.2% (11)
Some	62.5% (5)	100% (1)	100% (1)	100% (3)	91.3% (7)	90.8% (3)	75.0% (4)	70.6% (2)	85.7% (5)	69.1% (2)	94.2% (5)	41.3% (6)	72.7% (44)
Detailed	37.5% (3)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	14.3% (1)	/	/	45.9% (1)	9.1% (5)
Total	100% (8)	100% (1)	100% (1)	100% (3)	100% (8)	100% (5)	100% (5)	100% (3)	100% (6)	100% (3)	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (60)

Overall, we found that very few items featured detailed information about the context or background of Brexit policy. Those that did were drawn from BBC outlets, including three on BBC News Online, and one each from the BBC News app, *Newsnight* and *Today*. For example, BBC News Online provided a lengthy descriptive account of Labour's Brexit policy options (19 June 2019), while the BBC News app reported the details of a preliminary post-Brexit deal with South Korea. The News app item contained a relatively high level of information about a possible trade deal between the two nations. The article read:

International Trade Secretary Liam Fox signed the deal with his South Korean counterpart Yoo Myung-hee in Seoul.

The preliminary agreement marks the first post-Brexit trade deal the UK has secured in Asia.

The agreement is roughly in line with the terms of the existing Korea-EU FTA.

"In so far as a (UK-S Korea) deal has been struck that's a landmark moment," Mouhammed Choukeir, chief investment officer at private bank Kleinwort Hambros told BBC 5 Live Breakfast's Wake Up to Money.

"Where it's not a big deal is that actually the biggest trading bloc still needs to be negotiated - the EU and US."

The deal would cover South Korean exports including cars and auto parts. South Korea exports mostly cars and ships to Britain, while it imports crude oil, cars and whisky.

The agreement is designed to provide stability under a no-deal Brexit, with the UK due to leave the EU on 31 October, with or without a deal.

Mr Fox said: "The value of trade between the UK and Korea has more than doubled since the EU-Korea agreement was applied in 2011.

"Providing continuity in our trading relationship will allow businesses in the UK and Korea to keep trading without any additional barriers, which will help us further increase trade in the years ahead,"

"As we face growing global economic headwinds, our strong trading relationship will be crucial in driving economic growth and supporting jobs throughout the UK and Korea."

Both countries aim to ratify the deal by the end of October and implement it in November.

"The deal is significant as it eased uncertainties sparked by Brexit, amid the already challenging environment for exports on the escalating trade row between Washington and Beijing," Ms Yoo said.

South Korea - Asia's fourth largest economy - is a global leader in electronics, steel and auto industry.

The country's exports to the UK hit \$6.36bn (£5.0bn) last year.

The UK is South Korea's second largest trading partner among EU members, and the Asian nation's 18th largest trading partner. The UK is pushing to strike agreements with its trading partners as the Brexit deadline looms.

As a member of the EU, the UK is part of 40 trade deals which the EU has with other countries.

If the UK leaves the EU without a deal, it would fall out of these deals immediately, disrupting about 11% of UK total trade.

A priority for the government has been to get these countries to roll over their trade deals with the UK.

So far the UK has agreed "continuity" deals with 12 countries and regions, including Israel, Norway and Iceland, Switzerland and Chile.

(BBC News app, 10 June 2019)

Similarly, in a *Newsnight* interview with Neale Richmond, an Irish Fine Gael Senator, there was an informative discussion about the role of the so-called Irish backstop in the Brexit negotiations.

Anchor: Clearly Boris Johnson's point is 'it's obvious, there is another way to do this...'

Neale Richmond: The whole suggestion of alternative arrangements, technological solutions or indeed the context of the Malthouse compromise that was thrashed out a number of months ago has all been put before. And, we have been quite clear from a European point of view that we need real guarantees to guarantee that the border of the island of Ireland maintains itself as completely open and free. We very much hoped to do that through a deep and meaningful trade and customs regulatory agreement between the UK and the EU as a whole. If not, we will indeed look at alternative arrangements and technological solutions. However, none of these... no credible solutions have been presented. Therefore, we do need the backstop in order to provide that insurance, that guarantee both for the Irish and British governments, but us as the European side as a whole to make sure that we protect that peace agreement. The suggestion that alternative arrangements can replace that is completely out of left field and does not stand up to scrutiny.

Anchor: Well no, come on... let's deal with alternative arrangements briefly. Yes, some of it is examined before, technology for example. But even under the arrangements envisaged currently certain types of regulatory checks are envisaged aren't they. Not customs, if the withdrawal agreement went through, but regulatory checks away from the border, animal health that kind of thing. It is not an outrageous idea surely to extend that principal.

Neale Richmond: To be frank, we have put quite clearly that if alternative arrangements or technological solutions are to be the future, we need to see real proposals, not aspirations. Real genuine meaningful proposals...

Anchor: Sorry, I have got to push you on this though. He is not suggesting primarily technological solutions, is he? He is suggesting physical checks away from the border which is something in the regulatory part of the plan, obviously not the customs part but the regulatory part on standards and things like that is envisaged. So why would it be so outrageous to extend that principal to more goods or things coming across?

Neale Richmond: Well with respect to the comments of Mr Johnson himself today, but I would like to address the wider comments, not just of comments of those running for leadership of the Conservative party. But indeed, people from the Labour party and across the political media spectrum. A 20 second, 30 second intervention on one radio show does not provide a full solution to what is the most pressing problem for us going forward. We have to guarantee the peace. We need the insurance policy of the backstop, which isn't just based around regulatory alignment, it is very important, it deals with customs, it deals with EU and UK wide customs agreement which was a major concession by the European side. The withdrawal agreement and the three parts relating to the situation on the island of Ireland is very very clear. Once we agree with the withdrawal agreement we can negotiate of course, absolute flexibility on the future political framework...

(*Newsnight*, 14 June 2019)

While this and the other examples reflected news items with a relatively high level of detail about negotiations or trade deals, overall a large majority of Brexit news, across all outlets, provided only *some* degree of policy information. For example, a BBC reporter on *News at Ten* featured some policy information about Brexit from an EU perspective, but it was combined with news about UK Parliamentary politics and some insightful analysis of the UK's political situation.

Reporter: Don't expect much of an official reaction, but EU politicians from across the continent were dipping in and out of that BBC debate and the comments I have heard so far, off the record, have not been particularly complimentary. The EU thinks most of those leadership candidates are not being realistic. EU leaders preparing to come to Brussels at the end of this week for a summit are also preparing a united determined front when it comes to the idea of renegotiating the Brexit deal, and their answer is no. Even if Sophie, if the EU were tempted to reopen some of those questions, such as when it comes to the Irish backstop, those conversations could never be finished by the 31st October, which is the date which most of those leadership candidates say they want to leave the EU. And that is why this evening the EU thinks the idea of an no deal Brexit is becoming increasingly likely. They heard say this evening that Boris Johnson if there were to be no deal then the UK should have this transition period, where it still retains the advantages of EU membership while it negotiates with the EU the future trade relations. Absolutely not says the EU,

because that would be like them rewarding a no deal Brexit. And we know Sophie, the EU wants to avoid a no deal Brexit, it would hurt them too. But they are convinced it will hurt the UK more, and they believe in case of a no deal the new UK Prime Minister would be forced to come back to Brussels and knock on the door and say ‘look, please can we start talking about trade’. And before they do that, EU leaders say they will insist on sorting out the Irish border issue first. That very same issue that bedevilled those Conservative leadership candidates tonight.

(BBC *News at Ten*, 18 June 2019)

Across most news outlets, there were also a few items where no policy information was supplied. These were typically shorter pieces, but they still represented a sizeable proportion of the airtime these outlets spent reporting Brexit. The following examples represent brief BBC radio news items about the processes involved in the UK exiting the EU, rather than providing in-depth policy information.

A senior UK diplomat has warned that Brexit is causing lasting damage to Britain’s reputation abroad. Scott Wightman was giving his final report to the Foreign Office before leaving his post as High Commissioner to Singapore. He said political leaders there were baffled by the UK’s chaotic politics and the claims of candidates in the Conservative leadership contest.

(Radio 4 *Today*, 13 June 2019)

Change UK, the political party, is less than four months old but it is meeting today to discuss if it has a future after up to half of its MPs are rumoured to be poised to leave. The disagreements in the party became rather obvious when the MP Anna Soubry voiced her irritation, frustration, with Heidi Allen on the *Today* programme after the EU election results where Change UK failed to win any seats and took just 3% of the votes.

(Radio 4 *World at One*, 4 June 2019)

In both instances, news about domestic and internal UK party politics shaped the Brexit coverage.

We then examined the *degree of policy analysis* journalists supplied in every Brexit news item, which involved going beyond describing events or issues in order to analyse their wider context and consequence. Table 9.5 shows that while most outlets contained news predominantly devoid of policy analysis, in more than half the total time spent reporting Brexit there was some degree of background and context. But only five items – all from the BBC – supplied, according to our criteria, detailed policy analysis by including a substantive level of context and/or background about Brexit from a range of perspectives.

Table 9.5: Percentage of policy analysis by item times (N in brackets)

	BBC News Online	LBC	talkRADIO	BBC News at Ten	Channel 4 News	Sky News	BBC News Channel	ITV News	Newsnight	Radio 5 Live Breakfast	Radio 4 World at One	Radio 4 Today	Total
Almost none	/	100% (1)	100% (1)	21.5% (1)	10.9% (2)	9.2% (2)	68.6% (4)	61.1% (2)	43.8% (3)	100% (3)	52.2% (4)	26.2% (9)	36.1% (32)
Some	62.5% (5)	/	/	78.5% (2)	89.1% (6)	90.8% (3)	31.4% (1)	38.9% (1)	41.8% (2)	/	47.8% (2)	27.8% (1)	51.2% (23)
Detailed	37.5% (3)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	14.4% (1)	/	/	46.0% (1)	12.7% (5)
Total	100% (8)	100% (1)	100% (1)	100% (3)	100% (8)	100% (5)	100% (5)	100% (3)	100% (6)	100% (3)	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (60)

BBC News Online provided three detailed analytical pieces about Brexit, including an item where the journalist considered Labour's options for preventing a no-deal Brexit in Parliament.

MPs have rejected a Labour-led effort to take control of Parliament's timetable, blocking the latest attempt to stop a no-deal Brexit. The Commons opposed the move by 309 votes to 298. If passed, it would have given opponents of a no-deal Brexit the chance to table legislation to thwart the UK leaving without any agreement on the 31 October deadline. The result of the vote was greeted with cheers from the Tory benches. But Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn responded by shouting "you won't be cheering in September".

Ten Tory MPs, mostly pro-Europeans, rebelled against the government by backing Labour's motion. Conversely, eight Labour MPs - mostly Eurosceptics or MPs in constituencies which voted Leave at the referendum - defied party instructions and voted against it. A key factor for the government was the support of Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionists, who have voted against Theresa May during previous Brexit votes. No deal would mean the UK leaving the EU without any agreement about the "divorce" process.

Overnight, the country would be out of the single market, customs union and institutions such as the European Court of Justice and Europol. There are fears about widespread disruption in such an event - to trade, travel and the functioning of the Irish border, in particular.

The opposition said the Commons defeat was disappointing, but it still believed there was a majority in the Commons against a no deal and it remained "determined to win this fight". "There will be other procedural mechanisms we can use," shadow Brexit Secretary Sir Keir Starmer said. "We are already looking at what those other opportunities will be."

Number 10 said giving MPs a "blank cheque" to dictate Brexit policy would have set a troubling precedent. The UK was originally supposed to leave the EU on 29 March. But the EU decided on a seven-month extension after MPs rejected the terms of withdrawal on three occasions. Opponents of a no-deal exit are concerned that Theresa May's successor as prime minister could seek to take the UK out of the EU without parliamentary approval for such an outcome.

Tory leadership frontrunner Boris Johnson and several of his rivals have said the UK must leave the EU by the revised date, whether a deal is passed or not. Wednesday's motion - supported by the Lib Dems, the SNP and Plaid Cymru, as well as some Conservatives, would not, by itself, have ruled out a no deal.

However, its supporters hoped to start a process on 25 June which could culminate with Parliament blocking the UK leaving without an agreement - in effect, tying the next prime minister's hands.

Backing the motion, Conservative ex-minister Sir Oliver Letwin said the case for ensuring Parliament had a "decisive vote" on the next PM's Brexit plan ahead of the 31 October deadline transcended party politics. Given that leaving without a deal remains the default legal position, he said it was "perfectly possible" for the next PM to usher in a no-deal exit by "simply doing nothing" at all.

Tory Remain supporter and former Attorney General Dominic Grieve said the motion was the "last sensible opportunity" to stop no deal. He added that in the future, if necessary, he would support efforts to bring down a Conservative government in a vote of no confidence if it was the only way to block such an outcome.

But veteran Eurosceptic Conservative Sir Bill Cash said it was a "phantom motion" which paved the way for "government by Parliament". "It just simply opens the door for any bill of any kind to take precedence over government business," he told by MPs. "It is inconceivable as a matter of constitutional convention."

After the defeat, the deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats, Jo Swinson, accused the Conservatives of "putting party loyalty ahead of national interest".

This is not the first time that MPs have attempted to seize control of the Commons order paper in order to shift government policy on Brexit. MPs voted in March to oblige Mrs May to seek a Brexit delay from the EU. But efforts by Sir Oliver and others to come up with an alternative Brexit plan failed in April after MPs rejected all the options in a series of indicative votes.

(BBC News Online, 12 June 2019)

On Radio 4 *Today* there was a detailed analytical piece that arose from an interview with Mark Rutte, the Dutch PM, when the reporter asked about EU policy-making generally, and then focused on the UK's negotiating options.

Mark Rutte: "I do believe the EU is moving in a direction which many in the UK would like, it is a European Union which is much more focused on few core issues like internal markets, like handling migration, like handling climate change and not being everything to everybody. Not dealing with pensions, healthcare, social security, this is left to the member states. There is no talk of a European army, I am deadest against it. I do believe in working together but not in a European defence system."

Anchor: "Some talk about it..."

Mark Rutte: "You always have people talking about visions and things for the future, but I don't believe you should do that."

Anchor: "Let's look at the idea of another extension, what would happen if the new prime minister asked for one in the lead up to the end of October."

Mark Rutte: "Well it has to be a unanimous decision. When the new prime minister comes in and asks for an extension, we also have to learn what his plan will be, in terms of new elections, new referendums, making changes to the red lines the UK is

currently holding. If nothing is happening and it would mean after 31st October, again, going through the rounds and these traditional talks on ‘can we make change?... no, you can’t, because you have to change the red lines’ then there is no point in having an extension.”

Anchor: “So the Netherlands always describes itself as a friend of the United Kingdom, so as a friend, can you give some friendly advice to these leadership candidates. They are making all sorts of promises and statements. What is realistic and what is pie in the sky. For example, the idea of renegotiation come Autumn, is it realistic?”

Mark Rutte: “No. What they could do is look together, collectively at the political agreement which is below let’s say the withdrawal agreement, the political declaration, the future relationship and then we could make certain changes if the United Kingdom would tell us they would want to deal with the border, the issue of Northern Ireland staying an intricate [sic] part of the United Kingdom, not only... again, as a part of the country but not being part of the customs union or the internal market. If there are no changes on all those positions, I cannot see why it makes any sense to negotiate any longer.”

Anchor: “So you are saying no to renegotiations, that is what we are expecting EU leaders to say now. If come the autumn and the EU were to be tempted to open some discussions about the political declaration, or about some kind of addendum, or some discussion on the backstop, just let’s say possibly. If any new conversations were to start could they be finished by the 31st October, because most of the candidates are saying we have to be out by then.”

Mark Rutte: “On what basis would we start these discussions on the political declaration, and it has to be a signal from the United Kingdom, from the new Prime Minister, the new government coming in, saying this is what we want to change and our position. Because if the position doesn’t change the only solution on the table is the present solution, again because there is no technical, practical or logistical solution given the current red lines being drawn by Theresa May and her government.”

(Radio 4 *Today*, 20 June 2019)

Apart from the BBC’s online reporting, as well as items on *Newsnight* and *Today*, most coverage only supplied *some degree* of context and background about Brexit. In a widely reported story about protestors interrupting the Chancellor’s Mansion House speech, for example, the BBC *News at Ten* and Channel 4 supplied some analysis of his speech, but the coverage was mainly a descriptive account of the events of the night.

Anchor: “Climate change protestors have disrupted the Chancellors annual Mansion House speech to bankers in the city of London. A number of women dressed in red held up proceedings for several minutes as Phillip Hammond began to speak. When he got back on his feet, he warned against a no deal Brexit and said the next Prime

Minister may have to consider a second referendum, here is our Economics Correspondent Dharshini David.”

Reporter: “It could be Phillip Hammonds final appearance at the finance industries annual knees up and the Chancellor got more than he was bargained for... (clip of climate change protestors) ...climate protestors removed, it was onto another potential disruption, the perils of a no deal Brexit.”

Phillip Hammond: “We cannot allow ourselves to be force to choose between our democracy and our prosperity and if the new prime minister cannot end the deadlock in parliament then he will have to explore other democratic mechanisms to break the impasse, because if he fails his job will be on the line and so too will be the jobs and prosperity of millions of our fellow citizens.”

Reporter: “And a no deal could threaten tax cuts too. Well here at the Treasury they reckon they about £25 billion or so extra over the next few years which could be used to alleviate austerity by spending let’s say on schools or defence without breaking the rules on public finances. But Mr Hammond has been reluctant to ear mark that cash. He is concerned that he may need it in the event of a no deal to alleviate say disruptions or shortages or to shore up the public finances.”

(BBC *News at Ten*, 20 June 2019)

Reporter: “Well, Mansion House is the City of London’s big set piece; six hundred bank bosses and money managers all gather. But Mr Hammonds speech is really directed simply at Boris Johnson, he is going to warn that a no deal Brexit will squander the twenty-seven billion pounds that he has saved for the country and that promises of tax cuts and public spending boasts are simply pie in the sky if you pursue no deal. And this all comes on the day that the Bank of England has downgraded growth in the UK for the last three months to zero because of Brexit uncertainty.”

(*Channel 4 News*, 20 June 2019).

Finally, across a number of outlets, there was very little analysis of policy, primarily because during the sample period the focus was on the process of UK political events. LBC and talkRADIO, for example, reported short, largely descriptive items.

The UK and South Korea have reached an agreement on a post-Brexit trade deal. It will allow the two countries to keep buying and selling freely. It aims to maintain stability after the UK leaves the EU, even in a no-deal scenario.

(LBC, 10 June 2019)

UK and South Korea have signed a trade deal which will take effect after Brexit. It will allow the two countries to keep buying and selling freely. International trade sectary Liam Fox has signed the deal in the South Korean capital Seoul.

(talkRADIO, 10 June 2019)

On the BBC News Channel and Radio 4's *News at One*, there was also a large proportion of airtime about Brexit that was largely devoid of policy analysis – 68.6% and 52.2% respectively – despite containing some useful background policy information.

Anchor: “Change UK, the political party, is less than four months old but it is meeting today to discuss if it has a future after up to half of its MPs are rumoured to be poised to leave. The disagreements in the party became rather obvious when the MP Anna Soubry voiced her irritation, frustration, with Heidi Allen on the *Today* programme after the EU election results where Change UK failed to win any seats and took just 3% of the votes.”

(Radio 4 *World at One*, 4 June 2019)

It is of course difficult to extrapolate about Brexit news coverage from a relatively small number of items across a wide range of outlets over three weeks. And Brexit coverage was overshadowed at this point in time by the Conservative leadership contest, which meant that the news focused more on the future plans of each candidate rather than dissecting the intricacies of any ongoing negotiations with the EU or the ramifications of possible trade deals. That said, overall, we identified that most news items were ‘policy-lite’, with only some background, context and analysis of issues. This was the case for most of the BBC outlets examined, with the exception of BBC News Online, *Today* and *Newsnight*, where perhaps the more generous time and the format of live interviewing allowed for more informative and analytical reporting. While commercial radio was largely free of policy information and analysis, the evening television news bulletins – including the BBC *News at Ten* – featured no in-depth Brexit coverage.

The limited coverage of Brexit was compounded by the narrow lens through which Brexit was reported. With the exception of a few items, we found that almost all news about Brexit (93.9%) focused primarily on UK party political viewpoints. While there were moments when an EU perspective was provided by reporters or anchors playing devil’s advocate in interviews, very few items substantively covered Brexit from the standpoint of the European Commission or other EU member states. When these viewpoints came to the fore, they provided useful insights that might have helped audiences understand political relations between the UK, the EU and its member states (this was evident to a greater extent in BBC coverage of the Conservative leadership contest – see Case Study 1). So, for example, a relatively brief *Today* item reported that:

The European Commission will update its guidance on dealing with a no-deal Brexit later today. A leaked document suggests there are a number of areas where more preparations are needed, including insurance, payment services and licences for international train drivers. It also says Brussels will seek an agreement with the UK on fishing rights in British waters for next year, if there is no Brexit deal at the end of October.

(Radio 4 *Today*, 12 June 2019).

Similarly, the BBC News Channel reported the EU’s stance about the Withdrawal Agreement not being up for renegotiation, from its perspective:

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has said that the UK’s next Prime Minister will have to respect the Brexit deal which is already on the table. At an event organised by the Politico website, Mr Juncker said that there could be “clarifications, precisions, additions” to the Political Declaration on the future relationship, but no renegotiation of the Withdrawal Agreement.

(BBC News Channel, 11 June 2019)

But these examples were rare moments when Brexit was viewed through the prism of the EU. The framing of UK perspectives in Brexit reporting was reflected in the *routine sourcing* of UK politicians, rather than hearing or reading the perspectives of EU officials or its member states. As Table 9.6 reveals, as a proportion of all politicians or political institutions directly sourced, 83.2% were from elected UK parties.

Table 9.6: The number of types of sources in the reporting of Brexit news items

	Elected UK parties and politicians	EU politicians and institutions	Non-EU political institutions	EU member state politicians	Other	Total
BBC News Online	35	/	1	/	19	55
BBC News app	1	/	1	/	2	4
ITV News app	3	/	/	/	7	10
Sky News app	7	/	/	/	1	8
BBC News at Ten	3	2	/	1	1	7
Channel 4 News	11	/	/	/	7	18
Sky News	8	/	/	/	/	8
BBC News Channel	4	1	/	2	1	8
ITV News	3	/	/	2	2	7
Newsnight	12	/	/	2	/	14
Radio 5 Live Breakfast	1	/	/	/	1	2
Radio 4 World at One	12	/	/	1	3	16
Radio 4 Today	9	/	1	8	5	23
Total	109	3	3	16	49	180

There were just three EU actors – Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission and two European Union unidentified spokespeople – who appeared over the three-week sample period. Two of these were on the *BBC News at Ten* and one on the *BBC*

News Channel. We found no direct sourcing of EU officials on commercial television and radio news.

There was also limited engagement with the perspectives of EU member states; just 16 sources were seen or heard across 13 outlets over three weeks. Apart from two sources on *ITV News at Ten*, these sources all featured in BBC News outlets. However, the cast of member state representatives revolved around only five sources – Neale Richmond, an Irish Fine Gael Senator, Bruno Bonnell, a Member of the French National Assembly, Mark Rutte, the Dutch Prime Minister, Xavier Bettel, the Prime Minister of Luxembourg and Leo Varadkar, the Irish Prime Minister – rather than reflecting the views of a wide range of EU member states. The other sources were primarily made up of UK spokespeople from the world of business, media, non-governmental departments, and other organisations.

Reporting Brexit almost entirely through a UK prism was also evident in the topics addressed in the overall coverage. Table 9.7 shows that, during the sample period, the biggest single topic was about the Labour party's Brexit position, representing almost one in four items; 24.2% of coverage overall. This was made up principally by *Newsnight*; five of the six items it reported about Brexit focused on the machinations of the Labour party leadership.

Table 9.7: Percentage of news item focus, by outlet (N in brackets)

	BBC News Online	LBC	Talk Radio	BBC News app	ITV News app	Sky News app	BBC News at Ten	Channel 4 News	Sky News	BBC News Channel	ITV News	Newsnight	Radio 5 Live Break fast	Radio 4 World at One	Radio 4 Today	Total
Trade agreements	12.5% (1)	100% (1)	100% (1)	50.0% (1)	/	50.0% (1)	33.3% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	33.3% (1)	/	9.1% (1)	12.1% (8)
Change UK split	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	16.7% (1)	/	1.5% (1)
Brexit contingency planning	25.0% (2)	/	/	50.0% (1)	50.0% (1)	/	/	12.5% (1)	/	/	/	/	33.3% (1)	/	9.1% (1)	10.6% (7)
Labour party Brexit position	12.5% (1)	/	/	/	50.0% (1)	50.0% (1)	33.3% (1)	12.5% (1)	40.0% (2)	20.0% (1)	33.3% (1)	83.3% (5)	/	/	18.2% (2)	24.2% (16)
Cross-party motion to stop no-deal	12.5% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	/	37.5% (3)	20.0% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	/	7.6% (5)
Brexit negotiations	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	12.5% (1)	/	20.0% (1)	33.3% (1)	16.7% (1)	/	/	27.3% (3)	10.6% (7)
Conservative leadership candidate pledges	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	12.5% (1)	/	/	/	/	33.3% (1)	50.0% (3)	/	7.6% (5)
Brexit timetable	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	20.0% (1)	20.0% (1)	/	/	/	33.3% (2)	9.1% (1)	7.6% (5)
Brexit damaging UK reputation	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	9.1% (1)	1.5% (1)

Many of the other topics reported were about UK concerns and anxieties about Brexit, including Parliamentary procedures, fears about damaging the country's reputation, contingency planning for a no-deal outcome and the broader implications of exiting the EU without a deal, as well as other domestic party political issues. The possibility of new international trade agreements was, in a similar vein, largely discussed in the context of UK policy-making. There were also five items involving Conservative leadership contenders, which we included as Brexit items as they were substantively about exiting the EU, such as an intervention from the head of the Bank of England, and an interview with Jake Berry – a supporter of Boris Johnson – about Brexit policy

Not including a greater range of views from the EU arguably limited the degree to which audiences were exposed to the positions of both sides of the negotiations. As UK news media outlets reported Brexit almost exclusively through the lens of UK politicians and political parties, audiences were largely reliant on understanding the EU's motives and actions by reading or hearing what UK politicians said or journalists analysed. This tended to be framed by partisan, domestic concerns. Moreover, counter-balancing UK politicians' claims about key sticking points in the Brexit negotiations – whether the Irish backstop or a no-deal scenario – with EU or member state officials may have enhanced the range and depth of reporting, raising audience understanding of how the UK should exit the EU.

So, for example, in a *World at One* interview with Dominic Raab – a Conservative leadership candidate – the focus was on his Brexit proposal. While the journalist attempted to provide an EU perspective, this position was not sustained, allowing the UK politician to frame the EU as continuing to negotiate with “stubborn intransigence” and that characterisation was not directly rebuffed.

Anchor: “He is not alone in saying that, not just that Europe doesn't want to be going back to the negotiations, but even if they did there isn't time between now and the time of our departure from the European Union. And, that means that effectively if you're giving that as a hard date what you are really saying is that you are leaving without an agreement.”

Dominic Raab: “I don't accept... there is a series of assumptions there which I don't accept. To start with, of course the EU and of course in particular people close to Emmanuel Macron would say that now. And, there is time, and of course the extension was agreed by the EU and Macron was pivotal to it. So, if they have sort of disarmed themselves from the ability to continuing negotiating then I am afraid that poses more question them. What is important and what Boris Johnson has said that arm of friendship will remain extended, we have got the chances to get the changes needed to leave with a deal. But of course, you are absolutely right to say if the EU just doesn't budge, if it continues this stubborn intransigent, we are committed under a Boris Johnson premiership to leave at the end of October. Very briefly, what is clear, it is the EUs choice if we leave on WTO terms. And, I think the public will understand that.”

Anchor: “What evidence is there that Brussels is making this up and that is purely tactical and that they don't mean what they say?”

Dominic Raab: “Well, I think there is a divergent and variety of views that was always my experience as Brexit secretary, and of course Emmanuel Macron has been on the harder line edge of things. And, I think they, of course, will want to avoid a no deal scenario because I think of the risks on the EU side, but we need to hold our nerve in this. What we can’t have is further deliberating paralysis, businesses need to know that we are going to leave, and they can plan accordingly. The country needs to know that we can keep our promise on Brexit and Boris Johnson is absolutely committed to that.”

(Radio 4 *World at One*, 19 June 2019)

Although there was an attempt by the BBC anchor to challenge Raab’s framing of the EU, it did not elicit a direct response. Since we heard very little from EU officials or member states, the vast majority of news items about Brexit were dominated by UK politicians and their largely domestic concerns.

Summary

Over the sample period, Brexit was overshadowed by the Conservative leadership contest and other high-profile political stories. This meant that stories about Brexit were pushed to the margins of the news agenda, which may partly explain why we found very few items with a substantive level of policy information and analysis on topics such as ongoing negotiations between the UK and EU, future trade deals or a no-deal scenario. Items that did appear came from BBC outlets, including BBC News Online, its News app, *Newsnight* and *Today*.

More generally, we found that Brexit coverage – including on BBC outlets – was overwhelmingly reported from the perspective of UK party political interests, rather than reflecting the wider views of EU or its member states. Most news providers relied to a large extent on UK politicians, with only a few BBC outlets directly sourcing the EU and then with only a narrow cast of five sources representing the 27 member states. At times anchors and reporters counterbalanced UK party political perspectives by referencing the EU’s position (this was apparent on the BBC) but these were not substantive or sustained positions within a news item.

As a consequence, on the BBC and other news providers, reporting was largely framed by partisan, domestic concerns, with journalists responding to internal UK political perspectives. It may appear, in this sense, entirely reasonable to understand Brexit almost exclusively through the lens of UK politicians and parties. We examined, after all, UK news media. But in doing so it limited the degree to which audiences were exposed to the positions of *both sides* of the negotiations, and meant they were largely reliant on understanding the EU’s motives through the lens of UK politicians and journalists. More regularly counterbalancing the claims of UK politicians with those of EU or member state officials might have enhanced the range and depth of Brexit coverage.

Broadcasters acknowledged that domestic political issues represent an important part of Brexit reporting, but pointed out that in routine coverage they would ordinarily expect UK and EU perspectives to inform coverage. As the Director of News and Current Affairs at ITV put it:

you can't cover this story properly without a proper understanding that there is a Westminster argument going on and a different European perspective. I think we've probably often give more time to explaining what's happening at Westminster but almost every time we've done that, we've given a summary of what's been happening in Europe at the same time. So it's the norm on a big Brexit night on News at Ten for Robert to be interviewed in the studio and for James Mates to be interviewed down the line from Europe. So I don't think viewers will ever pass through one of our programmes and think there's just a debate going on about this at Westminster without being reminded what the EU perspective is and, in some senses, that's probably because the EU position, at least in recent months, has remained rather more stable than the position of the UK Government...I think we do routinely source... but I think it's normally there but it might well occupy less time, and that's partly because actually since the agreement was struck between the May Government and the EU, the EU's position hasn't really changed and the UK Government's has.

Given the EU's stance has remained largely static in much of the Brexit negotiations, this does help explain the focus on UK parties in politicians in our study.

The BBC Six and Ten Editor of Television news bulletins similarly stressed the importance of balancing UK and European perspectives:

I suppose, inevitably, if you tot it up where our coverage is coming from, more of it is going to be coming from the UK and Westminster than it is from Brussels, or Berlin, or Paris. We're talking about it more as a country than they are and the implosions we've seen and everything we've seen, so there is inevitability there. But, absolutely, you can't understand one without understanding the other...Obviously, the UK Government in all its different guises over the last few years is going to project a version of Brexit, or the Withdrawal Agreement, or the way out, which they believe in, or they think is borne out by the deal that is being done and obviously Brussels, Berlin, Paris, etc. may have a different interpretation of that. You can't understand, say, the Brussels' position without understanding the tenets of the EU and what it was borne out of and what it is meant to represent and how it is meant to operate. Again, it would be highly unfulfilling coverage if all we were doing was one side of the story.

Meanwhile, the Editor of 5 News revealed how editorial coverage was largely driven by resource issues and making it relevant to viewers:

We do dip into the Brussels' world, but again it's when one of our major guys is going out there – if Boris Johnson is going out, or if the Foreign Secretary is going out, so that's when we more dip into that. The thing I find about Brexit is, it's not just polarising, it's splintering. There are so many kinds of shades of Brexit, so actually they might not have quite the same, but you will very often get a balanced piece just by kind of speaking to people back here. Our focus is very much domestic, so we will bring that in when it is relevant...But there will be relatively long periods where that's not a focus for us and it's about the internal struggles of the Tory Party and how they're dealing with it, so we think then about how we can make that feel like it's a relevant story for people rather than bringing in other elements. So it's quite a fluid version. What we don't have is a Brussels correspondent, a Westminster

correspondent, and something else; we just have Andy [Andy Bell the political editor], so he will very much pull everything in. That's where we use lives as well [live 2-way reporting]. Often we can't cover that because we don't have the coverage, we're not there, we don't have that interview, so Andy will pick up those elements in his lives as well. Lives aren't just for the sake of having a live, they're actually to add and enhance and give more information to people that we're not necessarily able to cover in the piece.

In considering the reporting of Westminster politics more generally, Channel 4's Head of News and Current Affairs articulated the editorial dilemma facing journalists with Brexit overshadowing other political issues and events:

I think we've all faced a challenge that we want to cover news outside Westminster, but news at Westminster has been so urgent, it's been so necessary for people to know it. I have felt concerned that there's so much to cover in Westminster that sometimes we're only going outside Westminster to get reaction to what's happening inside Westminster. Brexit has caused a real issue there. That's a challenge we've really got to work at.

All interviewees acknowledged the challenges associated with reporting Brexit at different stages since 2016. For a fuller picture of Brexit reporting, we would need to go beyond the three-week monitoring period of the study, which was overshadowed by the Conservative leadership contest.

Case study 3: Health and education in a devolved UK

Since 1999, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have had policy responsibilities from the UK parliament devolved to them in key areas such as health and education. What happens in English schools and hospitals, in other words, is governed by the UK parliament in Westminster, whereas the devolved administrations in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Stormont largely control decisions in health and education in their respective nations.

Given the devolution of power across the nations, reporting social policy on UK news outlets has become increasingly difficult for journalists. While both the BBC and ITV provide television news opt-outs in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as in many regions across England, many people in the UK continue to rely on UK-wide news television programmes, such as the BBC's *News at Ten*. They also rely on UK radio programming, such as Radio 4's *Today* and *World at One*. The focus of this study is on UK network media across broadcast and online news, rather than the nations and regions. But, as the BBC Editor of News and Current Affairs pointed out, "Nations and regions output is a very big, important part of the BBC's portfolio...some of the heavy lifting is done on services that are not network services". Similarly, ITV's Director of News and Current Affairs stated:

we don't just cover public affairs when it is headline news at Westminster, but things that affect our viewers which are small 'p' political but are part of a wider agenda. I think we are assisted in that by having a network of regional newsrooms right around the country who also does a lot of that sort of coverage, and also some network news correspondents who aren't based in London, or who aren't just reporting on the bubble.

We fully acknowledge that BBC and ITV news services in the nations and regions play an important role in informing audiences across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Although the BBC has local, regional and national online news sites across the four nations, in its websites on health and education, and family, all the UK stories are presented together, making it important that the devolved relevance of each item is clear.

However, the BBC's Online Editor stated it has attempted to ensure audiences within the nations access news and information that is directly relevant to them:

Over the last year we've introduced a thing for signed-in users where it will give you a different front page depending on which nation you are from. So between a third and 40% of the users coming to the front page on a daily basis are signed-in, and the teams in the nations now have the option of excluding some stories they feel aren't relevant to their nation, and promoting other stories they think are more relevant to their nation. If it is an England and Wales story that's not relevant in Northern Ireland, they can just take that off the front page now, so it can not appear at all, which I think gets around some of the issues we have had. The nations and regions have got quite a lot of control over that top story section, in terms of being able to exclude or promote things, which I think seems to be working well.

All interviewees made it clear their news organisations were editorially committed to covering the nations and regions accurately and fairly. Indeed, as the Editor of the BBC Six

and Ten television news bulletins stated when asked how conscious was about reporting devolved politics to UK audiences:

as an editor, we've got that obligation of universality and reflecting the whole of the UK, it's in our Charter, we've got to do it, and so that's that; and, as an editor, personally, one of the things that would bother me the most, and does bother me the most, is if people are turning around saying those programmes aren't for me, or they don't deliver for audiences in a particular part of the UK. That's a real issue and challenge for me and for BBC News and we can't tolerate that. So, on that basis, we need to be trying as hard as we can in a very thought through way to deliver for the whole of the UK.

The BBC's Editor of News and Current Affairs said a system of ensuring the whole of the UK is routinely reported across all output had recently been created:

We're reporting the UK to the UK. We have developed integration between the news operations we have in the four nations, including them participating at a senior level in the morning conference. That machinery of nations and regions we use to try and deliver a news agenda that serves the UK.

Indeed, the first purpose of the BBC's Charter states: "The BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming to build people's understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world". In the light of this purpose, this case study examined how accurately health and education was communicated across a UK in which these areas are largely governed by four separate administrations.

Research has shown that public knowledge about devolved powers is low, with many people confused about which political bodies make decisions about social policy. A representative poll in Wales found that 43% and 31% of respondents thought that health and education respectively were the UK government's responsibility, while 42% of people wrongly believed policing was an assembly matter¹⁹. In short, a large proportion of the population in Wales did not know which government – the UK parliament or devolved administration – should be held accountable for policy decisions that affect their daily lives.

Our analysis explored the extent to which different news providers across online, TV, radio and news apps platforms signposted the devolved relevance of all health and education items during the main three-week study. Put simply, did an item clarify that a health and education story had some devolved relevance, or were items reported in the context of the UK generally or England specifically?

We are not suggesting that all UK social policy reporting should necessarily include references to the devolved nations. There may, for example, be stories that explore social care or teaching generally in the UK without covering the policy implications of the issues examined. However, by examining all health and education items over the three-week sample period we can assess the degree to which devolved signposting was present and identify how

¹⁹ See, for example, <https://theconversation.com/british-media-is-failing-to-give-voters-the-full-picture-ahead-of-elections-57020>

clearly information was communicated within a news item by the different providers and platforms.

The sample examined in this case study included all health and education items across online, TV, radio and news apps, excluding international news stories. Given the limited online sample (the top five items per day on the homepages on UK news sites²⁰), we supplemented our analysis of BBC News by including the five top items from the health and education BBC News websites on each day of the sample period. This generated 30 extra online BBC items to the three-week sample. Table 9.8 breaks down the sample by the proportion of items about education and health across different platforms.

Table 9.8: Sample of UK health and education items

	Education	Healthcare/NHS	Total
Online	56.3% (36)	43.8% (28)	100% (64)
TV	27.6% (21)	72.4% (55)	100% (76)
Radio	22.9% (16)	77.1% (54)	100% (70)
News app	18.2% (2)	81.8% (9)	100% (11)
Total	33.9% (75)	66.1% (146)	100% (221)

In total, 221 items were examined, of which 75 were about education and 146 about health (which included stories about healthcare generally or the NHS specifically). There were 129 BBC News items, representing more than half (58.4%) of the total sample.

Devolved signposting

In order to explore the geographic relevance of social policy issues in the UK, we began by assessing whether news outlets provided some degree of devolved signposting in an item about health or education. We measured this by examining whether an item contained a reference to either England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, which would, at the very least, *allude* to any policy differences between the nations. If an item did *not* contain any references to a geographic location, or referred to the UK generally, we classified this as having no devolved signposting. So, for example, in a story on 17 June 2019 about a UK government policy initiative to identify mental health problems among students, the training was for teachers *in England*. But when this was introduced by the anchor on Sky News there was no reference to the geographic relevance of the policy.

Anchor: “New teachers are to receive training on how to spot the signs of mental health issues in their students under a new prevention plan unveiled by Theresa May just over a month before she leaves office.”

Theresa May (PM): “As part of our prevention plan, we are pledging that every new teacher will be trained on how to spot the signs of mental health issues. Because I

²⁰ We are aware also that some online outlets have some editorial content produced in the devolved nations, so potentially some of their content may contrast with news produced in English editions.

think, the next great revolution in mental health has to be prevention. If we make prevention a top priority at every stage in life, then we can ensure that everyone has an opportunity to reach their full potential. There is more to be done because for too long there's been a stigma attached to mental health and we haven't seen it taken as seriously as the physical health."

(Sky News, 17 June 2019)

Although this English training initiative may not be implemented in the same way to teachers in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, the news item did not provide any devolved signposting that communicated its relevance to a specific nation or nations within the UK.

In contrast, *Channel 5 News* at 5pm, in its introduction to a news item, made reference to "in England", which signalled the geographic relevance of the training scheme.

Well, leadership battles and Brexit might be dominating her last few weeks in power, but Theresa May also wants to focus on some of her own priorities — including mental health. Today she unveiled a series of new measures aimed at tackling mental illness — among them, a plan to give every new teacher *in England* special training so they can spot the early warning signs of problems in children. Our Chief Correspondent Tessa Chapman has the details. She might not be Leading the Conservatives anymore, but Theresa May is still in charge of the country. Today that meant a roundtable discussion far away from Cabinet. On a mission to cement her domestic legacy she is putting mental health in focus, announcing new measures including suicide prevention training offered to all NHS staff, *extra funding for local authorities* to strengthen their suicide prevention practices and specific mental health training for all new teachers.

(*Channel 5 News*, 17 June 2019)

As we suggest further below, while this did not explicitly communicate the devolved relevance of this initiative, it did accurately signal that every teacher in England – and not, by implication, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – would be given special training to detect mental health issues among children.

In contrast, in a story about protests against LGBT rights teaching in a school in England, ITV's *News at Ten* did not signal the relevance to England or, by implication, that education is a devolved issue with curriculums overseen by separate bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In a package on June 3, a reporter stated:

Reporter: "The head insists she is only teaching equality, something that all schools are required to do from next year, though the government will leave the exact content up to teachers."

Head teacher: "That's a postcode lottery for equality where a school a mile at the road who has a lot of same-sex parents, their children in that school will have a completely different understanding of children in my school if I'm told, 'well, you don't have to talk about this.'"

(*ITV News at Ten*, 3 June 2019)

In a follow-up interview with the Secretary of State for Education (who has responsibility for English schools), the reporter asked: “do you or don't you expect schools to have taught LGBT equality by the time people leave primary school?” The Secretary State for Education responded: “the regulations are what's in law recently passed through parliament and they specify” before being interrupted by the reporter stating, “they are incredibly vague”. At no point is the issue of equality training and regulation being a devolved responsibility signalled within the package.

Likewise, the BBC Radio 4 *World at One* and its online coverage discussed school policy generally without clarifying whether curriculums differed across the nations.

Reporter: “The Mayor who is gay himself said he’s been personally affected by the story because he’d made him realise that homosexuality was still an issue in the city among certain communities. Mr Street called on the Department of Education to speak out louder about equality teaching and to be clearer in its guidance to schools. This afternoon another protest will take place outside Anderton Park Primary school.”

(Radio 4 *World at One*, 7 June 2019)

A BBC News online item also focused on the Mayor’s comments about the protests:

Protests against LGBT teaching at a Birmingham primary school are "homophobic" and must "stop now", the West Midlands mayor has said. Andy Street said he was in "disbelief" at material distributed by protesters outside Anderton Park Primary. The mayor, who is gay, told the BBC he had thought homophobia was a "non-issue in our city".

While this item was produced for the Birmingham and Black Country section of the BBC News site, it also appeared on the BBC’s UK-wide education webpage. It is unlikely that all audiences would have noticed that the item emanated from a regional site in England and concluded that this area of responsibility was governed by the devolved nations. The item finished with a quote from the UK Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, who referred to “British values”.

We will always support head teachers and schools who are doing the right thing and ensuring that children leave school well educated and properly equipped to live and prosper in a modern society and a modern economy. And that includes having a full and proper understanding of British values and the way we live our lives today.

(BBC News Online, 7 June)

Since equality training is governed by curriculums in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, a source invoking “British values” could potentially confuse audiences about which administration has the responsibility to change education policy in this Birmingham school.

Overall, Table 9.9 shows that over half of all BBC items (51.2%) contained no devolved signposting, compared to nearly two-thirds (63.0%) on commercial news outlets. There were, however, differences *in the degree* of devolved signposting, according to the type of health and education coverage. For example, with the exception of an item identifying the England-

only relevance of a dispute about junior doctors' contracts, 5 Live Breakfast coverage provided no devolved signposting in its health and education coverage.

Table 9.9: Proportion of items about health and education with devolved signposting (by percentage; N in brackets)

		Yes (devolved nation signposted)	No devolved signposting	Total
BBC	BBC News Online	63.8% (30)	36.2% (17)	100% (47)
	BBC News app	55.6% (5)	44.4% (4)	100% (9)
	BBC News at Ten	50.0% (4)	50.0% (4)	100% (8)
	BBC News channel	70.0% (7)	30.0% (3)	100% (10)
	<i>Newsnight</i>	100% (2)	/	100% (2)
	Radio 5 Live Breakfast	9.1% (1)	90.9% (10)	100% (11)
	Radio 4 World at One	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)	100% (7)
	<i>Newsbeat</i>	33.3% (3)	66.7% (6)	100% (9)
	Radio 4 Today	38.5% (10)	61.5% (16)	100% (26)
Total BBC		48.8% (63)	51.2% (66)	100% (129)
Other	The Sun	75.0% (3)	25.0% (1)	100% (4)
	The Guardian	/	100% (2)	100% (2)
	BuzzFeed	/	100% (1)	100% (1)
	Huffington Post	50.0% (2)	50.0% (2)	100% (4)
	The Mirror	50.0% (3)	50.0% (3)	100% (6)
	LBC	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)	100% (3)
	Heart	/	100% (5)	100% (5)
	Capital	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)	100% (3)
	talkRADIO	16.7% (1)	83.3% (5)	100% (6)
	ITV News app	100% (1)	/	100% (1)
	Sky News app	100% (1)	/	100% (1)
	<i>Channel 4 News</i>	18.2% (2)	81.8% (9)	100% (11)
	Sky News	44.4% (4)	55.6% (5)	100% (9)
	<i>ITV News at Ten</i>	66.7% (4)	33.3% (2)	100% (6)
	<i>Channel 5 News</i>	36.7% (11)	63.3% (19)	100% (30)
Total other		37.0% (34)	63.0% (58)	100% (92)
Total		43.9% (97)	56.1% (124)	100% (221)

In part, this lack of devolved signposting related to the nature of the news provider's social policy agenda, which was often about general topics rather than specific policy issues. So, for example, BBC Radio 5 Live, in its coverage of health issues, included interviews with a knee surgeon about the rise in injuries among amateur runners, with a scientist about improving sleep patterns and with a mother and paediatrician about raising public awareness. Similarly, Radio 4's *World at One* coverage included items about a World Health Organisation report, UK public trust in vaccines and new research into constipation, as well as a broader

discussion about a post-Brexit trade deal with the US, and the consequences this might have for the NHS and drug pricing. In these and other items, there was clearly a rationale not to highlight the devolved relevance of the topics.

In 5 Live *Breakfast*'s and *World at One*'s health and education reporting, there were potential opportunities to discuss the devolved implications of some of the issues addressed. For example, there might have been an opportunity to discuss the role played by the devolved administrations in negotiating a US trade deal, with respect to their NHS responsibilities, and the differing prescription charges to patients in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In order to assess whether it might have been relevant to include some devolved signposting in stories with no references to any of the four nations, we re-examined all 124 items in this category. We asked whether an item *could* have included a reference to the devolved nation, taking into account the nature of the story and whether devolution was largely irrelevant or peripheral to the topic (in many cases because of its more general UK focus).

Of the 66 BBC News items, we found that 45.5% of non-devolved signposted items could have made reference to a devolved nation, but did not, as opposed to 54.5% that were general UK issues. On commercial media outlets, in contrast, of the 58 that had no devolved signposted items, 58.6% were viewed as being relevant to the devolved administrations, whereas 41.4% were not.

So, for example, half of the *Today* items could have been made relevant to the devolved nations. In an item about the mental health of university students in a UK-wide survey, whereas BBC News Online referred to the different fees in England potentially influencing the findings of the poll²¹, *Today* did not include any comparative information between the four nations nor did it specify whether the survey covered students across all nations.

Anchor: "An annual survey suggests two-thirds of students now think that their university should inform their parents if there are serious concerns about their mental health. The Higher Education Policy Institute spoke to fourteen thousand undergraduates. It hopes that more universities will introduce the same system as Bristol, which began asking students for permission to contact their parents following a number of suicides. Here's our education editor Branwen Jeffreys."

Reporter: "The number of university students seeking help from mental health problems has risen sharply (...) University students are young adults and some expect complete confidentiality, more universities are looking at how to navigate between students' right to privacy and making sure serious mental health problems are not missed."

(Radio 4 *Today*, 13 June 2019)

On Sky and Channel 4 News almost all the non-devolved signposted items could have made reference to devolved powers in either England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. For example, in the story about LGBT protests in a school in Birmingham, Sky News featured an

²¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-48611593>

interview with the head teacher followed by a live two-way conversation. Despite the lengthy treatment the story received, at no point was there any reference to potential differences in equality teaching between the nations. Indeed, the reporter referred to the implications of equality training in “Britain” – not England.

Reporter: “Now, today is significant because protesters carried out their first demonstration since that injunction. Now, they did it outside the exclusion zone on a patch of land 200 yards away. They are angry; they say that their protests are peaceful. They argue that they’ve been silenced by this high court injunction and they are raising money through crowdfunding to go back to their high court on Monday to argue against the injunction. They say they should be able to hold their demonstration outside the school. Now they don’t want children to be taught about same-sex relationships. They say that the children are too young, a five-year old shouldn’t know that some people have two mums or two dads but they say they are not homophobic. Now, I’ve spoke to the head teacher today and she said categorically that these protests are homophobic and she said that there are *no circumstances under which she would pause or stop the teaching that is crucial about learning about equality in Britain.*”

(Sky News, 7 June 2019)

On Radio 1’s *Newsbeat* and Radio 4’s *Today*, between a third and one in four items did not signpost the devolved relevance of stories about health and education. While this was partly because these outlets examined broad topics rather than those on a specific government initiative, there were opportunities to mention the devolved relevance of the issues explored. For example, in a story based on a UK survey about students allowing universities to inform their parents about any mental illnesses they may suffer while studying, Radio 4’s *Today* made no reference to the differences between the higher education systems across the nations. BBC News Online, in contrast, made sense of the survey’s findings by referencing the different fees charged by universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

The student satisfaction survey showed that within the UK, students in Scotland, where there are no fees for Scottish students, were much more likely to think they had good value, compared with those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

(BBC News Online, June 13).

Overall, BBC News Online and the BBC News Channel took the opportunity to signpost devolved relevance more regularly than other news providers. *Newsnight*’s coverage comprised only two items, both of which provided some devolved context.

Across many of the commercial outlets, there were only a few items about UK health and education. While the Sun made reference to several items with English relevance, in other online items there was limited devolved signposting. Once again, this should be viewed in the context of broad topics being reported rather than specific issues relating to a government initiative.

There were only a limited number of items about health and education on television news bulletins that allowed us to compare whether broadcasters signalled the geographic relevance

of stories. That said, *ITV News at Ten* provided devolved signposting in over two-thirds of its items about health and education, compared to half of the *BBC News at Ten* items, just over a third of items on Channel 5 and less than two in ten items on Channel 4.

Where is the devolved focus?

Within the sample of items with devolved signposting (N=97), we assessed whether each item stated that the primary focus was about health or education in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. While England, Scotland, Wales and/or Northern Ireland may have been referenced within a news item, our analysis focused on which nation was *the main focus*. There were, however, a couple of instances where the item was about both England and Wales or all the nations.

Table 9.10 shows that the focus of health and education was primarily on items in England. For the BBC, 84.1% were about England. However, if we exclude BBC News Online items, 100% of all the items with devolved signposting, on television, radio or the news apps, were about England. On commercial outlets, 67.6% of items were about England. But again, if we exclude a few outlets (Channel 5, ITV, the Mirror and Sky News), the exclusive focus was on education and health in England. Indeed, Channel 5 News made up half of all the references to non-England items.

Table 9.10: Proportion of items about health and education with main focus on specific nation or nations

		England	Scotland	Wales	NI	England & Wales	All Nations	Total
BBC	BBC News Online	66.7% (20)	23.3% (7)	6.7% (2)	3.3% (1)	/	/	100% (30)
	BBC News app	100% (5)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (5)
	BBC News at Ten	100% (4)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (4)
	BBC News Channel	100% (7)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (7)
	Newsnight	100% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (2)
	Radio 5 Live Breakfast	100% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (1)
	Radio 4 World at One	100% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (1)
	Newsbeat	100% (3)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (3)
	Radio 4 Today	100% (10)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (10)
Total BBC		84.1% (53)	11.1% (7)	3.2% (2)	1.6% (1)	/	/	100% (63)
Other	The Sun	100% (3)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (3)
	Huffington Post	100% (2)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (2)
	The Mirror	33.3% (1)	33.3% (1)	/	/	33.3% (1)	/	100% (3)
	LBC	100% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (1)
	Capital	100% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (1)
	Talk	100% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (1)
	ITV News app	100% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (1)
	Sky News app	100% (1)	/	/	/	/	/	100% (1)
	Channel 4 News	50.0% (1)	50.0% (1)	/	/	/	/	100% (2)
	Sky News	50.0% (2)	/	/	/	25.0% (1)	25.0% (1)	100% (4)
	ITV News at Ten	50.0% (2)	50.0% (2)	/	/	/	/	100% (4)
	Channel 5 News	63.6% (7)	36.4% (4)	/	/	/	/	100% (11)
Total other		67.6% (23)	23.5% (8)	/	/	5.9% (2)	2.9% (1)	100% (34)
Total		78.4% (76)	15.5% (15)	2.1% (2)	1.0% (1)	2.1% (2)	1.0% (1)	100% (97)

Apart from England, when a nation or nations were identified, Scotland made up 23.3% of items about health or education, compared to 6.7% for Wales and 3.3% for Northern Ireland. This was accounted for entirely by the BBC's online coverage on its health and education web pages, which drew on regional news sites from the four nations of the UK. For example, BBC online items about Scotland included two health stories (calls to be vigilant about Lyme disease in Scotland and the reality of alcohol-damaged children). BBC online items about

Scotland also included five education items (teachers at a Lanarkshire school striking over health fears, financial watchdog warning of financial pressures on Scotland's colleges, Alzheimer's funding boost for Scots scientists, the reopening of Dumfries' North West Community Campus and P1 assessments' modifications). The items about Wales included Welsh schools falling short on the provision of PE lessons, and therapists calling for speech and language support to be more widely available for children in Wales. The one item in Northern Ireland was about the cultural stereotyping of computer users, leading to fewer girls studying computing.

On commercial media, Scotland made up 36.4% of devolved signposted health and education items, with 5.9% about England and Wales and 2.9% about all the nations. The items about Scotland included calls to close two Coatbridge schools over chemical contamination fears, which was covered by *Channel 4* (12 June), *ITV News at Ten* (18 June) and twice by Channel 5 (18 and 20 June). Other Scotland items were about the former captain of Glasgow Rangers in final stage of motor neurone disease (*ITV News at Ten*), alcohol sales in Scotland falling after the introduction of minimum pricing (Channel 5), and a warning about heart disease being the biggest killer in Scotland (Channel 5). Other devolved items on commercial outlets included abortion rates reaching their highest-ever level in England and Wales (Sky News), Donald Trump branding Britain's NHS hospitals "a sea of blood" after the recent spate of knife crime (the Mirror) and a man fighting severe MRSA in Scotland (the Mirror).

Overall, with the exception of BBC News Online and Channel 5 at 5pm, health and education was almost entirely made up of stories with a focus on England.

Implicit vs. explicit references

In order to consider the clarity of how well the BBC and non-BBC outlets signposted the devolved relevance of all health and education items (N=97), we classified whether this was implicitly or explicitly communicated. By implicit, we refer to items where a nation is referenced: "in England" or "NHS England" but where there is no further context or background about the devolved relevance of the story or issue.

For example, when the BBC News Channel reported a story about new genome analysis for sick children it clearly stated the NHS "in England".

From next year, the NHS *in England* will offer to analyse the entire genetic code of all seriously ill children where the cause of their condition is unknown [...] From next year *throughout England*, the NHS will offer whole genome testing to all babies and children where the cause of their illness is unknown. The first National Health Service in the world to do so.

(BBC News Channel, 10 June)

Similarly, on 10 June when Radio 4 *Today* reported on lymphoma treatment it specifically referred to "NHS England".

Anchor: "A pioneering new treatment for lymphoma, which genetically reprogrammes the immune system to fight cancer, has been used for the first time on NHS patients. The therapy, called Car T, has been found to cure some people who

were told they were terminally ill. James Gallagher reporter (...) Simon Stephens, the chief Executive of *NHS England* said that NHS patients were among the first in the world to benefit from Car T and the treatment marked a new era of personalised medicine.”

(Radio 4 *Today*, 10 June 2019).

This devolved signposting may appear minor, but it is significant because CAR T-cell therapy has not been approved by the Scottish government, so patients may have to be referred to English hospitals.²²

However, while NHS England or Public Service England were regularly involved in many health items, the impact on the devolved nations was sometimes not clear. In a story about an outbreak of listeria in North West England the devolved signposting was regularly supplied by journalists or sources by referring to “Public Health England”. On Sky News, for example, it was stated:

In this case, of six people infected, three died. One at Aintree hospital in Liverpool and two at Manchester Royal Infirmary. They contracted listeria from sandwiches made by a company called The Good Food Chain - this is what *Public Health England* are saying. The meat came from a supply called North Country Cooked Meats who we think are based in Salford.

Now, both companies have ceased production, there's been a product withdrawal across the hospital trusts. *It's slightly unclear whether across the entire NHS in Scotland and England as well.* And the production of those has ceased and hospitals are saying that the risk is low.

(Sky News, 7 June 2019)

While Sky News alluded to the possible knock-on impact on NHS Scotland, it did not state whether this body, or NHS Wales, had also taken steps to mitigate the risk of spreading listeria.

In a BBC News item about the threat of listeria, the location of the story in England was well-signposted but it was not specified whether the sandwiches might have been withdrawn in Wales, Scotland or elsewhere.

Three hospital patients have died in an outbreak of listeria linked to pre-packaged sandwiches. *Public Health England* said the victims were among six patients infected *in England* and the deaths occurred in Manchester and in Liverpool. Two of the victims were at the Manchester Royal Infirmary with the other patient at Aintree Hospital. Sandwiches and salads from the Good Food Company chained linked to the outbreak have been withdrawn and production stopped. Public Health England says the risk to the wider public is low.

²² See, for example, reports by: <https://lymphoma-action.org.uk/car-t-cell-therapy-not-approved-scotland> and <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-in-general/treatment/immunotherapy/types/CAR-T-cell-therapy>

(BBC News Channel, 7 June 2019).

Similarly, in a Channel 5 live two-way piece with a reporter standing outside the office of Public Health England, there were no references to the possible impact on the devolved nations.

Anchor: “Three hospital patients have died following an outbreak of listeria linked to pre-packed sandwiches. The deaths were in Manchester and Liverpool. Leyla Hayes is outside Public Health England – Leyla, what more do we know?”

Reporter: “*Public Health England* say six patients became seriously ill following this outbreak of listeria, three patients have now died. The patients were in the care of two Hospital trusts, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust and Aintree University Hospital Foundation Trust in Liverpool. The pre-packed sandwiches and salads linked to this outbreak have been withdrawn and an investigation is under way.”

Anchor: “Is there a danger to the wider public?”

Reporter: “Well, listeria is not normally dangerous in otherwise healthy people but it can be more risky to those with pre-existing conditions. *Public Health England* says there have been no cases outside the health organisations I’ve already mentioned in Manchester and Liverpool but they stress the risk to the public is low.”

(*Channel 5 News*, 7 June 2019)

On radio news, in particular, there were several items about the rise of self-harming in England, based on the findings of a new survey among young people, but there was no engagement with developments or strategies to prevent it in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Newsbeat ran a report featuring interviews with victims of self-harm and experts, but it was entirely through the perspective of people in England.

Anchor: “Next, we are moving on to a major new study into self-harm. Thousands of people were questioned *in England*, a study suggests that self-harming is increasing with women between 16 to 24 most affected. Annabel Rackham has this report.”

...

Reporter: “Abby is one of the thousands of people *in England* who have self-harmed which is when people hurt themselves to deal with difficult feelings or experiences. The 14-year study found self-harm was on the rise with almost 20% of young women have done it at some point. Dr Claire Casey is a psychiatrist who specialises in issues affecting teenagers.”

Dr Claire Casey: “It’s a really good study and we are looking at the general population, not just mental health patients’ population, so really does give us a sort of the best indication that we’ve got about how bad this problem is within the community”.

Reporter: “But she estimates figures for self-harm could be even higher that the report says.”

(*Newsbeat*, 5 June 2019).

Since the responsibility for dealing with self-harming is the responsibility of four different bodies in the UK, no news providers took up the opportunity to compare how different NHS strategies in the devolved administrations were mitigating its rise.²³

There were also a few implicit references to devolved powers beyond England. For example, *Channel 4 News* on 12 June began a package story about toxic waste in a Glasgow school by referring to the “Scottish government”:

Anchor: “The Scottish government is to examine whether possible chemical contaminations at a secondary school site has led to illness among staff and pupils. The site in North Lanarkshire was used for industrial waste until 1972. Teachers have voted to strike over concerns that school buildings could pose a risk despite reassurances from the local authorities.”

(*Channel 4 News*, 12 June 2019)

So far, we have examined implicit references to the devolved powers, where the geographic relevance of items (overwhelmingly to England) have been signposted. But the clarity with which they have been communicated has been vague, with phrases such as ‘in England’ or ‘NHS England’ used to signal the relevance to England – and implicitly, the *irrelevance* to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In order to quantify reporting which *did* communicate the geographic relevance of UK issues more carefully, we noted every item that provided an explicit reference to devolved powers. This included items when more than one nation was referenced, so the devolved relevance was more clearly signposted for audiences.

In an item about tattoo infections, BBC News Online provided useful context to the different regulations across the nations:

What are the laws on these procedures around the UK?

Different parts of the country have different laws and regulations in place. Wales is the only part of the UK where a compulsory licensing scheme for tattoo parlours and others offering similar services is being planned. This means technicians who offer the procedures will need to have an approved infection control qualification, and this information will be put into a national database. This stops technicians moving counties and setting up new businesses if they have a poor history of infection. Scotland also has a licensing scheme for business owners but there is no requirement for technicians to have a qualification. In most areas of England and Northern Ireland, business only have to fill in a registration form to open up a shop. The report says these systems are "outdated and do not provide any reassurance to the public that the business they are visiting is safe". The Department of Health and Social Care in England said local authorities had the power "to regulate the hygiene and cleanliness of tattoo and piercing providers if they judge there is a risk to health and safety"

²³ https://www.proceduresonline.com/kentandmedway/pdfs/manage_self_harm_yp.pdf

(BBC News Online, 14 June 2019).

Similarly, while Channel 5 did not refer to England, but to East London, it did explicitly reference the devolved differences in Scotland and Wales:

But at this tattoo parlor in *East London*, where safety is taken seriously, just how many of its customers think about the risk of infection when choosing where to have it done? [...] But at the moment *there's no legal infection control requirement across the UK*. According to new research, one in five people who have had a procedure such as a tattoo or cosmetic piercing in the last five years experienced negative effects, such as burning or swelling. And one in ten required medical treatment, which is why health officials want stricter regulation.

Shirley Cramer, Chief Executive, The Royal Society for Public Health: '*In Scotland* there's some licensing, there's a bit more control, but there is no call for no call for somebody to have a proper qualification. And it's only in *Wales* where they are planning for 2020 that all special procedures should be licensed, and that all individuals or providers should have an infection control qualification.' Reporter continues: While these tattoo artists continue to do all they can to prevent infection, many other places do not. It's hoped there'll be a review of current regulations to help keep people safe.

(*Channel 5 News*, 14 June 2019).

Overall, we found six explicit references on BBC and four on commercial media outlets. This meant that implicit references represented nearly nine in ten (89.7%) items where the devolved relevance of health or education was signposted. The proportion of implicit and explicit references was roughly the same on the BBC as on commercial media generally.

We then investigated how the devolved relevance was signposted. Table 9.11 shows that it was left to anchors or reporters to communicate this information in 84.1% and 85.3% of news items on the BBC and non-BBC outlets respectively.

Table 9.11: Proportion of devolved signposted items referenced by anchors/reporters, sources or both

	Anchor/reporter	Source	Both reporter and source	Total
BBC	84.1% (53)	6.3% (4)	9.5% (6)	100% (63)
Non-BBC	85.3% (29)	5.9% (2)	8.8% (3)	100% (34)
Total	84.5% (82)	6.2% (6)	9.3% (9)	100% (97)

It is important that anchors and journalists signal the devolved relevance; if this is left to sources alone it may be confusing for audiences to understand which a devolved nation holds power over a specific policy area. In a story about the future of the NHS in any potential post-Brexit trade deal between the US and the UK, a Radio 4 *World at One* item interviewed a former Secretary of State for Health, Lord Andrew Lansley, who referred to the role of "NHS England", but the item overall did not clarify the role and relevance of the devolved NHS bodies.

Lord Andrew Lansley: “I think it is extremely unlikely that the Americans will insist on an ability to provide healthcare services as such to the NHS from America. Because of course, at the moment, if you are, for example a hospital corporation of America, you own hospitals in the United Kingdom and they can provide services to the NHS. They do so on the basis of providing additional capacity when the NHS requires it in effect and that will continue. However, if you look at their negotiating objectives which the federal trade representatives published back in February I think, it is quite clear that what they will actually target is the process by which we control pharmaceutical pricing which has sets in UK what is effectively both an agreement about the overall budget for pharmaceuticals and a rebate system plus also NICE, through NICE and *NHS England* there is a process for saying that some drugs are so expensive that they cannot be good value for the NHS and then in effect they are negotiated price discounts if they are going to be made available.”

(*World at One*, 5 June 2019).

While the interviewee alluded to “NHS England” playing a role in negotiating the price of drugs, this implicit reference to devolved powers was not unpacked. And yet, as a BBC online reality check item pointed out on 8 June 2019 in relation to a possible US-UK trade deal, “health is a devolved matter and there are different commissioning arrangements in place around the UK”.²⁴

As Table 9.12 shows, we also found that most references to devolved powers were not made in the introduction to an item – where a viewer, listener or reader might be more attentive – but in the main package. This was particularly the case for commercial media, where more than half of the items (55.9%) that included some devolved signposting referenced it in the main body of the report rather than in the introduction. The BBC, in contrast, included a higher proportion of devolved signposting in the introduction to an item – 27% compared to 20.6% on commercial media – and in both the introduction and main body of an item (31.7% for BBC as opposed to 23.5% in non-BBC news). However, both on BBC and non-BBC coverage, references to devolution were more commonly made not in the introduction to an item, but in the main report and sometimes not until the final part of a package.

Table 9.12: Proportion of devolved signposted items referenced by anchors/reporters, sources or both

	Intro	Main body/report	Both intro/main body	Total
BBC	27.0% (17)	41.3% (26)	31.7% (20)	100% (63)
Non-BBC	20.6% (7)	55.9% (19)	23.5% (8)	100% (34)
Total	24.7% (24)	46.4% (45)	28.9% (28)	100% (97)

In a BBC *News at Ten* item about the listeria outbreak, while the cities of Manchester and Liverpool were namechecked, ‘Public Health England’ was signposted only at the very end of the report:

²⁴ See for example <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-48527328>

Anchor: “Three hospital patients in Manchester and Liverpool have died and three others are seriously ill following an outbreak of listeria. The cases have been linked to prepacked sandwiches and salads prepared for patients. Our health correspondent Dominic Hughes has more details.”

Reporter: “Listeria is an infection that in healthy people can cause a relatively mild flu—like illness and can even pass unnoticed, but for those who are already ill, or who have a weakened immune system, it can be much more serious, affecting the blood stream and the brain. That’s the case with six patients who were already poorly and became infected. Three of them have since died, two at the Manchester Royal Infirmary and one at Liverpool’s Aintree Hospital. We hope there will be no more cases. One of the problems with this particular infection is the long incubation period. It can be three or four weeks, so in terms of the numbers we just watching. The outbreak seems to have occurred early last month and has been traced to prepacked sandwiches made specifically for the health care sector by the Good Food Chain. The company gets its sandwich fillings from North Country Cooked Meats and it’s here that a strain of listeria has been identified. Both companies have now voluntarily ceased production and in a statement the Good Food Chain said it regularly laboratory tests its supplies, finished products and environment, in line with industry guidelines and best practice. Experts say the bug is a threat the food industry is well aware of. It’s particularly difficult for the food industry because unlike a lot of the other bacteria that we get through eating food, this one will grow in the fridge. Following the deaths of patients here in Manchester and Liverpool, *Public Health England* say there is no evidence of any further cases outside of the health care system and the risk to the general public is low. Meanwhile the Food Standards Agency has launched an investigation into the causes of this and also to make sure no more vulnerable patients are at risk. Dominic Hughes, BBC News, Manchester.”

(BBC News at Ten, 7 June 2019)

Similarly, in a Channel 5 story about toxic water supplies, while Glasgow was mentioned in the opening segment, “the Scottish government” was invoked only at the end of the package.

Anchor: “It’s the school health crisis that has been swept aside. That is the verdict of a former janitor at a school near Glasgow, who says she warned years ago that the school’s water supply could be toxic. Staff members there have been diagnosed with a rare cancer and high levels of arsenic have been found in two pupils. Now there are questions over whether they could be linked. Alan Jenkins reports.”

Reporter: “What is meant to be a place of Learning has turned into a place people fear and many who stepped foot here are worried.”

Former school janitor: “Well, it feels like we are in a crisis, That’s been going on from 2013. There was blue water, there was ground movement and later on it was the methane gas alarm, which was activated.”

Reporter: “The high schools opened seven years ago on land which was once used to dispose of lead, arsenic and other industrial waste. Questions are being asked since it emerged four current or retired teachers at Buchanan are being treated for the same rare form of cancer and concerns are being raised about pupils being sick too.”

Mother of a former pupil: “The symptoms go way beyond headaches and nausea...they cannot be ignored.... Every child has to be tested to get right to the bottom of the problem”...

Reporter: “It’s reported high levels of arsenic have now been found in two pupils. But in a statement North Lanarkshire Council say specialist doctors from the public health department of NHS Lanarkshire have confirmed there is no evidence to link attendance at the school with an increased risk of cancer... *The Scottish Government* has now announced an immediate independent review into health and safety. One public health expert says those affected need answers.”

Prof. Andrew Watterson: “There has been a lot of miscommunication problems and we shouldn’t now be in the position that we are in. I mean, these issues should have been addressed and if there isn’t a problem, there couldn’t have been any difficulty in sending out the information early.”

Reporter: “In the coming days the teachers here are due to strike. Their union calling for the school to close early for summer. Alan Jenkins, 5 News, Coatbridge.”

(Channel 5 News, 18 June 2019)

Signalling the devolved relevance towards the end of reports may reduce the likelihood of audiences learning which nation is responsible for the policy area being reported.

Summary

In our analysis of health and education items, we found that more than half of all BBC items (51.2%) contained no devolved signposting. But this proportion was higher on commercial media outlets, which provided no references to devolved powers in nearly two-thirds (63.0%) of items. BBC News Online and the BBC News Channel signposted the devolved relevance of social policy items more often than other news providers. Although the number of items about health and education on television news bulletins was low, ITV News at Ten provided devolved signposting in more than two-thirds of its items, compared to half of items on the *BBC News at Ten*, just over a third of items on *Channel 5 News*, and less than two in ten items on *Channel 4 News*.

The difficulty in routinely communicating the devolved relevance of news about social policy in the UK was acknowledged by the Editor of 5 News. When asked about the challenges associated with reporting devolution she conceded:

It’s still a struggle, I’ll admit, day-to-day when we’re doing stories. I will say in a meeting, so which nation does this apply to; can we make sure we are clear about that. One of the things we’ve started trying to do – and it’s a very low level but I think it is important nonetheless – is that within the reporting of the piece, we will give more detail about what the other nations do. So if we’re focussing on a story that’s England and Wales, or Scotland, we will talk about the other nations and give a little bit more detail.

Since social policy was often about the UK generally, we assessed whether it was relevant for items with no devolved signposting to have referenced England, Scotland, Wales or Northern

Ireland, or if devolution was largely irrelevant or peripheral to the topic. On the BBC we identified 45.5% of items that could have made reference to a devolved nation, compared to 58.6% on commercial media. In short, while all news outlets could have reported the devolved relevance of health and education more clearly, BBC News outlets took up this opportunity more regularly.

England was the overwhelming focus of items about health and education, making up nearly eight in ten items with a devolved reference. On the BBC News outlets, only its online service included items about Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, because it drew on sites from the nations. Of the commercial broadcasters, Channel 5 featured the most items beyond England, with five about Scotland. Indeed, the Editor of 5 News explained how both resources and editorial innovation shaped coverage about the nations beyond England. In her words:

Having a Scotland team has been a real boon for us. I was very clear when we advertised for that that I didn't want a Scotland correspondent, because I think that sounds a bit weird. I wanted a team based in Scotland who will do Scottish stories, but will also do stories. If there is a story that affects the whole UK, why can't we do it from Scotland? Just in hearing more regional accents on the programme is fantastic, and we do have quite a big chunk of people in Scotland. Northern Ireland, obviously, is a big issue at the moment with the border, and we're spending a lot more time there at the moment, going over more regularly, speaking to more people.

She went on to suggest Channel 5 coverage of the nations within the UK had changed over recent years:

I think we're slightly redressing the balance [in reporting the nations within UK], where we will often do stories that are very Scotland specific. So in the past we might have gone, Scotland is doing a health campaign on knife crime, their public health attitude to knife crime, oh it's just Scotland, maybe we won't do it because it's not just such a big chunk of the audience. Now we'll go, actually we've done loads about knife crime in England and the South East, why don't we do something about what is going on in Scotland?

Similarly, the Director of News and Current Affairs at ITV reflected that:

I think there are tiers of this. There's the being accurate about language, which I think we're better at than we probably were immediately after devolution, so reminding people that it is England and Wales only or it's Wales only or it's Scotland. Then there is journalism that proactively puts things into greater context, and I think we've done more of that in the last two or three years than we probably had done before...of finding examples of the difference between the different administrations of how they deal with an issue that is devolved. I think we've got better at that. I think there will always be a challenge, and it's not necessarily completely resolvable where you've got the unusual situation - and the UK is unusual in this regard - with 84% or whatever it is of the population being in one of those administrations, and the devolved nations having their own half an hour national news on ITV, being followed by a UK-wide news, when there isn't an England devolved news at six. So there will

be quite a lot of things which an English audience needs to know about, and indeed that a Scottish and Welsh audience are interested in, in fact.

The Head of Channel 4 News and Current Affairs was also open in acknowledging the difficulties involved in reporting the UK's devolved political landscape:

I think we've got better at making clear which countries things happen in. I think we could still get better at saying, and in Scotland this is what they do... And we do that a bit more, but probably we should be doing more of that. Health is so difficult... I think people are maybe beginning to understand better about health and education than they did, but I think for a long time our own journalists - maybe because I am from Scotland - I would have to say, this script does not... you're just talking about England and Wales here, or I would ask them, are you only talking about England or is Wales included, and they go, oh I don't know. I'd say, they'll be watching it in Wales and they'll need to know, so could you find out. So I think that has improved but it needs to improve a lot more because, I'm afraid to say, we seem to be becoming more divided, and we've got to show people more that we understand - it's different for you where you come from.

Across all outlets we found that the devolved signposting of coverage was primarily due to implicit references such as 'in England' or 'NHS England'. This type of signposting made up approximately nine in ten items when a devolved nation was referenced, across both BBC and commercial media outlets. This meant that in the vast majority of items when devolution might have been relevant to the story, news providers did not explicitly signpost any devolved powers by referencing the nations which held devolved power in either health or education.

Overall, we found that in all BBC items with some devolved signposting just over a quarter did the signposting in the introduction to a news item, with most in the main package of a report, compared to a fifth on commercial media. How far audiences pick up on these implicit references to specific nations requires further study, but our analysis showed that very few items covered by the BBC, or elsewhere, explicitly spelt out the relevance of health and education news items to the devolved nations of the UK.

In response to a question about how best to report social policy stories that affect England only in network news media, the BBC's Editor of Six and Ten Television News said:

I think your minimum is obviously to say in England. There is an obesity story today and, say, if in Scotland they had a different obesity strategy, or they're already doing some of the measures that have now been suggested for England, for example, then that is relevant to the story and the storytelling and you want to sort of include that in a meaningful way. I think it is how relevant it is to the story. There will be times when you are covering something and it will just be applicable to England or Scotland, for example, but you would hope that audiences in the other place would still... so minimum alcohol pricing in Scotland, for example, clearly when that was announced and delivered, that's Scotland, not England but you would imagine there would be a lot of people in England sitting there watching thinking, is this going to work, is this a good thing, what do I think about it, and all of that... Sometimes, for informational purposes, you do need to say, this is what happens in Scotland or this is what happens

in Wales and sometimes you don't; sometimes there is a good contrast by comparing the different strategies.

Clearly, reporting domestic issues in an increasingly complex devolved UK represents a challenge to network editors. Finding the right balance of coverage between the nations and accurately articulating any devolved differences are difficult editorial judgements that can require specialist knowledge in specific policy areas.

Case study 4: Climate change

Across all the outlets covered in the three-week study, climate change made up a very small percentage of total news coverage. There were some major stories in the sample period, notably the Conservative leadership contest, which dominated the news agenda and may have influenced the level of news about the environment. However, the issue of climate change did become a prominent topic on one day of the sample period – when the government announced a net zero emissions target on 12 June 2019. The aim of this policy is to eradicate the UK’s net contribution to climate change by 2050. This meant updating the Climate Change Act 2008 from a target of 80% reduction in carbon emissions to net zero, following recommendations in the independent report by the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published in May 2019. Since climate change tends to be reported intermittently – after a political event or the publication of a report – when it does make the news agenda journalists play a key role in supplying the necessary background, context and analysis for audiences to understand the impact of emissions and any legislative solutions to countering it.

In this case study, we compared how different news providers reported the government’s announcement on 12 June 2019. In doing so, we examined the depth of policy information provided by news providers, the range of sources used to inform coverage, and the degree to which the government’s claims were appropriately challenged by journalists. We also analysed how different news providers independently reported the emissions target, which included assessing the range of perspectives they drew on to interpret the credibility of the proposal and the level of scrutiny it received by journalists and sources.

Since the study’s online sample consisted of just the five main topics each day, we have excluded commercial online news from the analysis because we may not have captured all the items about climate change reported by different news providers that day. However, for BBC News Online we retrospectively analysed its coverage, which included adding an additional item. In total, the sample consisted of 22 news items. This included items from BBC News Online, LBC, Heart, Capital, Talk, *BBC News at Ten*, *Channel 4 News*, BBC News Channel, *ITV News at Ten*, *Channel 5 News at 5pm*, Radio 5’s *Live Breakfast*, Radio 4’s *World at One*, *BBC Newsbeat* and *Radio 4 Today*. Sky News did not report this item between 5-6pm on June 12 (but it may well have done at another point over the course of the day).

Level of policy information and framing of government announcement

We began by considering the relative depth of reporting across different news providers. Broadly speaking, we found that outlets provided either some policy context or a more detailed level of information about the government’s plan.

All outlets provided a general sense of how the government would deliver the net zero target by 2050 and pointed out that people need to eat less meat and dairy, switch to electric cars and take fewer flights in order for the emissions reduction to be achieved. All commercial radio outlets, in this respect, provided some degree of policy information in their items about this story but this was largely limited to repeating the government’s announcement to reduce emissions to net zero.

So, for example, a Capital Radio item stated:

The government's come up with a new plan to stop climate change. "Tackling climate change is essential if we are to avoid the disastrous consequences which we are seeing right now." That's Dave Timms from Friends of the Earth. The new plan aims to cut emissions to almost zero by 2050. To do that we will need to switch to electric cars, and we could also have to eat less meat and dairy and take fewer flights.

(Capital Radio, 12 June 2019).

LBC provided slightly more policy information – including the claim that the UK would be the first G7 country to put a net zero emissions law on statute – as well as framing the Friends of the Earth as a critical voice against the government's plan, suggesting the target should be set before 2050.

Anchor: "The government's to set a legally binding target to cut the UK's greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050, ending our contribution to climate change. It means that after that date, any remaining pollution from things like aviation would have to be offset by measures like planting trees. The UK would be the first G7 country to put such a commitment into law. Dave Timms, from Friends of the Earth welcomes the plans but thinks the target should be met five years sooner."

Dave Timms: "It's going to be good for British businesses, we are going to be doing things like making people's homes warmer, investing in buses and rail. These are measures that need to be taken anyway but tackling climate change is essential if we are to avoid the disastrous consequences which we are seeing right now"

(LBC, 12 June 2019)

Heart, meanwhile, was briefer about the government's plans, but framed the Friends of the Earth source as being broadly supportive of the new law. However, it concluded the item with a more critical source, Extinction Rebellion, which argued the plans were not enough to tackle climate change.

Anchor: "There are plans to cut the UK's carbon emissions down to pretty much zero by 2050. The legally binding targets will mean some big lifestyle changes for some though, like eating less meats and flying less. Dave Timms from Friends of the Earth says it's good news."

Dave Timms: "It's going to be good for British businesses, we are going to be doing things like making people's homes warmer, investing in buses and rail. These are measures that need to be taken anyway but tackling climate change is essential if we are to avoid the disastrous consequences which we are seeing right now."

Anchor: "Any remaining pollution will be offset by things like planting trees, but Extinction Rebellion, the climate change protestors that held days of demonstrations in London in April, say it's not enough."

(Heart, 12 June 2019).

TalkRADIO, unlike the other commercial radio providers, repeated the government's plans, describing them as "ambitious", but quoted a sole government minister rather than any environmental campaigners.

Anchor: "Theresa May wants to bring in ambitious targets on climate change which would see the UK reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. This would have a huge impact on our lives, we would have to switch to electric cars, eat less meat and stop flying as much. Energy Minister Chris Skidmore says he doesn't want people to feel daunted."

Chris Skidmore: "That's why we set the target for 2050, because we want a just transition and a sustainable change. But we can't do this without making sure the whole of society is prepared to play its part. It's primarily going to come from big changes in industry".

(talkRADIO, 12 June)

Since these commercial radio news items lasted between 29 and 43 seconds, there was limited space to expand on the government's announcement, provide more context and background or challenge the claims.

The *World at One* reported one item about the government's plans to counter climate change, framing the story as the UK being the first country to legislate for the target and it being widely supported, while also referring to critical voices, including those who say the pledge is "impossible" to achieve.

Theresa May has told MPs that Britain will cut greenhouse gas emissions to almost zero by 2050, making it the first major nation to legislate for this target. The move has been widely praised, however some critics say that the phase out is too late to protect the climate and others fear the task is impossible. Our Environment Analyst Roger Harrabin reports.

(Radio 4 *World at One*, 12 June 2019)

The report itself provided some policy information but due to its length (70 seconds) there was limited time for any detail. However, the reporter did mention that the UK would be able to pay other countries to plant trees.

But there are plenty of caveats. The UK is reserving the right to pay other nations to plant trees on its behalf if that's cheaper.

(Radio 4 *World at One*, 12 June 2019)

While this was only briefly mentioned, the reference to the UK potentially offsetting its emissions target by buying international carbon credits went beyond any policy analysis supplied by commercial stations. We develop this point later in the case study.

Today, *5 Live Breakfast*, and *Newsbeat* reported several items about the government's plan to reduce emissions. In each case, one of these items contained only some policy information. For example, on *Newsbeat* the first item broadly outlined the government's policy as well as

briefly referencing the five-year review, at which point the UK can reconsider its emissions target if other nations are not meeting their targets and the UK is put at a commercial disadvantage. The second item, however, did not cover policy information at all but instead imagined what life would be like in 2050 by, for example, changes to food, fashion and travel as a result of climate change.

All television and BBC radio outlets provided relatively detailed information about the government's plans to cut emissions to zero, but there were differences in the selection of sources and how critical they were towards the proposal.

The *BBC News at Ten*, for example, introduced the government's plans, referencing widespread support by campaigners, while also acknowledging critics who say that it is either too late to have any meaningful impact or that it is an "impossible task" to counter climate change.

Anchor: "The Prime Minister has announced that the UK will commit to cutting its carbon emissions to almost zero by 2050 as part of a new government plan to tackle climate change. It would mean, among other things, millions of people switching from petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles and taking fewer flights. If the plans are passed Britain will become the first major economy to adopt such a legally binding target. The move has been widely praised by green campaigners, but some fear it is already too late and an impossible task. Here's our Science Editor, David Sherman."

(*BBC News at Ten*, 12 June 2019)

ITV News at Ten, which was the only bulletin to make the climate change policy its lead story, introduced the item by stating that tackling climate change had generally been slow but this had been enhanced by the government's "ambitious plans". The government's announcement was then introduced without any specific criticism about the policy.

Anchor: "Good evening. We have been talking about climate change on this programme for decades. The warnings about our impact on the earth have grown louder and louder and yet political action has been slow. Well today arguably the pace has picked up. The government made a legally binding commitment to reduce the UK's carbon emissions to zero by 2050, the most ambitious plan yet for a major economy. The details have yet to be worked out, but it will mean big changes for all of us."

(*ITV News at Ten*, 12 June 2019)

In a follow-up item, *ITV* conducted an interview with the UN Special Representative for sustainable energy, to explore the government's plan in more depth. In doing so, the anchor provided some useful context and background to the challenge of cutting emissions so drastically.

Anchor: "Well, illuminating the countries carbon footprint is a massive project involving the daily lives of each and every one of us. There are some of the main sources here now contributing to the 375million tons of carbon dioxide pumped into the atmosphere last year alone. Energy supply including from polluting power stations

makes up 26% of the total. The UK will need to switch to mainly renewable energy sources like wind and solar. The offices we work in contribute 18%, UK businesses will have to improve waste recycling and electricity use. Domestic transport is the biggest contributor to the UK's carbon footprint, almost a third of the total. By 2040 there will be no more new petrol or diesel vehicles, other forms of transport such as electric cars will be the norm. And finally, our homes are responsible for 18% of CO2 emissions, old gas boilers and hobs will have to be replaced by alternatives such as electric ones.”

(*ITV News at Ten*, 12 June 2019)

On *Channel 4 News*, where the topic was much further down the news agenda, the government's plan was outlined and broadly praised by campaigners, but there were no critical voices in the introduction to the package.

Anchor: “Less meat to eat. No petrol-powered cars. Fewer flights and homes no longer heated with gas boilers. That's what may have to happen now that the Prime Minister has committed the UK to the toughest climate change target of any major economy. Environmental groups have welcomed the tightening of existing legally enshrined targets that would mean our greenhouse gas emissions would be cut to zero by 2050. Minnie Stevenson reports.”

(*Channel 4 News*, 12 June 2019)

Finally, Channel 5 personalised coverage by referencing the Prime Minister's political situation and referred to the announcement as “a bold pledge”, without acknowledging critical voices about the government's target.

Anchor: “Now she may be in the final stages of her time in office, but Theresa May has made a bold pledge on climate change. She wants the UK to become the first major nation to cut carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050. As Peter Lane reports, it will mean big changes to how we live, work and travel.”

(*Channel 5 News*, 12 June 2019)

Similarly, Radio 5 Live *Breakfast* outlined May's target to cut emissions, drawing on a source from the energy industry who reinforced the government's message and did not include any critical opposition to the plan.

Anchor: “Theresa May says reducing pollution will improve public health and save the NHS money. The Prime Minister is today setting a legally binding target to end the UK's contribution to climate change in just 30 years. It means emissions from homes and businesses will have to be completely cut or offset. Laurence Slade is from Energy UK which represents the energy industry.”

Laurence Slade: “We don't know in the future what bills are going to do but I would actually hope that by improving energy efficiency, if we can get for example a national infrastructure programme to improve the efficiency of our buildings, our homes, our offices, actually that should have a pretty good effect on keeping bills

down and it's an opportunity for businesses around the country to really get involved in this and make a huge huge difference to our futures.”

(Radio 5 Live *Breakfast*, 12 June 2019)

Newsbeat, in contrast, offered a more conversational style than other news providers in its reporting, focusing on personalities to help frame the news on the emissions target. The introduction referenced David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg before briefly and uncritically outlining the government's plans.

Anchor: “We've all heard the warnings about climate change: ‘We are facing a manmade disaster’ [voice of David Attenborough]. The challenge is to cut greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere causing the planet to warm up. There's been lots of criticism it's not happening fast enough ‘We have run out of excuses and we have run out of time. Change is coming whether you like it or not’ (voice of Greta Thunberg) and now the government has made a big announcement. Nomia Iqbal is here to tell us more.”

Reporter: “So, the government has announced it is going to set a legally binding target to cut greenhouse gas emissions to almost zero by 2050. So we already have one – to reduce emissions by 80% and that was agreed by MPs under the Climate Change Act in 2008 but now the goal is basically tougher.”

(*Newsbeat*, 12 June 2019)

As already identified, the follow-up item on *Newsbeat* explored the imagined effects of the net zero emissions policy on people's lifestyles in 2050, rather than scrutinising the relative merits of the government's policy.

The way the story was framed in the opening headlines on Radio 4's *Today* was similar to how *World at One* had introduced the government announcement.

Anchor: “A new target is being set by ministers for the UK to eliminate or offset all of its greenhouse gas emissions by the middle of the century.”

Reporter: “The government has outlined an ambitious plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions in the UK to almost zero by 2050 to tackle climate change. Britain is thought to be the first major nation to put forward such legislation which will amend the 2008 Climate Change Act. One senior climate negotiator has described the move as historic, but critics say the action has been taken too late and fear the target will never be met. Here's our Environment Analyst Roger Harrabin.”

(Radio 4 *Today*, 12 June 2019).

The report by Roger Harrabin was a longer and more detailed version than was featured on *World at One*. The *Today* programme returned to the topic later with a lengthy studio discussion and interviews.

In its main online item about the emissions target, the BBC introduced the topic by outlining some of the benefits highlighted by the government, and then included criticisms of the proposal.

Greenhouse gas emissions in the UK will be cut to almost zero by 2050, under the terms of a new government plan to tackle climate change. Prime Minister Theresa May said there was a "moral duty to leave this world in a better condition than what we inherited". Cutting emissions would benefit public health and cut NHS costs, she said. Britain is the first major nation to propose this target - and it has been widely praised by green groups. But some say the phase-out is too late to protect the climate, and others fear that the task is impossible.

(BBC News Online, 12 June 2019)

The other BBC online article published on the day of the sample originated on the *Newsbeat* website. As with its radio item, the introduction imagined how far away 2050 was by using the ages of well-known personalities, and then explored what life might be like, before referencing some general criticism of the government's announcement.

Over the next 31 years, we're likely to be taking fewer flights, eating less meat, and using far less single-use plastic.

That is, if the UK government is to achieve its target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions to almost zero by 2050 - an ambitious plan that no other major nation has made.

The year 2050 might sound like a long time away - if in 2019 you're 25 like Stormzy and Harry Kane, you'll be 56 at the start of 2050. Critics such as the Green Party say the "net zero" target could happen much sooner, while others say it is too ambitious and expensive. So what does that target mean for you? And how could the world have changed by 2050?

(*Newsbeat* online, 12 June 2019)

Overall, in their initial framing of the government's announcement, BBC outlets were generally more critical than commercial media of the government plans, challenging rather than accepting the proposals to meet the emissions target. We now consider more closely the way each item was reported, including the degree to which the urgency of climate change was communicated, as well as the level of scrutiny the government's announcement received.

Reporting the urgency of meeting the 2050 net zero emissions target

Given the urgency of reducing emissions, which scientists have long called for, we considered how much this was stressed by journalists in each news item. In doing so, we broadly observed whether the coverage made *no* substantive reference to the urgency of reducing the emissions target, if there was *some* reference to it, or if the urgency was clearly communicated.

Commercial radio items did not stress any real urgency about enacting the government's plan, partly – as already acknowledged – because of the limited time they had to

communicate news. Across BBC radio items, there were several items where no real urgency was communicated. For example, while the *World at One* referenced the government's message that the UK was the first "major nation" to cut carbon emissions to almost zero, the only mention of urgency came in the anchor's introduction, when it was briefly stated: "Some critics say the phase-out is too late to protect the climate."

When the urgency of meeting the 2050 net-zero target was communicated, it tended to be through the use of external sources, rather than by the journalists. On the BBC News Channel, *Newsbeat*, Radio 4, ITV, and *Channel 5 News*, each outlet included an item where there was some reference to the urgency of meeting the target, but this was not unequivocal. For example, the ITV *News at Ten* anchor introduced a package by saying that the warnings about climate change had grown louder and that political action had been slow. But there was no sense of urgency in meeting the goal.

Good evening. We have been talking about climate change on this programme for decades. The warnings about our impact on the earth have grown louder and louder and yet political action has been slow. Well today arguably the pace has picked up. The government made a legally binding commitment to reduce the UK's carbon emissions to zero by 2050, the most ambitious plan yet for a major economy. The details have yet to be worked out, but it will mean big changes for all of us.

(ITV *News at Ten*, 12 June 2019)

In a follow-up ITV News package, while the consequences of climate change were discussed, this issue of changing people's behaviour immediately was alluded to, but not explicitly communicated.

Teacher: "How can we reduce our carbon footprints?"

Reporter: "These local children will be almost 40 when the net-zero target must be met."

Child 1: "We use solar panels, we use taps that turn off over a certain amount of time."

Child 2: "You can ride your bike to school, or walk and it'll be using less fossil fuels."

Reporter: "They clearly know what has to happen to prevent climate change damaging their future, but do the grownups in Westminster? Net-zero means nothing at all unless the government introduce ambitious policies to get us there."

Emma Pinchbeck (RenewableUK): "Firstly, bringing forward the technologies we already have. Backing things like onshore wind, backing energy efficiency in people's homes, pushing electrification of transport. It's really important that the treasury understands that the only risk here is delayed action. That is when the cost will go up."

Reporter: "The transition to a cleaner more sustainable economy will cost though, hundreds of billions by 2050. But the question isn't so much, can we afford it? It's can we afford not to."

(ITV *News at Ten*, 12 June 2019)

In contrast, the BBC *News at Ten*, *Today* and *Channel 4 News* more emphatically communicated the urgency of cutting emissions.

In an interview with the former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Ed Miliband, on Radio 4's *Today*, the pressing need to meet the emissions target was unambiguously discussed.

Presenter: "Well let's talk to two people now who know a great deal about this subject from different perspectives – Dieter Helm who is Professor of Energy Policy at Oxford University, author of a government review into the cost of energy, and Ed Miliband former Labour Party leader of course, former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change who steered the Climate Change Act through parliament, what, 11-years ago? You were on the programme a few weeks ago Mr Miliband talking about the state of emergency. You said then it was justified. Does this announcement today, does this change in the law today, go far enough? Does it do what's needed do you think?"

Ed Miliband: "I think it is a really important moment. It's an important moment because when I was Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, we legislated for 80% reductions in carbon emissions by 2050. Now we are if you like taking that extra step because the science tells us we need to go to zero emissions. If we can do it more quickly than 2050 I think that would be great but let's get this in legislation and then – and this is the crucial point John – let's will the means as well as the ends. And what do I mean by that? I mean we then have got to start making the policies to make this happen; like making sure we take petrol and diesel cars off the roads far earlier than 2040 which is the current government target. We have got to end the moratorium on onshore wind because it's now the cheapest fuel we have. So, this is a big signal we are sending around the world, it's a really important step, I commend the government for doing it and now we have got to get on with making it happen."

(Radio 4 *Today*, 12 June 2019)

Likewise, on the BBC *News at Ten* the reporter provided useful context about the need for all countries to urgently reduce emissions by, and even before, the government's 2050 net zero target.

A map of global warming. Despite every effort, temperatures keep rising round the world with the risk of the impacts becoming more severe. Britain hopes that taking a lead will set an example that others will follow.

Now to put this in context, the world is currently adding more and more of the gases that raise temperatures. That's this line going up here. To have any chance of avoiding dangerous warning, those emissions need to be falling instead. Either at this rate, or ideally at this much faster one. In fact the UN Climate Panel says everyone should be close to zero-emissions by 2050, not just the UK. And this matters because even a slight rise above the safe temperature level, that's 1.5C, could see the global maize crop fall by 7% risking malnutrition. 37% of the world population facing an extreme

heatwave every five years and the rise of the sea level threatening hundreds of millions of people in coastal cities. That's why climate scientists welcome Britain's move but say it's only the first step.

(BBC *News at Ten*, 12 June 2019)

By going beyond the government's announcement, and drawing on the UN Climate Panel report, the need for an immediate reduction in emissions was more clearly communicated on the BBC *News at Ten* than on other outlets.

Channel 4 News drew attention to the contradiction between the urgent calls by climate change campaigners and the thirty-year span of the target, as well as other proposed policies.

Reporter: "The time is now, say climate change campaigners, but not quite yet says the government. The pressure may now be off Theresa May, but she is determined to leave a legacy. Today announcing that the UK would cut greenhouse emissions to zero by 2050."

Theresa May: "Well, I believe that we have a moral duty to leave this world in a better condition than what we inherited. And that's why today we are announcing that we will be ending our contribution to climate change by 2050 and legislating for a net zero emissions target."

Reporter: "While some welcome that news many leading environmentalists say the target is too far away, criticising the governments chronic inaction on climate change."

Dave Timms (Friend of the Earth): "The UK can and must go faster and we must see some radical changes in policy straight away because we're not even meeting the carbon targets we have now."

Reporter: "But does government rhetoric match reality? Some think not. Only last month parliament claimed a climate emergency."

Michael Gove: "It is a crisis, it is a threat"

Reporter: "But this government's decision to expand Heathrow under Theresa May's premiership doesn't quite marry up to their mission to eliminate carbon emissions. And this October, they will impose VAT on some solar panel projects."

(*Channel 4 News*, 12 June 2019)

Channel 4, as this example illustrated, exhibited more scepticism about the government's long-term target than the other broadcasters, highlighting the contradiction between the government's plan to eliminate all emissions and to expand Heathrow.

We will now consider more closely the degree to which the government's claims about meeting its emissions target were challenged.

Which sources informed coverage - and was the government's claims challenged?

In order to compare the range and depth of coverage in more detail, we examined the type of every direct and indirect source featured, across all items. In doing so, we explored the extent to which news outlets relied largely on government perspectives rather than drawing on a

wider range of external and independent sources for different expert views about the credibility of the plan. We also assessed whether the sources were either largely critical or supportive of the government's plan (or a mixture of both).

As Tables 9.13, 9.14 and 9.15 show, in terms of political sources, BBC Radio 5 Live *Breakfast* was the only outlet to interview a government minister - Chris Skidmore, the Interim Energy and Clean Growth Minister. BBC 4 *Today* interviewed Ed Miliband, Labour opposition MP and former Environment and Climate Change Minister. Other outlets used edited clips from film and radio interviews, or statements by Theresa May, the Prime Minister, and Caroline Lucas, Green MP.

With the exception of the BBC News Channel and Radio 4's *World at One*, all the BBC items featured a government source. But these perspectives, in most cases, were counterbalanced by critical voices from climate change charities and campaigners or opposition MPs. There were also sources drawn from international bodies such as the UN, academics, an energy group and science charities. ITV *News at Ten*, *Channel 4 News* and *Channel 5 News* constructed a similar balance of information sources. Channel 4 and Channel 5, however, featured experts who considered the future of sustainable housing. In follow-up pieces, ITV and *Channel 4 News* respectively interviewed Rachel Kyte, a UN Special Representative for Sustainable Energy, and an environmental lawyer, for more in-depth analysis of the policy.

On BBC radio, there was a similar balance between a government source and climate charities and campaigners, along with experts in energy. Radio 4 featured a lengthy interview involving an academic and the former Secretary of State for Climate Change and Energy, Ed Miliband, which included a broader discussion about the historical challenges of meeting emissions targets and the contemporary international context. As already acknowledged, with the exception of talkRADIO, commercial radio relied on environment charities as their sole external source.

Finally, BBC News Online featured the highest number of sources (eight) within an item. Three were from the government, while the others included the UN, an academic, science and environmental charities, and the author of 'The Skeptical Environmentalist'.

Overall, as Tables 9.13, 9.14 and 9.15 reveal, with the exception of talkRADIO and some follow-up items, all outlets included sources critical of the government's plans. However, on Channel 5 and ITV News, some of these critical sources provided mixed responses; they were supportive while raising issues with the government's target. On all the BBC outlets government perspectives were counterbalanced by critical voices.

Table 9.13: The type and tone of directly quoted sources in television news reporting of the government’s 2050 emissions target

Note: N/A indicates where sources were included to give context to climate change rather than responding to government policy.

Outlet	Item and type	Directly quoted source	Generic source type	Critical (C), Supportive (S), Mixed (M) or Unclear (U) towards government’s plan
BBC News Channel		Rachel Kyte, UN Special Representative	Int. governance body	S
		Dr. Shaun Fitzgerald, Director, Royal Institute	Science charity	C
		Caroline Lucas, MP	Opposition MP	C
BBC News at Ten		Theresa May, PM	Government	S
		Noga Levy-Rapoport, Climate Activist	Climate activist	C
		Professor Dieter Helm, Energy Economist	Academic	C
ITV News at Ten	Item 1	Theresa May, Prime Minister	Government	S
		Ceri Nicholas, Welcome To Our Woods	Community organisation	M
		Emma Pinchbeck, Renewable UK	Renewables industry group	M
	Item 2	Rachel Kyte, UN Special Representative	Int. governance body	S
Channel 4 News	Item 1	Theresa May, PM	Government	S
		Dave Timms, Friends of the Earth	Environmental charity	C
		Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Environment	Government	N/A
		Bernard Tulkens, Architect	Architect	M

	Item 2	Farhana Yamin, Climate Change Lawyer	Lawyer	C
<i>Channel 5 News</i>		Chris Thompson, Citu Homes	Sustainable home building company	U
		Theresa May, Prime Minister	Government	S
		Prof. Andy Gouldson, Leeds Climate Commission	Group promoting action on climate change	M

Table 9.14: The type and tone of directly quoted sources in radio news reporting of the government's 2050 emissions target

Outlet	Item and type	Directly quoted source	Generic source type	Critical (C), supportive (S), Mixed (M) or (Unclear) towards government's plan
Radio 5 Live <i>Breakfast</i>	Item 1	Lawrence Slade, Energy UK	Energy group	S
	Item 2	Craig Bennett, CE Friends of the Earth	Environmental charity	C
		Chris Skidmore, Interim Energy and Clean Growth Minister	Government	S
Radio 4 <i>World at One</i>		No sources		
Radio 4 <i>Today</i>	Item 1	No sources		
	Item 2	Chris Skidmore, Acting Energy Minister	Government	S
		Caroline Lucas, MP	Opposition MP	C
	Item 3	David Attenborough, Environmental campaigner	Environmental campaigner	N/A
		Greta Thunberg, Environmental campaigner	Environmental campaigner	N/A
Jeremy Corbyn, Opposition leader		Opposition leader	N/A	
Item 4	Theresa May, Prime Minister	Government	N/A	
	Prof. Dieter Helm, Oxford University	Academic	C	
Item 4	Ed Miliband, Labour MP (past Labour leader and Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change)	Opposition MP	M	
<i>Newsbeat</i>	Item 1	No sources		
	Item 2	No sources		
LBC		David Timms, Friends of the Earth	Environmental charity	C

Heart		David Timms, Friends of the Earth	Environmental charity	C
Capital		David Timms, Friends of the Earth	Environmental charity	C
TalkRADIO		Chris Skidmore, Acting Energy Minister	Government	S

Note: N/A indicates where sources were included to give context to climate change rather than responding to government policy.

Table 9.15: The type and tone of directly quoted sources in BBC News Online reporting of the government’s 2050 emissions target

Outlet	Directly quoted source	Generic source type	Critical (C), supportive (S), Mixed (M) or (Unclear) towards government’s plan
BBC News Online	Laurence Tubiana, France Special Representative for Paris Climate Change Agreement	Int. governance body	S
	Theresa May, Prime Minister	Government	S
	PM Office, No. 10 Downing Street	Government	S
	Bjorn Lomborg, Author of ‘Skeptical Environmentalist’	Author	M
	Prof. Phil Taylor, Newcastle University	Academic	M
	Dr. Shaun Fitzgerald, Director Royal Institute	Science charity	C
	Doug Parr, Chief Scientist, Greenpeace	Environmental charity	C
	Chris Skidmore, Acting Energy Minister	Government	S

With the exception of Extinction Rebellion, all the non-political sources broadly welcomed the government’s policy, but were cautious and critical. Representatives from international bodies, such as Laurence Tubiana, France Special Representative for Paris Climate Change Agreement and Rachel Kyte, UN Special Representative for Sustainable Energy praised the government’s target. Tubiana was indirectly quoted across a range of outlets, and was directly quoted only on BBC News Online, where he stated: “This is an historic commitment that will reverberate right around the world. All eyes will now turn on the rest of the EU to match this pledge”.

Kyte’s contribution, overall, was also broadly positive about the government’s plans. She featured on ITV News and the BBC News Channel. On *ITV News at Ten*, Kyte reinforced the government’s claim that it was leading the way with cutting emissions.

Reporter: “It is no doubt a historic aim, how quickly do you think other big economies might follow suit?”

Rachel Kyte: “It is a historic day. The first major economy. We know that the French government is looking to introduce legislation hopefully later this month. This puts the pressure on Germany and other countries within Europe, and of course the entire European Union. It also sends a very strong message to those in China who are negotiating what China’s new ambition will look like. Which will be announced next year. It sends signals to other countries around the world. And the Secretary General has called all heads of states, so Prime Ministers and Presidents, to New York in September and has said, “Don’t come with speeches, come with plans.” UK now comes with legislation that helps define what leadership looks like, that puts the UK on the main stage with other economies that are making that similar commitment. And it sort of eggs everybody else on it speeds things up.”

Reporter: “Do you think there is a genuine prospect of the target actually being achieved, given that the UK is already missing the targets that it already had?”

Rachel Kyte: “Well, I think that what we know about how to move quickly is if a government sets a target which is supported by all sectors, and of course this target is supported by everybody from the CBI to the Extinction Rebellion, and across all parties, you set the long term target that allows government policy to set the course and it allows the private sector to put their research and development pounds into the things that we will need in the future and all investment. And all the evidence is, is that when that happens we actually can outperform our targets. So, I think the question is, we know what we’ve got to do, we are not arguing about the target now, now the argument has to be about how quickly we can get there and what we are going to do that will work best.”

Reporter: “And very briefly Rachel, do you think the public is anywhere near ready for the changes we are all going to have to make?”

Rachel Kyte: “Well I think you don’t want to have to heat your drafty house in the winter and you don’t want to have to pay expensive cooling in the summer. I could go on. But my impression is that young people in particular, the young people of Britain, who will be in their forties in 2050 are ready for this and are actually excited by it.”

(ITV *News at Ten*, 12 June 2019)

Likewise, on the BBC News Channel, Kyte stated:

I think it’s very welcome. It is the first major economy to set this target, which is the target that will get us to where we need to be globally. It sends a very strong message to developed countries – you need to come along and do this too – and it sends a very important message to developing countries that developed countries are taking their responsibilities seriously.

(BBC News Channel, 12 June 2019)

While the government's claim to be leading the way with cutting emissions was repeated by many outlets, no news provider made reference to other European countries, notably Sweden and Norway, where targets are more ambitious²⁵.

Friends of the Earth featured widely in the coverage, welcoming the government's announcement, but overall the source was more critical than supportive, focusing on the slow pace with which the 2050 zero emissions target is being implemented. On 5 Live *Breakfast*, for example, Craig Bennett, the Chief Executive of Friends of the Earth, commented:

“2050's far too late. We'd prefer it to be much sooner than that. There's also some weasel words in the statement unfortunately. They are talking about offsets, and that means basically still having emissions in this country but offsetting them by planting trees in other countries, in tropical countries. And the governments' advisors have said they shouldn't do that. But perhaps the biggest problem is they're also saying they should review it in five years and we think that's fundamentally wrong because climate change is like a moral issue. You didn't have William Wilberforce say we should abolish slavery and then review it after five years. If you really mean this then you should get on with it. Set the target, get on with it, move as fast as we can. But it is an important step and I think if this is the one last thing Theresa May does in office at least it is a move in the right direction even if it's not enough.”

(Radio 5 Live *Breakfast*, 12 June 2019)

While this and other sources made critical remarks about specific aspects of the government plans, we now examine how far journalists scrutinised and challenged the announcement.

To what degree was the government's plan scrutinised?

In almost all the items, news providers mainly focused on reporting the government's general claim to reach net zero emissions by 2050. In doing so, the different outlets drew heavily on a range of government claims from sources other than just the Prime Minister. In this section, we consider whether the government spokesperson supporting the policy was challenged by a journalist or another source. While it would be impractical to expect every news item to openly challenge every claim, we would expect some degree of independent scrutiny in news coverage in order for the government's plans to be held to account.

With the exception of Heart and Channel 5, all news providers challenged the government's claims, either directly by a journalist or by referring to a direct or indirect source. There were only a few items that did not include a challenge to a government claim, but these were follow-up items where a government representative may not have been directly involved in the coverage, such as the interview with an academic and a former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

Within the reporter packages across the outlets, it was mainly left to sources, either directly or indirectly, to challenge the government plans, rather than journalists. Climate campaigners, opposition MPs, academics and housing groups were featured, raising concerns that the

²⁵ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Net-Zero-The-UKs-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming.pdf#page=23>

policy was not strategically broad enough, or urgent enough, to achieve the targets. In the commercial TV and BBC radio interviews journalists, through their questioning, directly challenged the government's policy and the likelihood of meeting its target.

Across several BBC outlets (but not in the commercial coverage) there was criticism of the government's 2050 target because it allowed the government to offset its carbon footprint by relying on imported goods that had been produced in a high-emissions country. For example, Deiter Helm, a British economist and academic, was interviewed on BBC News Online, BBC *News at Ten* and *Today*. In an exchange with the *Today* presenter, Helm pointed out that the government's approach could be inconsistent because the announcement did not include any reduction in imported carbon-intensive goods. While the government reduces emissions in the UK, this could be offset by importing goods that produce higher emissions, in countries such as China.

Deiter Helm: "Well I think if you look at developments in China, it's easy to see that they are doing lots of stuff but then they are a huge economy and when you think about that economy doubling, they have to do an enormous amount of decarbonising. And the point here to bear in mind from the UK's end, doing this unilaterally, is that we have got to be very careful that we don't simply say, well you know we are going to reduce the emissions from our cars and our power stations here in Britain but we are going to carry on importing those emission from overseas, And we only..."

Anchor: "Sorry, just so the people understand what you are saying, when you say importing emissions from overseas, in other words if we buy a million pairs of trousers or skirts or whatever it is from China, we are importing the emissions that were created by the Chinese making them in the first place."

Deiter Helm: "Exactly right and you have to remember we don't make very much in this country. Manufacturing is only 20% of the economy. Most of the stuff that you go and buy in the supermarket, that people consume when they go through airports, it's all imported. And let me give you an example. Recently British Steel was in the news and the possibility was that British Steel was going to close. Well from our unilateral new target, that's great news you know? Emissions go down in Britain. But think what we'll do instead. We'll import the steel from China and elsewhere and its emission to produce that steel will be even greater. So, you have to be very careful that doing the right thing here in Britain doesn't lead to higher levels of global warming than would otherwise be the case. The story for the last 20 years in Europe has essentially been that we've all been de-industrialising, there are virtually no energy intensive investments in Europe, and we have simply been swapping home production for imports and therefore contributing, even though it looks to the contrary, to increasing global warming. And this is why it's absolutely crucial that we apply the same rules to imported carbon-intensive goods as we do domestically and there are no plans in the net-zero target to do that yet and it's essential we do."

(*Today*, 12 June 2019)

Similarly, BBC News Online, 5 Live *Breakfast* and the BBC News Channel reported criticism of the government's decision to use international carbon credits. Doug Parr, Greenpeace UK's chief scientist, stated in a BBC News Online item that:

...it was a “big moment” for the climate but there were questions around plans to allow for international carbon credits which allow the UK to pay to offset its emissions elsewhere in the world.

Such off-setting had a history of failure, was not cost-efficient and shifting the burden to developing nations undermined the commitment, he told *The Guardian*.

Chris Skidmore, the acting energy minister, said the government did not “intend” to use international carbon credits but had kept it “as an option”. “We need to be able to decarbonise in the best possible way, so we don't want to rule it out,” he said.

(Radio 5 Live *Breakfast*, 12 June 2019)

On the BBC News channel, a reporter also made specific reference to the possibility that the government might use international carbon credits as a means of meeting its emissions target.

The British government may try to achieve its targets by paying countries like India to cut emissions on its behalf if it's cheaper. But that's controversial, and so is a plan to review the UK target in five years to see if other nations are following.

(BBC News Channel, 12 June 2019)

From another perspective, on the BBC News channel, Green MP Caroline Lucas criticised the government's plans to review the 2050 target after five years and modify it depending on the progress of other countries' reductions in emissions.

“Rather than giving business the real confidence that business needs in order to be able to go forward and invest in the green economy, they're saying that after five years they're going to see if anyone else is following us. If the government wants to claim that it's showing climate leadership, that isn't about dithering at the door constantly looking over your shoulder as to whether anyone else is following you. It's actually setting a trajectory, giving business the confidence it needs and demonstrating that there is a real commitment to this way forward.”

(BBC News channel, 12 June 2019)

Following a clip of Craig Bennett, Chief Executive of Friends of the Earth, who is quoted above criticising both carbon offsetting and the five-year review, the BBC 5 Live presenter robustly put this point to Chris Skidmore, the Interim Energy and Clean Growth Minister.

Presenter: “Let's start with that point of the review after five years. Why have it in there?”

Chris Skidmore: “Well, I mean when it comes to reviews its sort of part and parcel of legislation uh, that actually you have these reviews in place. The review that I think we've mentioned is also to see that other countries are keeping pace with us because you're absolutely right as was said at the beginning of the programme we are the first G7 country to actually legislate. Not just say but legislate, it's really important to mention that, on this net-zero target and we need to make sure that we hold other countries to account as well. We are bidding at the moment to hold a really vital climate summit for the United Nations next year, and we'll know whether we've been

successful on that later this month. Because we are responsible for about 1% of emissions globally...”

Presenter: “Sure, but why do what other countries do have anything to do with our own targets. I mean clearly the global picture is very important in all of this but that’s a rather separate issue, isn’t it?”

Chris Skidmore: “Well no not at all, because I think, you know we want to show leadership today and the International Energy Agency, which has been around since 1976, so reports on countries’ progress, they reported on our progress last week and they said that we a global leaders in this and actually our legislative process that was established by the Labour Party, you know I think it’s really important to mention that this shouldn’t be party political thing. We’ve tried to build on the Climate Change Act that was passed in 2008. It creates a stable framework by which then businesses can have certainty about how to be able to decarbonise...”

Presenter: “Yeah OK, but what I’m trying to work out is by putting in this review does that mean that if other countries are not meeting their commitments that we can soften our target because it in some way it impacts on what we are doing in the UK?”

Chris Skidmore: “No I don’t think so because when we’ve said...”

Presenter: “You don’t think so, or you don’t... you know that’s not the case?”

Chris Skidmore: “No, I know that’s not the case because we’ve already set carbon budgets that extend right out to 2032 already, and we are committed to meeting those. We’ve met our carbon budget two, we are on track to meet carbon budget three, you know, to be honest with you we are not on track to meet carbon budgets four and five yet which is why the legislation is so critical for putting down a firm marker saying we must take action, we must make sure that action is placed in law. Um, and therefore the review as I said is a formality that is part of legislation, look at all other parts of legislation I’ve passed and you’ll see...”

Presenter: “OK so you’re bound...”

Chris Skidmore: “...you’ve got to have a review in place. It just needs to happen.”

Presenter: “...OK so you would be bound by that legal commitment... “

Chris Skidmore: “Yes”

Presenter: “... to this target?”

Chris Skidmore: “Which is why it’s so important today that we celebrate the fact that this law has been passed...”

Presenter: “And what happens if you don’t meet it?”

Chris Skidmore: “Well we have been able, I mean there are always those concerns but by legislating you force the change. And so we’ve legislated, you know the previous Labour government introduced the Climate Change Act, we’ve met therefore the targets that probably 11 years ago there was another programme on Radio 5 Live

making these same points. Saying “how are you going to meet it by 2020, that’s so far off?” And actually, we have met it...”

The interview went on to challenge the importing of carbon-intensive goods.

Presenter: “Well a huge amount of our manufacturing base has been shifted abroad. We’ve basically farmed out our carbon emissions which is part of the story.”

Chris Skidmore: “No no no. I think when you look, you know it was the first time since the industrial revolution that we had 18 days coal free on the National Grid last week and that was mainly because, you know, we’ve been able to invest in renewables for the future, a huge investment in our offshore winds...”

Presenter: “But we don’t have the same factories spewing out greenhouse gases anymore.”

Chris Skidmore: “No, I mean this was net electricity, so it’s actually around the use and creating electricity market shifts and changes here. But I think what’s really important is to have that process that’s sustainable change. And it’s also really important for listeners to know the Independent Committee on Climate Change said that 2050 was the earliest possible moment at which we could have a sustainable transition for business but also a just transitions, to make sure we don’t penalise people.”

(Radio 5 Live *Breakfast*, 12 June 2019)

As this example illustrates, 5 Live did not just report the government’s plans, it challenged the credibility of the emissions target in specific areas.

Finally, the economic cost of the government’s emissions target featured in some news items after comments made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond. He was indirectly quoted as saying the cost could be as high as £1 trillion on *Channel 4 News*, *Channel 5 News* and *5 Live Breakfast*. BBC News Online reported one source who supported this estimate, and one who said it was probably too low. In contrast, on *Channel 4 News*, *Today* and BBC News online, Hammond’s costing was criticised by climate activists, who stated that this estimate did not take into account the benefits of reducing carbon emissions.

While all reporter packages across the outlets gave an overview of the government’s policy, they varied in depth of challenge, analysis and context. Channel 5 provided a brief overview of the government’s announcement before going into more depth about one of the major changes needed to achieve the policy. Along with *Channel 4 News*, the BBC News channel and *BBC News at Ten*, *Channel 5 News* at 5pm went to a site of new low-emission buildings and interviewed sources about the emissions target and the changes needed.

Anchor: “Now she may be in the final stages of her time in office, but Theresa May has made a bold pledge on climate change. She wants the UK to become the first major nation to cut carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050. As Peter Lane reports, it will mean big changes to how we live, work and travel.”

Peter Lane: “Britain gave the world the Industrial, shaping our Industrial revolution, shaping our landscape and lives for generations. Now, experts say climate change calls for a new revolution. Is this part of it? On the site of

a former factory in Leeds, solar part of it? On the site of a former factory in Leeds, solar panels line the rooftops of low energy, low carbon footprint homes. Still under construction this is the city's Climate Innovation District.”

(*Channel 5 News*, 12 June 2019)

All the reporter packages and studio interviews scrutinised the government's plans more closely than did Channel 5 news. On the BBC News channel, ITV and Channel 4, reporter packages and interviews challenged the government's plan and pointed out inconsistencies between its domestic industrial strategy and achieving its 2050 zero emissions target.

For example, in a BBC News channel reporter package:

And what about other weak points in the government's case, like planes? Britain has been hitting over all emissions targets so far, but it's slipping on future medium-term goals. What's more, ministers are expanding Heathrow, building more roads and encouraging fracking. How do these carbon intensive policies meet the urgent need to protect this fragile planet?

(BBC News channel, 12 June 2019)

While all outlets emphasised that the government's 2050 zero emissions target needed to be supported with new policies, an ITV news item from the Rhondda Vale took a different angle to other news providers. Visiting a community “abandoned by policies of the past” (*ITV News at Ten*, 12 June 2019), the reported highlighted the negative impact of previous energy and industrial changes on communities, suggesting this should be taken into account in the government's future plans of meeting its zero emissions target.

In a follow-up reporter package, *Channel 4 News* interviewed an international environmental lawyer and an Extinction Rebellion activist. Both were highly critical of the government's past and present policies, and its track record of meeting them, including the estimated cost by the chancellor and the cost of inaction. Although none of these criticisms was unique to Channel 4, they were all set out within a single interview, which stressed the inconsistent approach to meeting previous emissions targets.

Summary

The initial framing of the government's announcement was slightly different across the wide range of news providers, with BBC outlets generally more critical of its plans than commercial media. All news providers supplied some basic information about the government's announcement to cut emissions by 2050, but the level of policy analysis varied across broadcasters. With limited time, most commercial radio news stations largely repeated the government's plan but counterbalanced it with a critical voice. Most BBC news outlets did not just accept the government's proposals about meeting the 2050 zero emissions target, but questioned and challenged them.

All television and BBC radio outlets provided relatively detailed information about the government's plans to cut emissions, but there were differences in the selection of sources and how critical they were towards the proposal. On television news, all the reporter packages across the outlets gave an overview of the government's policy, but they varied in

depth of challenge, analysis and context. Channel 5 provided a brief overview of the government's target before going more into more depth about one of the major changes needed to achieve the policy. As with *Channel 4 News*, the BBC News channel and BBC *News at Ten*, Channel 5 went to a site of new low-emission buildings and interviewed sources about the likelihood of the government meeting its target.

While commercial radio supplied limited scrutiny of the proposal, ITV and Channel 4 provided critical coverage by challenging the government's record on previous emissions targets, the cost of inaction on climate change and examining how communities in the past had fallen behind because of industrial changes in energy policy. Across most BBC News outlets, the government's proposal to meet the zero emissions target was robustly challenged. A range of critical voices contradicted the government's response, along with probing questioning from journalists. With the exception of Heart and Channel 5, all news providers substantively challenged the government's claim, either directly by a journalist or by referring to a direct or indirect source.

Channel 4 journalists exhibited the most scepticism towards the government's long-term target, compared to other broadcasters. The contradiction between the government's plan to eliminate all emissions and to expand Heathrow, for example, was highlighted by a journalist (as it was on the BBC News channel). Only BBC outlets (and no commercial media) referenced or challenged the government's plan to review and revise its policy after five years if other countries had not met their targets, and also challenged the fact that the UK could offset its own emissions by buying international carbon credits.

10.0: Intercoder reliability scores

We recoded approximately 10% of the whole sample to generate intercoder reliability scores. We conducted reliability tests for all variables used in the main content analysis, as well as the case studies. Most variables were coded by two researchers, whereas some broadcast news output was coded by three researchers. We conducted intercoder reliability scores for variables involving a different number of researchers. To ensure all variables were robust, we assessed their reliability by carrying out statistical tests using Cohen's Kappa (for variables when two researchers coded material) and Krippendorff's Alpha (for variables when three researchers coded output).

As the results below reveal, overall we found a consistently high level of inter-coder agreement across all variables.

Conventions

Media	Level of agreement with Krippendorff's Alpha (KA) in brackets
Television/radio news	89.0% (0.85 KA)

Hard and soft news

Media	Level of agreement with Krippendorff's Alpha (KA) in brackets
Television/radio news	92.7% (0.72 KA)
Online/news apps	100%

News topics

Media	Level of agreement, with either Krippendorff's Alpha (KA) or Cohen's Kappa (CK) in brackets
Television/radio news	91.4% (0.91 KA)
Online/news apps	87.2% (0.85 CK)

Hyperlinks

Variable	Level of agreement, with Cohen's Kappa (CK) in brackets
Hyperlink source	100%
Hyperlink category	97.2% (0.96 CK)
Hyperlink type	100%

Tory leadership

Variable	Level of agreement, with Cohen's Kappa (CK) in brackets
Policy analysis	100%
Policy information	100%
Policy or process	100%
Sources	90% (0.61 CK)

Brexit

Variable	Level of agreement, with Cohen's Kappa (CK) in brackets
Policy information	87.5% (0.80 CK)
Policy analysis	87.5% (0.71 CK)
Country focus	100%
Sources	100%

Devolution

Variable	Level of agreement, with Cohen's Kappa (CK) in brackets
Devolved signposting	100%
UK mentioned	100%
Devolved nation stated focus	100%
Implicit / explicit reference	100%
Signposting positioning	100%
Signposting	92.3% (0.88 CK)

Climate Change

Variable	Level of agreement, with Cohen's Kappa (CK) in brackets
Sources	100%