Reporting the 2005 U.K. General Election

A study conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission by the Communication Research Centre, Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University

Report Authors: David Deacon, Dominic Wring, Michael Billig, John Downey, Peter Golding and Scott Davidson

Coding Team: Ben Oldfield, Emma Vine, Emily Keightley and Scott Davidson

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Introduction and Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an extensive audit of media coverage of the 2005 UK General Election conducted by the Communication Research Centre, Loughborough University on behalf of the Electoral Commission. The report is organised into the following chapters

Chapter 1: Mapping Media Coverage of the 2005 UK General Election: the results of the quantitative analysis of media content (pages 7-43) (David Deacon, Dominic Wring & Peter Golding)
Chapter 2: Politics as an Appearance and Reality Show: the results of the analysis of qualitative aspects of coverage (pages 44-59) (Michael Billig)
Chapter 3: The Internet and the UK General Election (pages 60 - 71) (John Downey and Scott Davidson)
Chapter 4: Women's Magazines during the election (pages 72 - 75) (Dominic Wring and David Deacon)

Executive Summary

The Extent of National Media Coverage of the Campaign

For the UK National Media, the 2005 General Election was just one of several news stories in town. The low levels of coverage particularly at the start of the campaign can be partly explained by the coincidence of other major news events that colonised a significant amount of the available news space, but this may not be sole factor. Certainly, this is not the first campaign in which other significant news events have intruded into proceedings[1].

The displacement effect of other news events may signal a growing disengagement with among certain sections of the national media with the formal political process. Although disconnection from the election was most evident with the populist national press, longitudinal comparisons also reveal an election-by-election decline in the amount of election coverage for the BBC flagship news and current affairs programmes between 1992 and 2005. (Levels of coverage slightly increased for the main ITV news programme in 2005, from a considerable low in 2001, thereby closing the coverage gap noted in previous elections with BBC 1 coverage.) The steep reduction from levels of BBC1 coverage since 1997 is mainly explained by the BBC's decision not to lengthen their flagship news bulletins in 2005, as in 2001. But this decision alone may be taken as indicative of the emergence of a more 'pragmatic', news value based approach to electoral reporting in the UK, in which the campaign must compete for prominence, rather than command it as of right.

Having said this, the results from 2005 suggest one important reversal of respect previous tends in media presentation. For a number of years analysts have been claiming that the media have been trivialising politics and that one

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[1] For example, in the 1992 Election Campaign a royal divorce was announced.

example of this has been the sound-bite culture of presentation. However, in this election, for the first time since 1992, the average length of politicians' sound-bites increased in mainstream TV news coverage.

Stop Watch Balance in the National Media

In the 2005 election, the Labour Party received more national press and broadcast coverage than their political opponents. This difference was greatest in the national press, but also evident in national broadcast content. There is no evidence, however, that this situation was unique to this election or the by-product of the recent change to a regime of self regulation by the broadcasters in their monitoring of the amount of coverage given to the main political parties. Comparisons with elections since 1992 show that the incumbent political party has consistently commanded higher levels of media attention, and that the political prominence of Labour in 2005 exactly mirrored that achieved by the Conservative party in 1992.

In previous elections analysts have commented upon the trend towards 'presidentialisation', or the focus by the media on the party leaders. As with previous elections, a large proportion of national election reporting in 2005 fixed upon the comments and activities of the three main party leaders. Interestingly, however, levels of presidentialisation in the national media appeared lower than those found in the 1992, 1997 and 2001 campaigns.

One area where there was no change was in the amount of coverage given to women and women's issues. Women candidates were an even more marginalised presence in coverage than they were in the actual election process itself, and few of the other elite opinion formers reported were women. Women most frequently appeared as members of the public or as familial associates of (male) politicians. Writing in the mid 1980s, Patricia Holland remarked that news coverage routinely presents women

> '…either as an anonymous example of uninformed public opinion, as housewife, consumer, neighbour, or as a mother, sister, wife of the man in the news… Thus not only do they speak less frequently, but they tend to speak as passive reactors and witnesses to public events rather than as participants in those events' (138-9)

Twenty years later, it offers an excellent summation of the situation in the 2005 campaign.

Agenda Balance in the National Media

'Iraq', 'Asylum and Immigration' and 'Political improprieties' were the most prominent substantive issues addressed in national coverage. However, as with previous elections, the biggest election story was the electoral process itself (party campaigning strategies and activities, opinion polls, etc). Moreover, national media tended to avoid providing manifesto and policy details in their coverage, focusing more on political impressions than information.

There were some striking differences in the specific news agendas of different national media. For example, the mid market tabloids (which all declared their support for the Conservative Party) gave more coverage to 'Iraq' and 'political improprieties' than other national media, concentrating much of the latter discussion upon the personal integrity of the Prime Minister. In contrast, Iraq was considerably relegated in the populist tabloid agenda.

Overall, the national media agenda was restricted to a limited range of topics, and many issues that became big news stories in the immediate aftermath of the campaign were sidelined during the election (most noticeably, 'Europe', 'Transport policy', 'the Environment', 'Northern Ireland', 'Terrorism' and 'Foreign Policy [other than Iraq]').

Directional Balance in National Coverage

UK-wide coverage tended to present Labour political actors in a more defensive posture than their party opponents in national coverage and when the media reported issues that were directly identified with Labour, the reporting tended to emphasise the possible negative electoral consequences for the party.

Broadcast and 'Quality' press coverage were the most directionally balanced – tending to focus upon the 'mixed' and 'general' party political implications of themes reported. In contrast, coverage in the national mid-market press was the most hostile to Labour and the most receptive to the Conservatives. This tendency was reversed to a more limited extent in the populist press, where 'bad news' for the Tories exceeded negative coverage of Labour.

Any suggestion that these data may suggest that the national popular press are re-embracing the strong political partisanship so evident in the 1980s is tempered by closer analysis of their editorial declarations. Although opprobrium of the government was widely evident, so were reservations and qualifications about the political alternatives on offer.

Election Coverage in Scotland, Wales and the East Midlands

Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalists gained some media presence in Wales and Scotland respectively, but the main parties still dominated the media agenda in the regional and other national media sample. As with UK-wide media, the Labour party commanded most coverage in the Scottish, Welsh and East Midlands media, but the coverage gap was not as great in these quarters.

Reporting of the electoral process itself commanded the greatest proportion of coverage in Scotland, Wales and the East Midlands. Beyond this aspect, however, there were some noticeable interpretative differences across these regions. In Wales and Scotland, constitutional issues concerning devolution were considerably more prominent in the news agenda. 'Asylum & Immigration' did not feature highly on the Welsh media agenda, but issues

concerning the NHS attracted a higher proportion of press and broadcast attention in this context. In the East Midlands, NHS and Crime featured particularly prominently.

Measures of directional balance suggest that coverage in Wales and the East Midlands had a more diffuse and less partisan focus than Scottish and UK wide news coverage.

The Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis concentrated upon exploring the subtle ways in which the television media might present politicians as figures to be distrusted. One of the strengths of qualitative analysis is that it permits the in-depth analysis of routine, non-dramatic sequences of talk. Thus, we examined how in the early parts of the election, television news programmes introduced political items and how their own political experts offered interpretations. Routinely, the experts and news-presenters treated the words of politicians as being in need of interpretation, in order to demonstrate the so-called 'underlying reality' behind the 'spin'. This assumption was in-built into the rhetorical structures of presentation with the effect that politicians were routinely presented in ways that encourage 'the hermeneutics of suspicion'. This can be seen forcefully in 'Paxman-style' interviewing. In this way, the presenters and interpreters regularly mediate the words of the politicians. Several examples were analysed in detail to show how this pattern of trusting the expert interpreters and distrusting the politicians has become a routine feature of news presentation. As such, the conventions of political reporting and interviewing may be contributing to the widespread distrust of politicians which has been regularly identified by opinion poll data,

The Internet and 'Blogging'

The Internet played a no more significant role in the 2005 General Election than it did in 2001. In terms of campaigning, political parties primarily saw the Internet as a way of raising funds and communicating with activists rather than as a direct vote-winner. The 2005 general election was the first, however, where citizens en masse sought out information and opinion on websites, particularly the BBC News website and Guardian Unlimited. However, the majority of citizens who seek out political information on-line belong to relatively wealthy and well-educated groups and make up a small percentage of the UK population. The mainstream news websites do not offer a substantially different fair from other sources. The significance of blogging was hyped in the UK before the election but proved to be of little importance during the election campaign. Several mainstream news media, however, incorporated blogs as an adjunct to their conventional reporting.

Women's Magazines and the 2005 Election

Although the best selling magazine Take A Break proclaimed this was the 'first UK women's election' this was not borne out if measured by the scant coverage of the campaign in the burgeoning number of weekly magazine designed for a predominantly female audience. Even the obvious human interest story involving the birth of Charles Kennedy's son failed to generate much response and the majority of titles analysed remained entirely devoid of politics despite their partly news driven formats. There were, however, some exceptions including features with the main leaders, photo-opportunities and interviews with prominent women including the Conservative leader's wife Sandra Howard.

References

Holland, P. (1987) 'When and Woman Reads the News' in H. Baehr and G.Dyer (eds) *Boxed in: Women and Television*, London: Pandora, 133-149.

Chapter 1: Mapping Media Coverage of the 2005 UK General Election

Dr David Deacon, Dr Dominic Wring & Professor Peter Golding

Section 1: Introduction

This chapter presents the results of a quantitative content analysis of election news reporting in national, regional and local media during the 2005 General Election Campaign.

1.1: Sampling

Table 1.1 lists (a) the media sampled for the quantitative content analysis (see columns 1-3), and (b) on-line and magazine discussed in chapters 2 & 3. Sampling began on Monday 4 April and ended on Friday 6 May (respectively, the day preceding the formal announcement of the commencement of the campaign and the day after polling).

With the broadcast media, all items that made any reference to the 2005 election campaign were included in the analysis. With the print media, all election related items that appeared in the following sections of the newspapers were coded

- The front page
- The first two pages of the domestic news section
- The first two pages of any specialist section assigned to the coverage of the campaign
- The page containing and facing papers' leader editorials.

The rationale here was to concentrate our analysis on the prioritized news arenas in the press.

Table 1.1: Media Sample

	TV News	Radio	Press	Magazines	Internet Websites & Blogs
	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
National – UK	• BBC1 10pm • BBC • ITV 10.30pm • C4 , 7pm • C5, 7pm • Sky News 9pm	• R4 Today 07.30-08.30 • R1 Newsbeat	• 'Quality' Newspapers (Guardian, Observer, Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph, Times, Sunday Times, Financial Times, Independent, Independent on Sunday) • 'Mid	• Bella • Best • Chat • Closer • Heat • Hello! • My Weekly • New! • Now • OK! • Peoples Friend • Reveal	• Labour • Conservative • Lib Dem • UKIP • National Newspaper websites

	TV	Radio	Press	Magazines	Websites/Parties
			Market' Newspapers (Mail, Mail on Sunday, Express, Sunday Express) • 'Populist' Newspapers (Sun, News of the World, Mirror, Sunday Mirror, People, Star, Star on Sunday)	• Star • Take A Break • That's Life • The Lady • Woman • Woman's Own	
Other National	• BBC Wales 1830-1900 ITV1 Wales 1800-1830 • BBC Scotland 1830-1900 ITV1 Scotland 1800-1830	• Radio Good Morning Wales 07.30-08 00 • BBC Radio Scotland 07.30-0800	• Sunday Mail • Daily Record • Scotland on Sunday • The Scotsman	-	• Plaid Cymru • SNP
Regional	• ITV1 Central News at Six BBC East Midlands Today	• BBC Radio Nottingham 07.30-0800	-	-	-
Local	-	-	• Derby Evening Telegraph • Nottingham Evening Post • Leicester Mercury • Lincolnshire Echo	-	• Selected examples of constituency websites • Selected examples of local news websites

1.2: Structure of this Chapter

Sections 2 to 4 of this chapter deal solely with national UK news coverage of the 2005 Election campaign. Section 2 examines the extent of election coverage across the sampled media. The next three sections examine this coverage in more detail in relation, utilizing a tri-partite distinction suggested by Norris *et al*. (1999: 20) between:

- **Stop Watch Balance** – the relative prominence given to competing political actors in news reporting (section 3).

- **Agenda Balance** – the relative prominence given to the various issues that are associated with a particular topic or event (section 4).

- **Directional Balance** – the amount of positive and negative coverage given to various political actors and issues (section 5).

Section 6 of the chapter examines trends in election related coverage in the Scottish, Welsh and East Midlands media.

Section 2: The Extent of National Coverage of the Campaign

Compared with the previous two campaigns there was less certainty about the outcome of the 2005 vote, but it took some time for national coverage of the election to gain cumulative momentum from the commencement of the campaign on 5 April. Figures 2.1 to 2.4 outline the amount of Election related coverage produced in all national media, on a week-by-week basis during the total sample period.

Figure 2.1: Amount of National Daily Press Coverage (4 April - 6 May 2005)

Average cm2 (Per Title, Per Day)

Legend:
- Up Market
- Mid Market
- Popular

X-axis: Week 1, Week 2, Week 3, Week 4, Week 5
Y-axis: 0, 500, 1000, 1500, 2000, 2500, 3000, 3500, 4000

Figure 2.2: Amount of Election National TV News Coverage (4 April - 6 May 2005)

Total Seconds

X-axis: Week 1, Week 2, Week 3, Week 4, Week 5
Y-axis: 0, 5000, 10000, 15000, 20000, 25000, 30000, 35000, 40000, 45000

Figure 2.3: Extent of Election Related News Coverage in National Sunday Press (10 April - 1 May 2005)

Average cm2 (Per Title, Per Day)
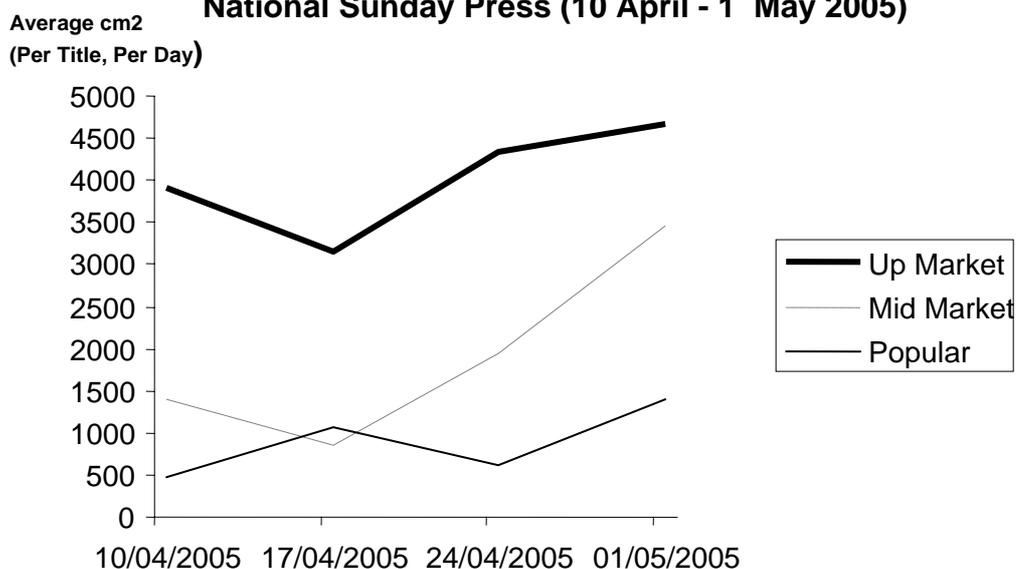
The following main points emerge:

- Levels of coverage in the first week of the campaign were low compared with subsequent weeks. This can be explained, at least in part, by two other significant news events that coincided with the start of the campaign – the death and burial of the Pope and the Royal wedding between Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles.

- In the national 'quality' daily press[2], levels increased significantly in the second week and steadily increased thereafter (see figure 2.1).

- In the Mid Market daily press sector[3], coverage peaked in week 3 and then slightly reduced during the last two weeks of the election (see figure 2.1).

- In the Populist daily press sector[4], attention to the election only significantly increased in the last week of the campaign (n.b. aggregate levels of coverage in this sector was slightly lower in week 3 than it was in week 1.) (See figure 2.1)

- For the national broadcast media[5], levels of coverage increased steadily through the first four weeks of the campaign, but then reduced slightly during the last week (see figure 2.2).

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[2] The Guardian, The Financial Times, The Times, The Independent and the The Daily Telegraph.
[3] The Daily Mail and Daily Express
[4] The Daily Mirror, The Star and The Sun
[5] National Broadcast=BBC1 10 pm News, ITN 10.30 News, C4 7pm News, BBC2 Newsnight, C5 News, Sky 9pm News, BBC Radio 4 'Today' (07.30-08.30), BBC Radio 1 'Newsbeat' (17.45-18.00)

- The amount of coverage in the National weekly press was far more volatile and variable, at least during the early stages of the campaign (see figure 2.3). In the national 'quality'[6] and 'mid market' press[7] sectors, the amount of coverage reduced between 10 April and 17 April, whereas for the 'populist' press, coverage increased during this period and then fell back on 24 April. Levels then rose for all three sectors for the remaining publication dates prior to the vote on 5 May.

Table 2.1 provides further evidence regarding the extent to which the more popular national newspapers engaged with the campaign. The data show the number of occasions that these titles ran election related stories on their front pages during the campaign. Overall, only 1 in 5 of the available front pages in the populist and mid market press carried any election related news.

Table 2.1: Number of Days During the Campaign that the Election Made the Front Page in the Mid Market and Populist Press

Title	Number of days with a front page election story	Percentage of all days sampled
The Sun	7	21
The Daily Mirror	5	15
The Star	3	9
The Daily Mail	11	33
The Daily Express	8	24

Alongside the death of the Pope and the Royal Wedding, another news story broke during the campaign that attracted a significant amount attention in some sections of the national media. These were the allegations made by a former employee of the celebrity couple David and Victoria Beckham regarding the state of their marriage. This story broke in the penultimate week of campaigning, and coincided with the final publication of Lord Goldsmith's confidential advice to the UK government about the legality of engaging in military action against Iraq. Whilst the latter disclosures attracted considerable comment in some media sectors and brought the issue of Iraq to the forefront of the election agenda (see section 4), they attracted scant attention in the populist press. Table 2.2 compares the total space dedicated to the Goldsmith story with the coverage give to the Beckham's marriage in the populist and mid market news sectors.

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[6] The Observer, The Sunday Telegraph, The Independent on Sunday, The Sunday Times
[7] The Mail on Sunday, The Sunday Express

Table 2.2: Tabloid Engagement with the Election Campaign – A comparison of coverage of David and Victoria Beckham's marriage (25 April) with coverage of the leaking of Lord Goldsmith's legal advice on Iraq (28 April)

	David and Victoria Beckham's Marriage 25 April	Leaking of Goldsmith's legal advice 28 April
Mirror	2146 cm2	204 cm2
Star	2269 cm2	864 cm2
Sun	2141 cm2	72 cm2
Mail	2069 cm2	3577 cm2
Express	756 cm2	1577 cm2

In the Mirror, Star and Sun, the amount of coverage given to the Posh and Becks' marriage story on 25th April far exceeded coverage given to the leaked Goldsmith's document on 28th April

With the Mail and Express, coverage of the latter exceeded the former, but the Mail in particular seemed greatly fascinated with both of these 'inside stories'.

2.1: Levels of Coverage in Context

These data suggest that at least certain sections of the national UK media had little initial or sustained interest in the 2005 campaign. This raises the question as to whether this apparent distraction was unique to 2005 or indicative of a longer term process of political disengagement.

The Communication Research Centre at Loughborough University has conducted investigations into national news election reporting for every UK general election since 1992. Although these were separate studies, it is possible to draw some comparisons across the data sets to assess how election-reporting practices may (or may not) have changed.

Figure 2.4 compares the amount of election related coverage in three flagship television news programmes over the last four UK general elections[8].

The results show that:

- There was a sharp decline in the amount of election related coverage in BBC1 Main Evening News and BBC2 Newsnight coverage between the 1997 and 2001 election campaigns. The trajectory of this decline reduced with the 2005 campaign, but the amount of coverage continued on a down-wards trend.

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[8] It is not possible to conduct an equivalent comparison in levels of national press coverage from 1992-2005, due to differences in the sampling and measurement procedures adopted in the four studies.

- In contrast, the amount of election related coverage on the main ITV evening news bulletin increased from a low point in 2001. Moreover, the clear gap evident in the previous 3 campaigns between the amount of election coverage on BBC1 and ITV news disappeared.

- A major reason for this closure of the BBC/ ITV 'coverage gap' in 2005 was ITV news's broadcast of comparatively lengthy interviews with the three main party leaders in their bulletins. These three items accounted for just over 6 percent of the total election broadcast time on the ITV news programme during the sample period.

Figure 2.4: Amount of Election Relations National TV Coverage 1992 - 2005
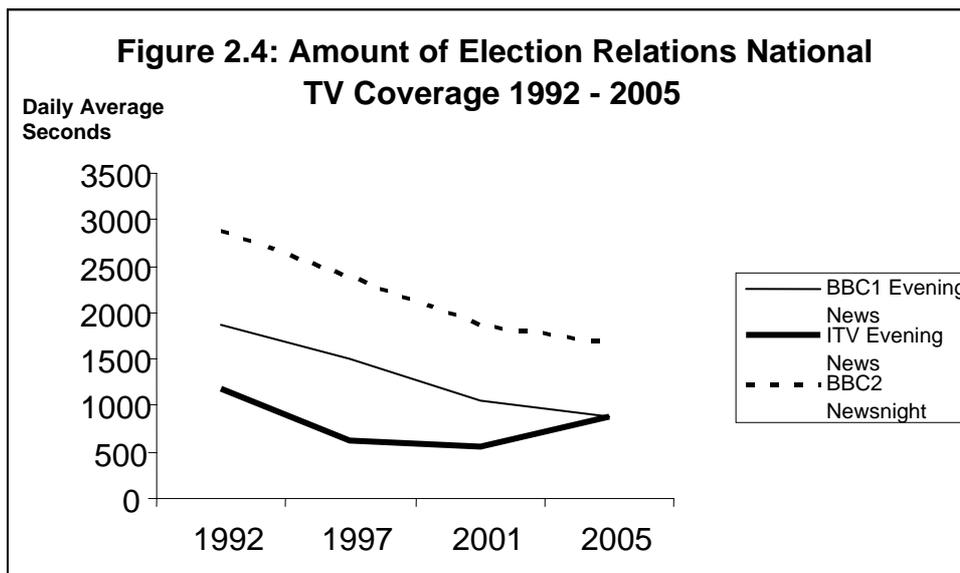
Notes: Daily averages were calculated by dividing the sum of all coverage by the number of days sampled.

2.2: Sound-bite Politics 1992 - 2005

Analysts in the US and UK have frequently remarked upon the emergence of a 'sound bite' culture in mainstream politics. The term first emerged in the 1980s to describe how politicians, adapting to the logic of media formats, have sought to organise their public communication around brief, pithy and memorable phrases. One US study found that the average amount of time political candidates were presented speaking in an uninterrupted way in TV news items reduced from 43 seconds in 1968 to 9 seconds in 1988 (Hallin, 1992).

Figures 2.5 and 2.6 compare the average length of quotation of actors in the two flagship national news programmes since 1992 (BBC1 and ITV Evening news bulletins). The results show that an election-on-election compression in average speaking time of a politician between 1992 and 2001 was reversed to some extent in 2005.[9] This change was most dramatic for the ITV evening news, where for the first time party political leaders and all political actors had

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[9] The averages presented here cannot be simply compared to those derived from US studies. This is because our figures represent the total amount of speaking time a specific individual had in a news item. As such, these figures are in many cases based on the aggregation of sound-bite time, rather than individual speech acts.

a higher average speaking time than they did on BBC1 news (see Figure 2.5). The difference between the two programmes in 2005 was mainly caused by ITV's inclusion of three lengthy interviews with the main party leaders in their bulletins. Figure 2.6 provides the averages with these three outlying values excluded. With this calculation a gap reappears between BBC1 and ITV in average quotation time for political sources. Nevertheless, these adjusted data still indicate that average quotation times were less compressed than they were in 2001.

Figure 2.5: Average Length of Politicians' Soundbites on BBC1 and ITV Main Evening News Programmes (4 April - 6 May 2005) (Unadjusted figures)

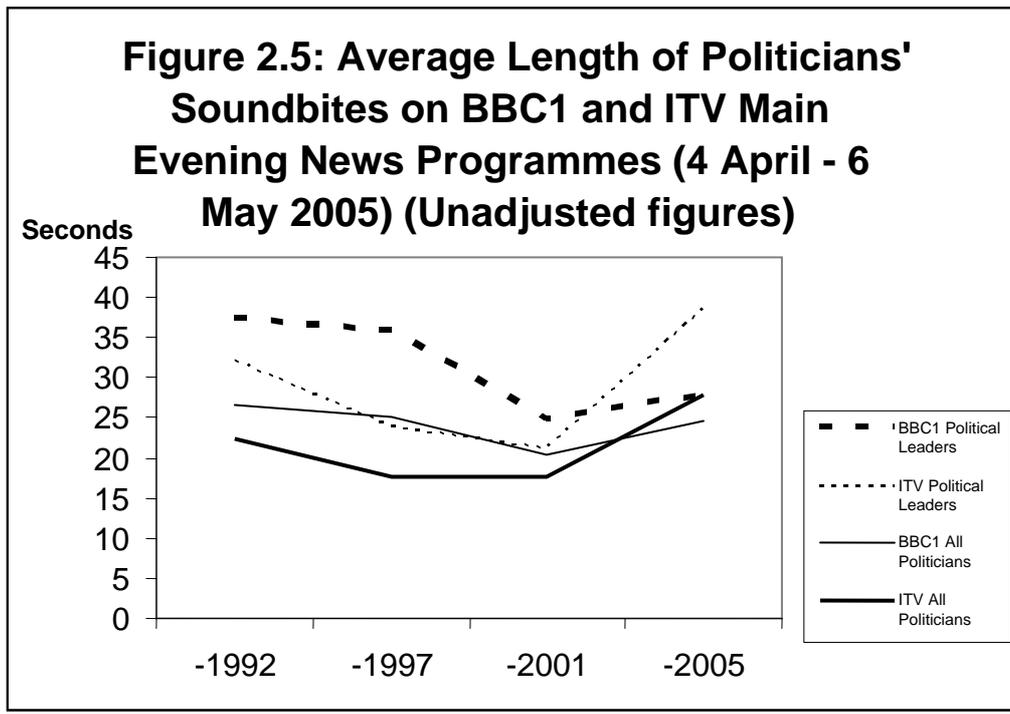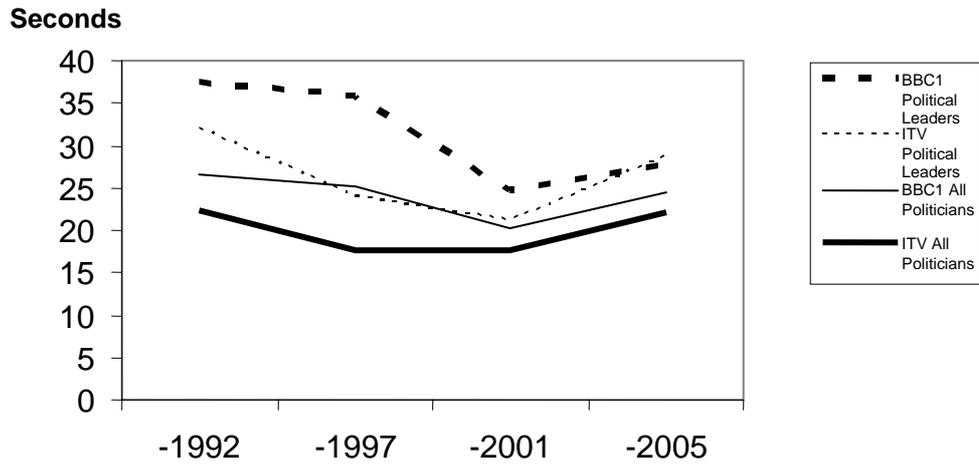Loughborough University   **Communication Research Centre**

Figure 2.6: Average Length of Politicians' Soundbites on BBC1 and ITV Main Evening News Programmes (4 April - 6 May 2005) (adjusted figures)

Seconds

Legend:
- BBC1 Political Leaders
- ITV Political Leaders
- BBC1 All Politicians
- ITV All Politicians

X-axis: -1992, -1997, -2001, -2005

Y-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40

Section 3: Stop Watch Balance

Stop-watch balance concerns the degree of parity in the space given to political competitors in news coverage. Two measures were used to assess this dimension of election related national news coverage: (a) the frequency with which party political figures appeared as 'active participants' in election related items[10], and (b) the amount of direct quotation allocated to them in those appearances where they were directly quoted[11]. The former measure assesses *news presence* (i.e. which political sources are the most frequent subjects and participants in routine news coverage) the latter assesses *news access* (as a general principle, the extent and frequency with which a source is quoted is an indication of their news status and credibility).

3.1: The Party Political Arena

Table 3.1 compares these two measures of 'stop watch' balance in National UK coverage (by media sector)

Table 3.1: Stop Watch Balance in National Media Coverage[12]: The Frequency of Appearance and Amount of Direct Quotation of Party Political Actors by Media Sector (4 April to 6 May 2005)

	National Broadcast		National 'Quality' Press		National Mid Market Press		National Populist Press	
	Appearances	Quotation	Appearances	Quotation	Appearances	Quotation	Appearances	Quotation
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Blair	12	14	15	7	20	18	21	39
Brown	3	2	7	8	5	4	7	5
Other Labour	21	22	29	31	33	25	28	24
Howard	13	13	10	19	13	28	13	19
Other Conservative	17	19	21	20	17	15	17	7
Kennedy	9	9	6	6	4	3	5	2
Other Lib Dem	15	13	10	4	6	5	8	2
Other Party	11	8	4	5	2	2	1	1
(Base N)	1441	46393 (secs)	2505	56337 (words)	506	14419 (words)	765	20967 (words)

Notes

[10] An 'actor' was defined as an individual or institution whose actions, opinions or existence were directly mentioned in a news item. But this was not the sole test. The individual/ institution mentioned had to have some independent status within the piece, i.e. they had an active presence and their views and actions were not simply mentioned or discussed by another actor.

[11] Quotation time for broadcast coverage was measured in seconds and for press coverage in the number of directly quoted words.

[12] National Broadcast=BBC1 10 pm News, ITN 10.30 News, C4 7pm News, BBC2 Newsnight, C5 News, Sky 9pm News, BBC Radio 4 'Today' (07.30-08.30), BBC Radio 1 'Newsbeat' (17.45-18.00)
'National "Quality" Press' = Guardian, Observer, Independent, Independent on Sunday, Daily Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph, Times, Sunday Times, Financial Times.
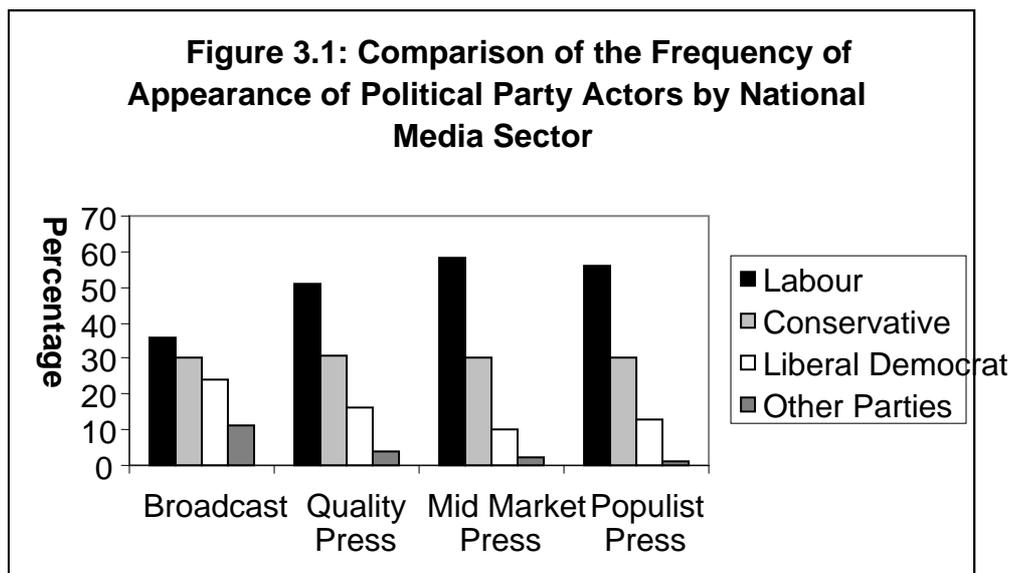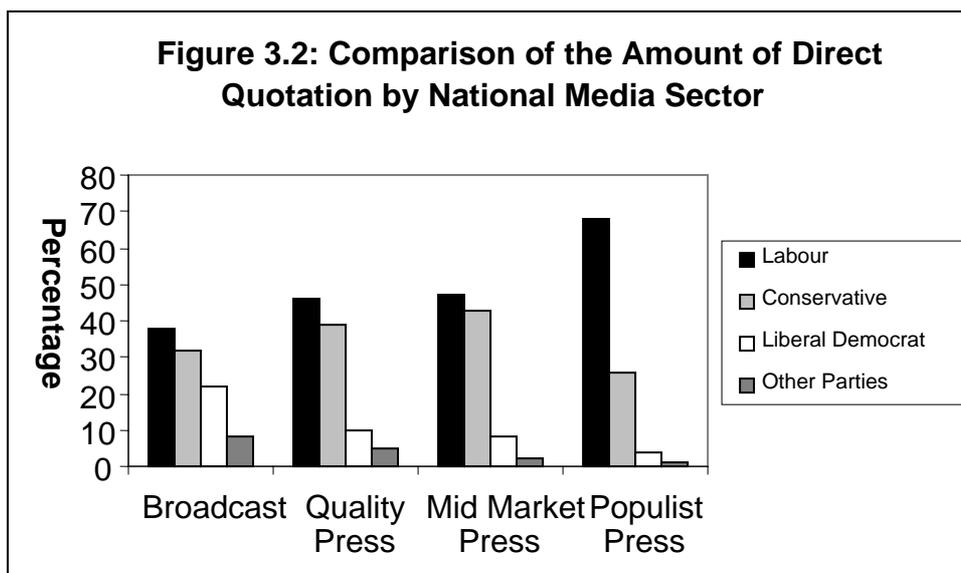'National Mid Market Press'= Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday, Daily Express, Express on Sunday
'National Populist Press' = Sun, News of the World, Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror, People, Star, Star on Sunday.
Up to 5 Political actors could be coded per item.

The following main points emerge:

- The strength of association between these measures of news presence and news access varied across media sectors. The strongest correlation was found for broadcast content (0.964), followed by the 'quality' press (0.847), Mid Market tabloids (0.805) and populist titles (0.786). There were two noticeable discrepancies between these measures. In the 'Mid Market Press' Tony Blair appeared more frequently than Michael Howard in election related coverage (20% to 13%, respectively), but Michael Howard was more extensively quoted than the Prime Minister (28% compared with 18%, respectively). In the 'Populist' press, Tony Blair accounted for 21% of the political appearances coded, but nearly 40% of the direct quotation space for all political sources.

- Labour party sources received higher levels of coverage than their party opponents across all national media sectors. (See Figures 3.1 and 3.2 for visual summaries of the differences between the parties in (a) the frequency with which they appeared and (b) the extent of their quotation.) The differences were smallest in national Broadcast coverage, and greatest for the mid market and populist press.

Figure 3.1: Comparison of the Frequency of Appearance of Political Party Actors by National Media Sector

Figure 3.2: Comparison of the Amount of Direct Quotation by National Media Sector

- There was a two party squeeze in all national press coverage, which marginalized the Liberal Democrats and minor political parties.

- There was a marked 'Presidentialisation' in all national election coverage – i.e. a significant proportion of coverage in all sectors focused upon the main party leaders. This trend was most evident in the populist newspaper coverage, where the three main party leaders accounted for 39 percent of all politician appearances and 60 percent of direct quotation space. The next most leader-orientated coverage was in the 'mid market' press, with the three main party leaders accounting for 37 per cent of all party political source appearances and 49 percent of directly quoted speech, followed by national broadcast coverage, where Tony Blair, Michael Howard and Charles Kennedy – 34 percent of appearances and 36 percent of quotes. National 'quality' newspaper coverage was the least presidentialised, but not to any significant extent (i.e. 31% of appearances and 32% of direct quotation space).

- Table 3.2 (derived from a recalculation of the results in Table 3.1) compares the prominence of reporting of the main party leaders in the aggregate coverage of their respective parties. These results show that coverage of the main opposition parties tended to be slightly more leader-focused than coverage of Labour party.

Table 3.2: Proportional Prominence of Main Party Leaders in their Parties' Total Coverage by National Media Sector

	National Broadcast	National 'Quality' Press	National Mid Market Press	National Populist Press
	Appearances	Appearances	Appearances	Appearances
Tony Blair	**33%**	**25%**	**34%**	**38%**
Michael Howard	**43%**	**32%**	**43%**	**43%**
Charles Kennedy	**35%**	**38%**	**40%**	**38%**

3.2: Trends in Stop Watch Balance in Election Coverage 1992-2005

In this section we compare these 'stop watch' balance results for 2005 with previous UK elections.

3.2.1: Party Political Balance

As previously noted, the Labour party achieved more appearances and quotation space than their political opponents in 2005 national election coverage. This difference was evident across all national media sectors. In the UK, newspapers are not required to provide the political parties with equivalent news-space, but these expectations are placed upon the broadcasters. Changes to the Representation of the People's Act In 2000 shifted the emphasis towards self-regulation by the broadcasters, with the expectation that 'Over a reasonable period of time, a proper balance of different viewpoints is achieved' (Home Office guidelines, 2001 quoted in Deacon *et al.*, 2001: p.669). This begs the question whether these changes have produced an advantage to the incumbent party, at least in terms of media presence[13].

Table 3.3 compares party stopwatch balance data for the 1992, 2001 and 2005 UK Elections[14] in the UK national broadcast media (both in relation to the parties' frequency of appearance and total quotation time).

Table 3.3: A Comparison of The Proportional Appearance and Total Quotation Time of the Three Main Political Parties in National Broadcast coverage of the 1992, 2001 and 2005 UK General Elections

	Quotation Time		
	1992	**2001**	**2005**
Labour	36	43.61702	41.30435
Conservative	41	38.29787	34.78261
Lib Dem	23	18.08511	23.91304
	Number of Appearances		
	1992	**2001**	**2005**
Labour	33.3975	41.30435	40
Conservative	41	38.04348	33.33333
Lib Dem	25.98653	20.65217	26.66667

The results show:

- Any apparent advantage in broadcast quotation time for Labour in 2005 was less than their lead in 2001 (41% compared to 44%). Their percentages of appearances were broadly similar for the two campaigns.
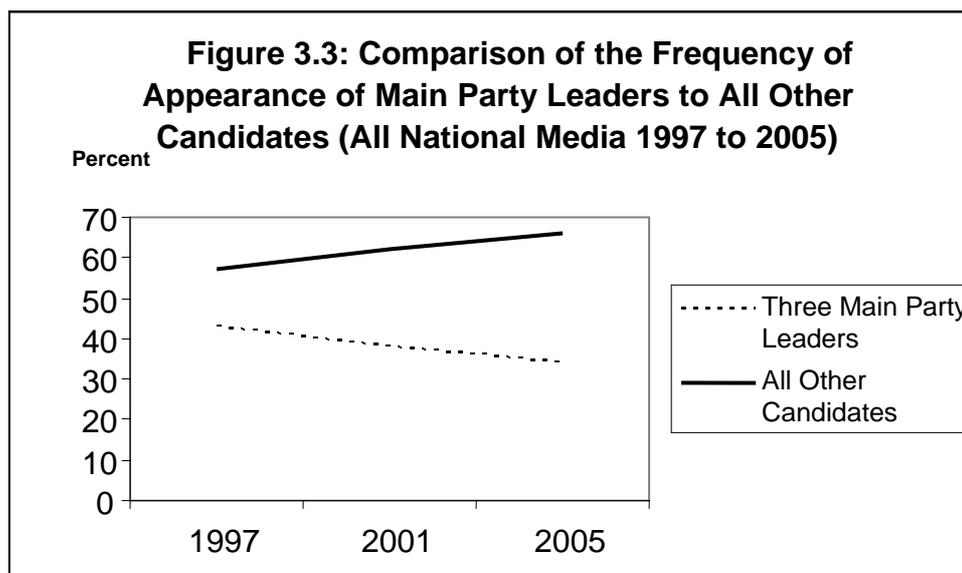
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[13] Of course it is not always the case that more media presence offers political advantage. There is also a need to consider the nature of coverage.
[14] Data for the 1997 are not available

- In 1992 the Conservative party, who were then in power, had higher levels of quotation time and appearances than their political opponents in national broadcast coverage. Moreover, these differences were almost exactly equivalent to those identified for Labour in 2005.

- Although levels of coverage of the Conservative party in 2005 were down on those identified in 2001, it was the Liberal Democrats rather than Labour who have benefited from this reduction. However, their levels of national media exposure in 2005 were not unprecedented, being broadly equivalent to those achieved in the 1992 campaign.

3.2.2: Trends in 'Presidentialization'

Observations about the presidentialization of national election reporting have been a recurrent refrain over recent campaigns. Figure 3.3 compares the extent to which the main party leaders dominated media coverage for the last four UK General Elections. Interestingly, the results suggest that although the party leaders still command a very considerable presence, electoral coverage has become *less* leader-orientated on an election-by-election basis since 1992.

Figure 3.3: Comparison of the Frequency of Appearance of Main Party Leaders to All Other Candidates (All National Media 1997 to 2005)

Notes: To ensure comparability across the different sample sets, these figures only relate to the three most prominently quoted party political sources in election related news coverage for the 1997, 2001 and 2005 General Election Campaigns. (In the 1997 analysis, only the three most prominent actors were coded)

3.3: Beyond the Parties: Other Actors in Election Related Coverage

Politicians are, of course, not the only interested parties in election campaigns. The onset of any election campaign also attracts contributions from many interest groups, citizens and public commentators who variously seek to influence and adjudicate upon the political contest at hand. Table 3.3 lists the prominence of individuals and institutions not directly related to UK political parties across all national media sectors.

Table 3.3: Comparison of the Presence of Non Party Political Actors in National Election News Coverage (4 April – 6 May 2005)

Non Party Actors	All National Media	Broadcast	Quality Press	Mid Market Press	Populist Press
	%	%	%	%	%
Politicians' Families	0.4	0.1	0.4	0.7	0.5
Foreign Politicians	1	0.4	0.8	2.2	2.2
Quangos[15]	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.2
Media	3.2	6.9	1.7	1.9	1
Pollsters	1.6	1.5	1.8	1.2	1.6
Voluntary Sector	1	1.2	0.8	1.3	0.7
Academic Sector	1.6	2.2	1.4	1.9	0.8
Public Sector	3.1	2.2	3.6	5.1	1.6
Corporate Sector	1.3	0.7	1.8	1.3	0.7
Trade Union Sector	0.1	0	0.2	0.1	0.1
Faith Communities	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4
Citizens	7.3	10.5	5.5	4.6	8.4
Other	0.2	0.4	0	0.1	0

Percentages=the percentage of all party political and non party political actors identified in coverage

The following main points emerge:

- Approximately 1 in 5 of the actors that appeared in election related news coverage were not directly linked to any of the political parties involved in the 2005 Election campaign.

- Members of the public ('Citizens') were the most prominent category of non-party political actors across all national news sectors. Their relative prominence was greatest in National broadcast coverage (10.5% of all actors coded) and in the populist press (8.4%).

- Journalists and other media-related actors were far more prominent in national Television coverage than any of the national press sectors (6.9% of all actors coded, compared with a range of 1 to 1.7 % for the national press).

- Academic, corporate, voluntary and quasi-governmental sectors received low levels of coverage, but the most peripheral actors were Trade Unions and representatives from the faith communities.

- Neither foreign politicians nor the families of UK politicians commanded any significant levels of national media attention[16].

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[15] 'Quangos' = Executive and Advisory NDPBs, Non Ministerial Government Departments & Next Step Agencies
[16] The low percentage recorded for 'politician's family' may seem surprising, given the news of the birth of Charles Kennedy's baby during the early stages of the campaign and the regular appearance of Sandra Howard alongside her husband at Conservative campaign events. However, as explained earlier, to be coded as actors, individuals needed to have an active presence in a news item. Simply being pictured without being referred to, or being mentioned in an incidental way by a journalist, would not normally provide a sufficient basis for being coded as an actor.

3.3: The Gender Agenda

In previous UK elections, concerns have been expressed about the gender imbalances in election reporting and the role these may play in entrenching, or even increasing, broader inequalities in political participation and representation. When considering this matter, Joni Lovenduski highlights the need to differentiate between Women's 'issues' and Women's 'perspectives':

> 'Women's *issues* are those that mainly affect women, either for biological reasons (such as breast cancer screening and reproductive rights) or for social reasons (sex equality or child-care policy). Women's *perspectives* are women's views on all political matters' (2001: 745)

In the 2005 campaign, 'Women's Issues' barely registered on the national media agenda, with only 19 items (0.5 percent of all national election news coverage) making any substantial reference to them.

Two measures were used to appraise the extent to which *women's perspectives* were included in mainstream coverage: (a) the gender of the authors of election related items and (b) the gender of actors in coverage.

Table 3.4 shows that men were far more likely to write or present election related coverage than women. Gender imbalances were most evident in the quality and mid market press, and least evident in broadcast coverage.

Table 3.4: Gender of Authors of National Election Coverage

	All Media	Broadcast	Quality Press	Mid Market Press	Populist Press
Female	23	29	19	19	24
Male	77	71	82	81	76

Notes: These data exclude instances of joint female/ male authorship and cases where the gender of the author was unclear.

Table 3.5 compares the proportion of male to female actors found in national election coverage for the 2001 and 2005 Elections.

Table 3.5: Gender of Actors in National Election Coverage

		Female Row %	Male Row %
All Media	2001	14	86
	2005	14	86
Broadcast	2001	16	84
	2005	17	83
Quality Press	2001	12	88
	2005	14	86
Mid Market Press	2001	14	86
	2005	13	87
Populist Press	2001	16	84
	2005	14	86

Notes: These data exclude instances of joint female/ male authorship andcases where the gender of the author was unclear.

- Across all national media, male actors outnumbered females by a ratio of more than 6: 1 in national coverage of the 2005 election.

- There was no significant variation between national media sectors as to the amount of coverage given to female actors.

- Gender differences found for the 2005 campaign proved remarkably consistent with those identified in the 2001 Election.

Table 3.6. breaks down the results of table 3.5 by 'actor type'.

Table 3.6: Gender of Actor by Actor Type (all National Media)

	Females (Row %)	Males (Row %)
Party Political	9	91
Foreign Politician	9	91
Politicians' Family	92	8
Quangos	17	83
Media	25	75
Pollster	13	87
Voluntary Sector	31	69
Academic	9	91
Public Sector	12	88
Corporate Sector	5	95
Trade Union Sector	0	100
Faith Communities	0	100
Citizens	45	55
Military	22	78

Notes: These data exclude instances of joint female/ male authorship
and cases where the gender of the author was unclear.

The following main points emerge:

- The gender gap for coverage of politicians (whether domestic or foreign) was even more accentuated (91 percent to 9 percent). In both cases, male politicians appeared ten times more frequently than their female colleagues.

- This differential considerably exceeds broader inequalities in the British parliamentary system[17].

- Across most of the other categories, male presence considerably exceeded female presence (see in particular the results for 'faith communities', 'corporate sector', 'Trade Unions' and 'Academic sector')

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[17] 18 Percent of MPs in the UK are female (see http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Campaign_Politics.htm)

- The only actor category where females and males achieved a near parity of presence was that of 'citizens' (i.e. lay members of society). Although, even here, males appeared 10 percent more frequently than females.
- The only category where female presence exceeded male presence was that of 'politicians' family'

Section 4: Agenda Balance – Themes in National Media Coverage of the Election

This section examines the interpretative aspects of national media coverage of the 2005 General Election – i.e. what were the most prominent topics of election related news coverage during the sample period? [18]

Tables 4.1 presents the main and secondary themes in national media coverage.

Table 4.1: Top 10 Main and Secondary Themes in National Media Coverage by Media Sector

	All Media	%	National Broadcast	%	Up Market Press	%	Mid Market Press	%	Populist Press	%
1	Electoral Process	44	Electoral Process	42	Electoral Process	49	Electoral Process	28	Electoral Process	46
2	Political Propriety	8	Iraq	10	Iraq	8	Political Impropriety	17	Political Impropriety	6
3	Iraq	8	Asylum/ Immigration	8	Political Impropriety	7	Iraq	10	NHS	6
4	Asylum/ Immigration	7	Political Impropriety	8	Asylum/ Immigration	6	Asylum/ Immigration	9	Crime	6
5	Taxation	5	Crime	4	Taxation	5	Taxation	7	Asylum/ Immigration	6
6	NHS	4	NHS	4	Economy	4	NHS	7	Education	5
7	Crime	4	Taxation	4	Education	3	Crime	5	Economy	5
8	Economy	4	Education	3	NHS	3	Education	4	Iraq	4
9	Education	3	Economy	2	Crime	2	Social Security	4	Social Security	4
10	Social Security	2	Social Security	2	Europe	2	Economy	3	Taxation	4

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The following main points emerge:

- Coverage of the electoral process itself (i.e. the actions, strategies and prospects of the participants) was the most prominent topic in election coverage by a considerable margin. Table 3 breaks this category down further and shows that the main issues in this grouping concerned (a)

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[18] If necessary, three items could be coded for each election related news item: one Main theme and up to two subsidiary themes. Where more than three themes were evident in a story, the three most prominent themes were coded. These judgements were made according to the following criteria:

a. The amount of space discussion of the theme occupies in the article (whether measured in seconds or column cms).
b. The prominence given to a theme in an article.
c. The use of headlines or studio intro leads to flag the most salient topics of the piece.

We were not interested in coding subtle, imputed or passing references made by journalists, or the sources they quote, to potential themes. To be coded, a theme had to occupy at least TWO FULL SENTENCES in a printed article, or 10 SECONDS of broadcast time.

open discussion of the parties' campaigning strategies (19 percent of all themes) and (b) opinion poll and focus group evidence (8 percent).

- 'Political Improprieties', 'Iraq' & 'Asylum and Immigration' were the next most prominent themes in UK National media coverage. There then follows a sharp tail-off in the prominence of other themes further down the list. When added together, the categories of 'Taxation', 'Education', 'Crime', 'the Economy', 'NHS' and 'Social Security' amount to just 22% of the total themes coded.

Table 4.2: Top 5 Sub Themes Within the 'Electoral Process' Theme Category (UK National Media Only)

	Percent
Discussion of Campaigning Strategies	19%
Opinion Polls, Focus Groups, 'Horse Race'	8%
Passing references to the chosen daily topic agendas of political parties	3%
Political tensions and infighting within Parties & defections	2%
Party Spin/ PR/ News Management	2%
All other themes in this category	10%

Notes: These sub theme percentages are percentages of all the themes coded (i.e. they add up to 44%).

- There are many themes absent from the list that were to prove considerably newsworthy in the immediate aftermath of the campaign. These included:

  a. Debates about the future of the EU constitution and the financial structure of the EU (during the election period, 'Europe' only accounted for 1.3 percent of coded themes).

  b. The prospect for the peace process in Northern Ireland in the wake of the rise of the Democratic Unionist Party and the IRA's declared cessation of armed activity (during the campaign, 'Northern Ireland' accounted for 0.6 percent of all coded themes).

  c. Radical proposals for taxing car usage as a means of alleviating chronic road congestion (during the campaign, 'Transport' accounted for 0.3 percent of all coded themes).

  d. Attempts by the UK government to secure international compliance to the Kyoto agreement as a means of tackling global warming (during the campaign, 'the Environment' accounted for 1.4 percent of all coded themes).

  e. Plans for reducing international debt among developing nations (during the campaign, 'Foreign Policy [aside from Iraq]' accounted for 0.4 percent of coverage).

  f. Concerns about the threat posed by terrorism and how to deal with it ('Terrorism policy' accounted for 0.2 percent of all coded themes)

- There was some variation in the prominence of themes across different national media sectors. Most noticeably, the categories 'Political Improprieties' and 'Asylum and Immigration' were far more evident in the Mid Market newspapers' coverage compared with all other national media sectors.

- Iraq was conspicuously less prominent in 'Populist' press coverage. (4.5 percent of the themes coded for *The Sun* concerned Iraq, compared with 4.7 percent for the *Daily Mirror* and 1.2 percent for *The Star*). With *The Star* the absence of coverage is reflective of a general disengagement with covering the political substance of the campaign. *The Sun*'s relative inattention to the issue may at least be partially explained by its enduring support for the Government's actions in invading Iraq. (This stance was reiterated in several of its election editorials). The *Daily Mirror*'s relative neglect of the issue is perhaps more intriguing, given its trenchant criticisms of the government's actions on Iraq during 2003-4.

- Table 4.3 breaks down the category of 'political improprieties' into sub-themes. In all national media sectors, the most common set of issues in this category related to the personal integrity and trustworthiness of candidates, and the dominant focus of this debate was the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The Mid Market press paid more attention to concerns about the integrity of the new postal voting arrangements than other National UK media. These titles also gave higher levels of coverage to debates about the Prime Minister's personal integrity (more than 1 in 10 of all the themes coded in national mid Market press coverage concerned this matter).

Table 4.3: Sub Themes within the 'Political Impropriety' Category Theme Category (Main and Secondary) by UK National Media

	TV	Up Market Press	Mid Market Press	Populist Press
'Concerns about Postal voting by demand'	2.2	2.6	4.7	1.5
'Other Electoral Fraud concerns'		0.1		
'Integrity of leaders – questions of trust - Labour'	5.3	3.6	10.4	2.0
'Integrity of leaders – questions of trust - Cons'	0.2	0.1		0.7
'Integrity of leaders – questions of trust - LibDem'	0.1			
'Integrity of leaders – questions of trust - Other'		0.1		
'Integrity of leaders – questions of trust – Various'	0.1			0.4
'Integrity of other politicians – questions of trust -Labour'			0.5	0.2
'Integrity of other politicians – questions of trust -Cons'		0.1		0.4
'Integrity of other politicians – questions of trust -LibDem'				
'Integrity of other politicians – questions of trust -Other'				
'Integrity of other politicians – questions of trust – Various'	0.2	0.3		
'Sexual exploits of politicians'		0.1	0.2	0.7
'Other issues concerning standards corruption scandals sleaze'		0.1	0.2	0.2

Notes: These sub theme percentages are percentages of all the themes coded. All Percentages are rounded to 1 decimal point

- The prominence of these particular themes varied considerably during the campaign period. Figure 4.1 shows the week-by-week prominence

of the top three substantive themes found in the election coverage analysed (respectively, 'Political Improprieties', 'Iraq' and 'Immigration & Asylum'). The salience of 'Iraq' and 'Immigration & Asylum' increased greatly towards the latter stages of the campaign. After the third week 'Asylum & Immigration' issues fell away from prominence.

Figure 4.1: The Changing Prominence of Key National Media Themes
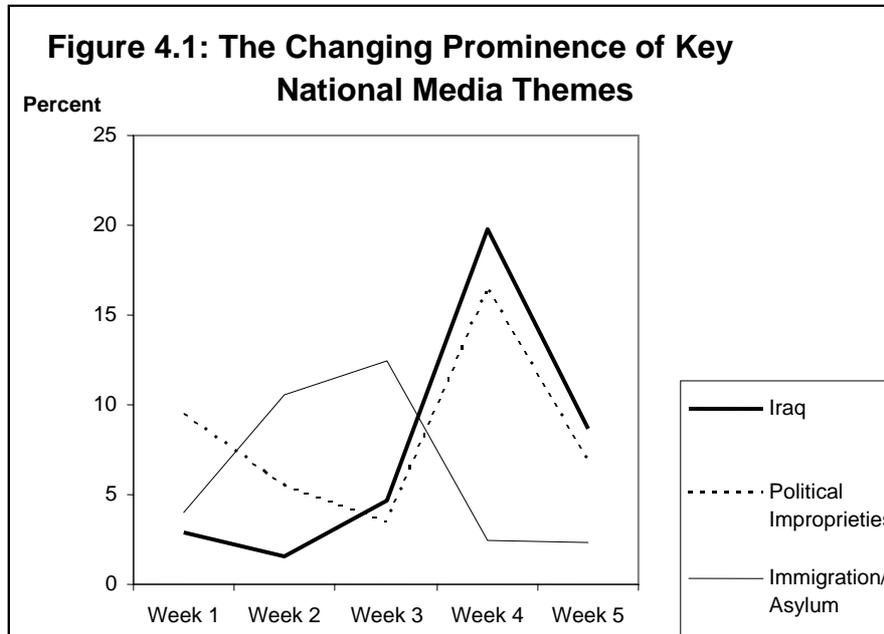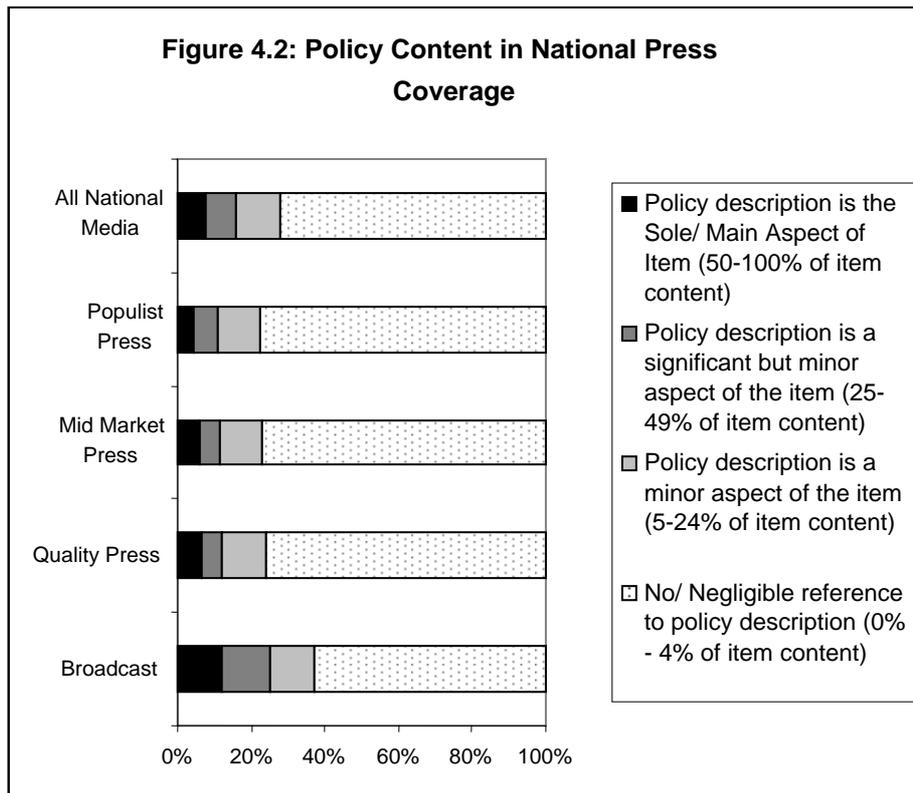

4.2: Policy versus Process

It is often claimed that election reporting is more concerned with reporting the process rather than substance of a campaign[19]. The marked dominance of coverage of the conduct of the election itself during the 2005 Campaign seems to lend weight to this interpretation, and is consistent with trends identified in previous UK general elections (see Billig *et al.*, 1992; Deacon *et al.*, 1997 and Deacon *et al.*, 2001).

To interrogate more closely the relative balance of 'policy' and 'process' coverage during the 2005 campaign we applied an ordinal scale to appraise (a) which items contained information about substantive policy issues and choices, and (b) the extent of this descriptive material relative to the overall length of the item. The results are presented in figure 4.2.

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[19] For example, in the 2001 campaign, Tony Blair lamented the national media's failure to deal with 'real issues' and Alistair Campbell criticised journalists' obsession with 'policy rather than process' (Deacon et al, 2001: 670)

Figure 4.2: Policy Content in National Press Coverage

Legend:
- ■ Policy description is the Sole/ Main Aspect of Item (50-100% of item content)
- ■ Policy description is a significant but minor aspect of the item (25-49% of item content)
- ▨ Policy description is a minor aspect of the item (5-24% of item content)
- ▫ No/ Negligible reference to policy description (0% - 4% of item content)

Categories (top to bottom): All National Media, Populist Press, Mid Market Press, Quality Press, Broadcast

X-axis: 0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%

The results show that:

- The majority of items in all national media sectors contained either no or negligible descriptive policy-related information (i.e. this content constituted less than 4 percent of the entire length of the item).

- The broadcast media produced a higher proportion of items containing at least some descriptive policy information than all sections of the national press.

There were no major differences between national press sectors in the extent of their policy reporting. (37 percent of broadcast items contained some policy description, compared with 24 percent of the 'quality' press, 23 percent of the 'mid market' press, and 22 percent of the 'populist' press).

Section 5: Directional Balance in National Media Coverage

'Directional balance' is the most contentious and problematic aspect of media coverage to assess, as it relates to the political evaluations made by news producers about political actors and issues. In popular terms, this is commonly referred to as 'bias', but this is a term we prefer to avoid, firstly because of the implicit accusations of cynicism and un-professionalism that it evokes, and secondly because of the assumption that there is some completely value neutral position from which the media accounts, wittingly or unwittingly, depart.

We used two measures to assess directional balance across the media sample. The first was used in relation to the thematic categories described in section 4. Each time a theme was identified an 'adjectival' code was attached to it that indicated whether the theme:

- Was mainly or solely 'Good News' for a particular political party
- Was mainly or solely 'Bad News' for a particular political party
- Had both negative and positive implications for a particular political party ('mixed News')
- Had no clear evaluative implications for a particular political party, whether positive or negative ('Descriptive News')
- Was either 'Good News', 'Bad News', 'Mixed News' or 'Descriptive News' for more than one particular party, or for politicians in general

The second measure for directional balance involved applying a further adjectival code to each political actor identified in election coverage. These codes indicated whether the reported actor was:

- Mainly or solely describing or presenting their policies and opinions
- Mainly or solely defending themselves from attack from their political opponents
- Mainly or solely attacking the views, actions or policies of others

An additional code was also included for those occasions where it was not possible to attribute any of the above to the actions or views of a reported actor ('no stance')[20].

In our view, this close attention to the evaluative aspects of the components of a news story provides a much more detailed, reliable and valid measure of directional balance, not least because it corresponds more closely to the discursive features of news reports, in which views and issues are often deliberately juxtaposed and it is not always possible to discern any single, unitary narrative strand.

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[20] Adept politicians will often seek to do several or all of these things in an individual media appearance. Therefore, it was often necessary to make an on-balance judgement between these choices. To do so, the coding team concentrated on identifying the initial reason for an actor's inclusion in an item.

5.1: Bad News for Whom? The Directional Implications of National News Themes

Table 5.1 presents the results from the adjectival codes linked to the themes identified in news coverage.

The following main points emerge:

Table 5.1: Directional Trends in National News Themes

		All Media	Broad-cast	Quality Press	Mid Market Press	Populist Press
		% of all Themes	% of all Themes	% of all Themes	% of all Themes	% of all Themes
Labour	*Good News*	6.3	2.4	5.5	1.0	**20.9**
	Bad News	18.8	9.9	17.6	**61.2**	9.8
	Mixed	16.9	18.8	18.4	8.8	14.3
	Descriptive	3.5	1.8	3.7	2.3	7.0
Conservative	*Good News*	3.0	1.5	3.0	7.0	3.1
	Bad News	6.7	3.4	7.2	1.3	15.9
	Mixed	6	9.4	5.8	2.8	2.0
	Descriptive	0.8	0.4	1.2	0.5	0.9
Lib Dem	*Good News*	0.8	0.7	1.0	0.8	0.2
	Bad News	1.0	0.2	1.0	0.3	3.7
	Mixed	2.2	4.1	1.8	0.3	0.9
	Descriptive	1.1	1.8	0.7	0.5	1.1
Other Party	*Good News*	0.1	0.2	0.1	0	0
	Bad News	0.8	0.6	1.0	0.3	0.7
	Mixed	1.1	2.2	0.9	0.3	0.2
	Descriptive	0.9	2.1	0.5	0	0.2
All/ Several Parties	*Good News*	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.8	0.2
	Bad News	1.7	1.5	2	0.8	1.7
	Mixed	**22.9**	**31.8**	23.3	10.0	12
	Descriptive	5.1	7.0	4.8	1.0	5.0

Notes: All figures are rounded to 1 decimal point. Percentage totals may not add up to 100.

- A remarkably high proportion of the themes reported in the mid market national press had negative implications for the Labour Party (61 percent) and only a very small minority had any positive implications (1 percent). However, this emphasis on 'bad news for Labour' did not translate into much coverage of 'Good News for the Conservatives' (7 percent).

- In the populist press, there were higher levels of 'Good News for Labour' (20.9 percent) and the extent of 'bad news' for the Conservatives exceeded that for Labour (15.9 percent compared with 9.8 percent).

- In the coverage of the 'quality' press and broadcast media themes more frequently displayed 'mixed' or 'general' implications (that is to

say, they raised positive and negative issues, or were not associated directly with any single political party).

- Themes related to the Liberal Democrats were most evident in the broadcast media and populist media sectors. In the former case, few of the themes addressed unequivocally positive or negative implications for the party. In the populist press, however, the largest Lib Democrat related category focused upon the 'bad news' aspect.

5.2: The Stance of Political Actors in National News Coverage

Table 5.2 provides an overview the results of the second measure of directional balance concerning the stances of the political actors in coverage.

Table 5.2: Party Political Actors Presenting, Defending & Attacking, in National Media Coverage

		Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
All Media	present	41%	30%	40%	56%
	defence	21%	12%	5%	3%
	attack	22%	44%	40%	21%
	no stance	16%	14%	15%	20%

The following main points emerge:

- Labour actors more frequently appeared in a defensive stance than their opponents. The Liberal Democrats were the least defensive in their appearances.

- Labour and Liberal Democrat actors were more frequently reported presenting their policies than the Conservatives.

- Conservative party actors were twice as likely to be presented attacking their opponents than Labour.

- The Liberal Democrats also displayed a more aggressive posture than Labour, which may seem surprising in light of Charles Kennedy's claimed aversion to negative campaigning. Two points need to be borne in mind here. Firstly, this high percentage figure is in part due to the marginalization of the Liberal Democrats in a lot of coverage (particularly press coverage). Put simply, there was not always a lot of room for them to present themselves in a more constructive manner. Secondly, these raw figures do not capture the evident qualitative differences in the nature of the attacks being made by the main parties. (Disdaining the negativity of other parties' campaigning is itself a political attack.)

Table 5.3 disaggregates the data in Table 5.2 by national media sector.

The results show:

Table 5.3: The Stance of Party Political Actors by National Media Sector

		Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
Broadcast	Presentation	35%	35%	47%	63%
	Defence	26%	11%	6%	3%
	Attack	21%	37%	35%	16%
	No Clear Stance	17%	17%	12%	18%
		Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
Quality Press	Presentation	44%	30%	36%	55%
	Defence	18%	12%	3%	3%
	Attack	22%	45%	45%	24%
	No Clear Stance	16%	14%	16%	18%
		Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
Mid Market Press	Presentation	27%	23%	15%	0%
	Defence	38%	3%	7%	0%
	Attack	22%	68%	74%	67%
	No Clear Stance	13%	6%	4%	33%
		Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
Populist Press	Presentation	48%	26%	31%	11%
	Defence	13%	21%	11%	0%
	Attack	24%	42%	29%	44%
	No Clear Stance	16%	12%	29%	44%

Notes: Percentages= Column percentages for each media category

- Levels of 'presentation' for all parties were greatest in the broadcast sector (with the sole exception of 'Labour Presentation' in the populist press sector).

- Although Conservative actors were uniformly more attacking than defensive in their stance across all sectors, the difference between these measures varied. In the Mid Market press coverage their 'attack' exceeded 'defence' by 65 percent, in the populist press and the broadcast media the difference was 21 percent and 26 percent, respectively.

5.3: National Press Partisanship 2005

All data presented thus far in this section relate to directional balance in all forms of editorial content in the national news media. It is also pertinent in this context to consider the partisan editorial declarations of the national press during the 2005 campaign.

Table 5.4 compares the final political declarations of all daily and weekly newspapers in the 2005 campaign with that of the 2001 election. A total of eight papers in 2005 endorsed Labour compared with six papers supporting the Conservatives and three, the Liberal Democrats. The corresponding figures for 2001 were 12 for Labour, for the Tories and none for the Liberal democrats. Translated into circulation terms, Labour's percentage of the daily press support reduced from 72 percent to 57 percent.

The major reason for this nominal redistribution of party allegiances was the repositioning of the Express Group newspaper titles (Daily Express, Sunday Express, Daily Star and Daily Star on Sunday). These titles were purchased in 2000 in highly controversial circumstances by Richard Desmond (publisher of a string of consumer, leisure and Adult magazines). In 2001 all these papers backed Labour. By 2005, both Express titles had switched to the Conservatives and The Star and Star on Sunday had decided not to declare for any political party.

Table 5.4: Editorial Declarations of the National Press in 2005 UK General Election

	2001		2005	
Daily Press		Circulation		Circulation
The Guardian	Labour	0.40	Labour	0.34
The Independent	Anti Conservative	0.23	Lib Dem	0.23
The Times	Labour	0.71	Labour	0.65
The Telegraph	Conservative	1.02	Conservative	0.87
The Financial Times	Labour	0.49	Labour	0.38
The Daily Express	Labour	0.96	Conservative	0.87
The Daily Mail	Anti Labour	2.40	Conservative	2.30
The Sun	Labour	3.45	Labour	3.26
The Mirror	Labour	2.79	Labour	2.29
The Star	Labour	0.60	No Preference	0.85
Sunday Press				
The Observer	Labour	0.45	Labour	0.42
Independent on Sunday	Anti Labour Landslide	0.25	Lib Dem	0.18
The Sunday Times	Labour	1.37	Conservative	1.35
The Sunday Telegraph	Conservative	0.79	Conservative	0.65
The Mail on Sunday	Conservative	2.33	Anti Labour	2.37
The Sunday Express	Labour	0.90	Conservative	0.84
The Sunday Mirror	Labour	1.87	Labour	1.53
The News of the World	Labour	3.90	Labour	3.64
The People	Labour		Labour	1.37

However, these figures potentially obscure more than they reveal, as viewing party affiliations in these crude, categorical terms reveal nothing about their strength. Just as commentators have identified the need to think of votes cast 'as though they are somewhere along a continuum from having definitely decided not to vote for a party to having decided not to vote for a party at all'

(Norris et al, 2001: 160), so press allegiances to their party of choice can range from convinced and staunch advocacy to the most hesitant of endorsements, or indeed a reluctance to declare for any party at all. When we apply this consideration to a qualitative overview of newspaper allegiances in 2005, a different picture emerges of the strength and direction of their political support.

5.3.1: The Strength of Party Affiliations

In many of the election editorials the support expressed for chosen political parties was qualified and circumspect. Only the Sunday Telegraph, Telegraph, Daily Express, Sunday Express and the Daily Mirror gave anything resembling a resounding endorsement of their party of choice. In part, the reservations and qualifications of other papers derived from an appreciation of the quality and legitimacy of more than one party. For example, although *The Independent* had many positive things to say about Charles Kennedy and the Liberal Democrats, and eventually recommended 'an outcome in which there is a significantly larger force of Liberal Democrat MPs', their editorial stated 'it would be too simplistic for The Independent to argue for a blanket endorsement of the Liberal Democrats at this election.' Amidst an excoriating attack on the Prime Minister over Iraq and civil liberties, the paper conceded that his government 'has been admirably liberal on social matters' and that 'Britain has changed for the better under his watch, becoming a more modern, inclusive country' (*Independent* 4/5/05). The Guardian and Observer, too, seemed caught in the gravitational pull between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, eventually recommending Labour but welcoming the prospect of a strengthened presence for the Liberal Democrats ('Voters with sitting Liberal Democrat MPs should return them.' *Observer,* 1 May 2005; 'Voters should use their heads and hearts to re-elect Labour with an increased Liberal Democrat presence' *The Guardian*, 4 May 2005). *The Times*, meanwhile, in a comparatively upbeat endorsement of Labour, acknowledged the appeal of the Conservatives manifesto in many areas and concluded 'The best result for Britain, we think, would be a smaller but viable Labour majority and a larger and renewed Tory opposition' (*The Times,* 3 May 2005).

In some of the editorials, the hesitant tone was linked to significant reservations about the record and manifesto of their chosen party. For example, *The News of the World* declared 'our first message is: Vote on Thursday. And our second is: Vote for Labour. We have thrown our weight behind Tony Blair's party. But not without some apprehension… If, as we expect, Labour form the next government we put them on notice this newspaper will be watching them closely.' (1 May 2005). This line was also evident in the editorialising of its sister paper, *The Sun.* At the start of the campaign, the Sun announced it had not made up its mind as to who it would support, but by the second week had decided 'Tony Blair –warts and all – will be the only real choice for Britain on May 5' (21 April 2005). But this was presented as 'one last chance' and the paper set out at considerable length their political differences and disappointment with the government in many policy areas.

Another stated reason for some papers' equivocation, was a cold and pragmatic assessment of the electoral prospects of their preferred choices. This was most evident in newspapers that expressed most sympathy with the Liberal Democrats, epitomized by the Independent on Sunday's conclusion that 'Where the realistic choice is between Labour and Conservative, we prefer Labour, but the values for which this newspaper stands are best promoted "where they can win" for the Liberal Democrats' (1 May 2005).

This appeal to tactical voting reveals what was by far the most common reason for newspapers' muted endorsement of one or more party: their antagonism towards the alternatives on offer. For, if some of the papers were subdued in their recommendations, they were certainly vehement in their declamations. For example, The Daily Mail, in outlining its support for the Conservatives commented

'The Tories may still seem something of a one-man band. But at least they offer the hope of restoring integrity to public life, of renegotiating more sensible terms with Europe, of restoring genuine prudence to the economy and re-energising the public sector…Yet if we're being honest, our support for a Conservative victory - which we concede is unlikely - is superseded by an even greater imperative: to diminish the power of an overweeningly arrogant Mr Blair and restore a healthy democracy to this country.'

This 'disdain for the other' was also widely evident among newspapers on the centre and centre-left. *The Guardian's* reservations about any switch of support from Labour to the Liberal Democrats was in no small part based on their adamant view that The Conservative party was 'the worst answer to what is wrong with Britain… It is vital to stop the Conservatives' (4 May 2005). *The People* recognised that 'There is much for Labour voters to be unhappy about', but warned that the consequences would be 'unthinkable' should Michael Howard and his party 'slither through the back door'. In less alarmist terms, the *Financial Times* stated

> 'There are good reasons for the nation's disenchantment with Mr Blair
> – not least the loss of trust resulting from the Iraq war and his
> shambolically informal style of government. But Mr Howard's
> Conservatives do not look like a convincing alternative. It is not yet time
> for a change' (3 May 2005).

Section 6: Election Coverage in Scotland, Wales and the East Midlands

This section compares the trends identified in UK wide election reporting with coverage produced in more specific national and regional contexts (respectively, Wales, Scotland & The East Midlands of England[21]).

6.1: Stop Watch Balance

Table 6.1 compares the prominence of Party Political Actors across the different sampled regions. The following main points emerge:

Table 6.1: Frequency of Appearance of Political Actors by Media Region

	UK National Media	Welsh Media	Scottish Media	East Midlands
Tony.Blair	16	5	10	11
Labour MP	26	19	26	13
Labour Other	6	10	4	13
Michael Howard	11	5	8	9
Conservative MP	8	5	3	4
Conservative Other	11	15	14	16
Charles Kennedy	6	4	5	9
Liberal Democrat MP	2	2	3	1
Liberal Democrat Other	8	13	11	14
Alex Salmond	0.4	0.3	5	0
other SNP	0.3	0	5	0
Ieuan Wyn Jones	0	1	0	0
Other Plaid Cymru	0.4	13	0.1	0
Ulster Unionist	0.3	1	0.1	0
DUP	0.3	0	0.1	0.2
Sinn Fein	0.3	0	0.2	0.2
Social Democrats and Labour	0.2	0	0	0
Respect	0.8	0.5	1	1
BNP	0.2	0	0	0.5
Greens	0.3	0.5	1	1.3
UKIP	0.5	1	0.2	3
Veritas	0.3	0.3	0.1	3
Scottish Socialists	0.1	0.2	1	0
Other politician	1	5	1	1

Notes: All Percentages above 0.51 are rounded to the nearest full number. Percentages 0.5 and below are rounded to 1 decimal point.

- Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalist Party gained far more prominence, respectively, in the Welsh and Scottish News Media than they did in the UK wide media.

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[21] The East Midlands was selected as our local media sample, because it contained many of the key marginal seats that determined the national outcome.

- The leaders of the main political parties tended to attract lower levels of coverage in Welsh, Scottish and East Midlands coverage. The one exception was coverage of Charles Kennedy in the East Midlands, where his proportional presence exceeded levels found in national coverage.

- The other minor parties were comparably marginalised across all four sectors. It is noticeable, however, that UKIP and Veritas achieved more coverage in the East Midlands (3 percent each)[22].

- MPs were the most frequently coded actors for the Labour party, across all four media categories. With Conservative and Liberal Democrat party appearances, however, other party actors commanded most coverage (i.e. local councillors and other party activists)

- Figure 6.1 compares the distribution of actors' appearances of the 5 most frequently reported parties. The results show that Labour achieved most appearances across all media categories, but that their prominence was less evident in Welsh, Scottish and East Midlands coverage.

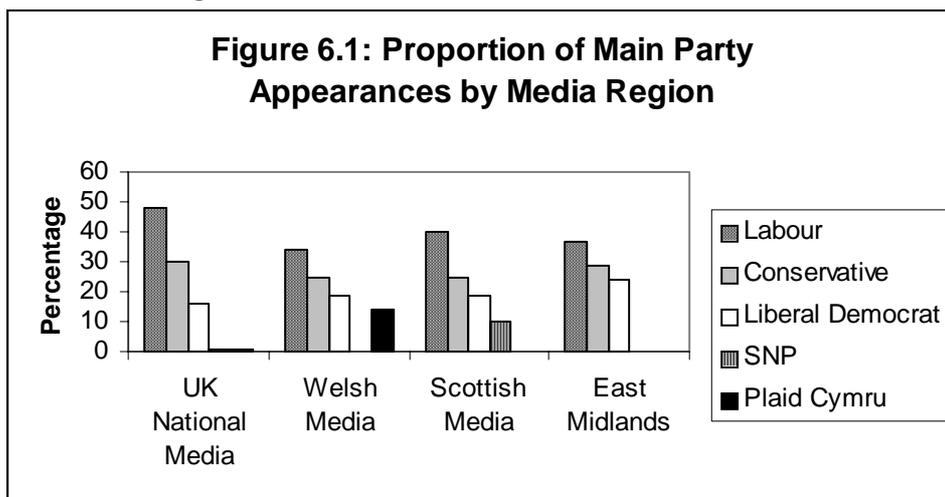Figure 6.1: Proportion of Main Party Appearances by Media Region

Table 6.2 compares the gender balance in election reporting in UK wide media with those in other national regional and regional media. Once again, men dominated the show. The under-representation of women was worst in Scottish coverage, and although the female presence was slightly greater in Welsh and East Midland's coverage, women still only accounted for 1 in 5 of the actors identified.

Table 6.2: Gender of Actors in Media Sectors

	All UK Media	Welsh Media	Scottish Media	East Midlands Media
Female	14	20	13	22
Male	86	80	87	79

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[22] This can be largely explained by the presence of Robert Kilroy Silk as an election candidate in the region

Note: As percentages are rounded, totals may exceed 100

6.2: Agenda Balance

Table 6.3 compares the most prominent themes found in Welsh, Scottish and East Midlands election coverage. The following main points emerge:

6.3: Top Ten Themes by Media Region

	All UK Media	%	Welsh Media	%	Scottish Media	%	East Midlands Media	%
1	Electoral Process	50	Electoral Process	49	Electoral Process	44	Electoral Process	52
2	Iraq	8	NHS	8	Political Impropriety	9	NHS	7
3	Political Impropriety	6	Political Impropriety	6	Iraq	9	Crime	6
4	Asylum/ Immigration	6	Constitutional Issues	5	Asylum/ Immigration	6	Asylum/ Immigration	6
5	Taxation	4	Iraq	5	Constitutional Issues	5	Iraq	4
6	NHS	4	Local Govt	4	NHS	4	Education	3
7	Crime	3	Education	3	Economy	4	Political Impropriety	3
8	Education	3	Economy	3	Taxation	4	Taxation	3
9	Economy	3	Social Security	2	Social Security	3	Economy	2
10	Social Security	2	Taxation	2	Other Military/ Defence	1	Social Security	2

- Levels of coverage of the electoral process were similarly high to those found in UK wide news and current affairs coverage. Levels were highest in the East Midlands (50 percent) and lowest in Scotland (44 percent).

- There was some degree of independence in the interpretative agendas of these other national and regional media. In Welsh coverage, 'the NHS' was the second most prominent theme category and 'local government' was sixth on the list (the latter category did not appear as a top ten issue in any other context). 'Asylum/ Immigration' did not make the top ten themes in this context, unlike all other media categories (The issue was the 4th most prominent theme in Scottish, East Midlands and UK wide media coverage). In the East Midlands, 'the NHS' and 'Crime' were the second and third most frequently reported themes. Finally, 'Constitutional Issues' attracted higher levels of attention in the Welsh and Scottish Media. (These matters did not make the top ten themes for either UK wide or East Midlands media.)

Table 6.4 breaks down the macro-category of 'Constitutional Issues' into its component elements. The results show that coverage of these issues in both

Wales and Scotland concentrated predominantly upon the responsibilities and operations of their respective legislative bodies (the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament). More general or abstract constitutional matters received scant attention (matching their marginal presence in national media debates).

Table 6.4: Comparison of Specific Constitutional Issues in Welsh and Scottish Election Coverage

	Welsh Media	Scottish Media
'Electoral boundary concerns or issues'	0.3 %	1.3%
'Voting reform'	0.2%	0.4%
'Welsh assembly – operation/ responsibilities'	4.4%	0.1%
'Scottish Parliament – operation/ responsibilities'	-	3.1%
'Other Devolution issues'	0.2%	0.1%
'Reform of parliament'	-	0.1%

6.3: Directional Balance

Table 6.5 presents the results of a comparison of the first measure of directional balance discussed in section 5 by media region (i.e. the adjectival codes applied to the themes identified in election coverage).

Table 6.5: Directional Trends in National News Themes

		All UK Media	Welsh Media	Scottish Media	East Midlands Media
		% of all Themes	% of all Themes	% of all Themes	% of all Themes
Labour	*Good News*	6.3	1.4	5.4	3.7
	Bad News	18.8	9.9	8.6	**5.6**
	Mixed	16.9	18.2	21.1	8.6
	Descriptive	3.5	1.4	2.7	0.7
Conservative	*Good News*	3	0.2	0.4	1.3
	Bad News	6.7	3.9	7.4	0.7
	Mixed	6	5.8	4	9.1
	Descriptive	0.8	1.4	1.4	1.3
Lib Dem	*Good News*	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.5
	Bad News	1	0	1	0
	Mixed	2.2	2.8	2.1	4.9
	Descriptive	1.1	1.4	2.1	0.8
Other Party	*Good News*	0.1	1.4	0	0.5
	Bad News	0.8	0.5	2.1	0.2
	Mixed	1.1	1.6	3	1.7
	Descriptive	0.9	1.8	3.3	0.7
All/ Several Parties	*Good News*	0.4	0	0	1
	Bad News	1.7	2.5	3.6	0.3
	Mixed	**22.9**	**39.6**	26.2	45.5
	Descriptive	5.1	5.5	4.3	12

The following main points emerge from this comparison:

• In Wales and the East Midlands coverage tended to focus more upon the mixed political implications of issues for more than one political party. In Scotland, there was more discussion of the mixed implications of reported issues for the Labour Party.

• Across all three sample regions, levels of 'bad news for Labour' were far lower than those identified in UK wide news coverage. However, levels of 'good news for Labour' were also comparatively lower.

• Levels of 'bad news for the Conservative party' in Scotland exceeded those found for all other media sectors.

Table 6.6 provides the results of the second test of directional balance discussed in section 5 (i.e. the distribution of the reported stances of political actors featured in news coverage.)

The following main points emerge from this comparison:

Table 6. 6: Stance of Political Actors by Media Region

		Labour	Cons	Lib Dem	SNP	Plaid Cymru	Other
UK	**Present**	41%	30%	40%	69%	82%	52%
	Defence	21%	12%	5%	3%	-	3%
	Attack	22%	44%	40%	24%	12%	22%
	no stance	15%	14%	14%	3%	6%	23%
Welsh	**Present**	53%	46%	61%	100%	36%	57%
	defence	10%	12%	8%	-	4%	5%
	attack	27%	32%	13%	-	49%	26%
	no stance	10%	10%	18%	-	12%	12%
Scottish	**present**	50%	34%	50%	49%	-	67%
	defence	13%	9%	4%	5%	-	-
	attack	29%	52%	39%	45%	100%	23%
	no stance	8%	5%	7%	1%	-	10%
East Midlands	**present**	66%	65%	62%	-	-	55%
	defence	7%	5%	7%	-	-	4%
	attack	13%	18%	14%	-	-	14%
	no stance	15%	11%	17%	-	-	26%

• Labour actors were most frequently presented in a presentational stance across all media sectors. However, their stance was less defensive in Scottish and East Midlands' coverage compared with UK wide coverage, and more aggressive in Wales and Scotland.

- The stance of Conservative actors is Wales was less aggressive in Welsh Media, compared with UK wide and Scottish Media (i.e. they were most frequently reported in a presentational mode).

- In Welsh coverage, Plaid Cymru were more frequently reported as attacking others than presenting their positions and policies (49 percent: 36%). In Scotland, the SNP 'presented' more than 'attacked' (39 percent: 50 percent)

- Political actors from all the main parties were more frequently reported in a presenting role than either attacking or defending in East Midlands coverage.

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Chapter 2: Politics as an Appearance and Reality Show

Professor Michael Billig

Public opinion polls show politicians to be among the least trusted profession in contemporary Britain. Regardless of the precise questions asked, a fairly consistent pattern of distrust has been revealed in the past few years. A MORI poll, conducted in July 2003 found that 75 percent of the adult population claimed that they would not trust politicians. According to the British Social Attitudes Survey of 2001 only eleven percent of the population said they trusted politicians to tell the truth most of the time. An ICM poll, conducted in March 2005, just before the General Election, revealed that 87 percent of respondents believed that politicians did not keep their promises, while 92 percent said that politicians never gave "a straight answer". Also, 73 percent of respondents said politicians had shown themselves to be dishonest too often.

The electorate express suspicion of politicians as a class, whether government or oppositional. The MORI poll of 2003 revealed that very similar proportions of the population distrusted the government as distrusted 'politicians in general'. Two other figures from the MORI poll are worth noting. Journalists as a group are equally distrusted as politicians – and this distrust is also long-standing. However, one group that is trusted, according to MORI, is 'television newsreaders'. Sixty-six percent said they would trust newsreaders.

If the belief that politicians are to be distrusted is widespread, then one can ask how this belief is reproduced. In a mass society, in which people have little direct personal contact with politicians, people are liable to receive their information about politicians via the media. In this context the high rating given to newsreaders is highly suggestive. It may be that newsreaders represent a trusted source of information about politicians' untrustworthiness. The question, then, is to examine how newsreaders and news presenters might construct politics in a way that reproduces common-sense assumptions about the untrustworthiness of politicians. They may be doing this in ways that simultaneously convey their own trustworthiness.

The present investigation concentrates upon this issue in relation to the General Election campaign. There are two considerations that have direct theoretical and methodological implications for the present study. First, the belief in politicians' untrustworthiness would appear to be part of contemporary common sense. It is not a belief that is dependent on the actions of a particular politician or party. The possibility is that this distrust might be in-built into the frameworks for presenting politics in the broadcasting media. If this is correct, then the assumptions of distrust should be evident at the beginning of the General Election coverage. They will not be created as a reaction to the conduct of the campaign. The television coverage of the early part of the General Election should be particularly important for investigating whether the media might transmit a generalised distrust.

Second, if there is a widespread suspicion of politics, then this should not be confined to the dramatic media moments, when, for instance, a particularly famous and pugnacious interviewer successfully challenges the veracity of a politician. It should be reproduced and reinforced by more banal moments of political coverage. Hallin (1992) has noted that politicians' words have become increasingly mediated in television news programmes. As compared with the 1970s, the television news now not only presents shorter extracts of politicians speaking, but these extracts are segmented between presenters' comments and interpretations. Roland Barthes (1977), in his classic essay 'Rhetoric and the Image', commented that most media images are anchored in text. This clearly applies to televised images of politicians: these images are 'anchored' in the words of the official presenters. The question is whether this anchoring routinely reproduces what Paul Ricoeur (1970), in another context, termed 'the hermeneutics of suspicion'.

The presentational forms and the conventional rhetoric of the television news media, therefore, need to be closely analysed. In investigating the banal discourse of ideology, it is often the 'small words' that play a big role (Billig, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). To understand how 'small words' operate it is necessary to examine discursive phenomena qualitatively. Therefore, the level of analysis will not be focussing on discovering particular news items that explicitly address the issue of distrusting politicians – nor to see how many such news items there were. Instead, banal episodes of reporting and commenting will be examined, in order to see whether there was a routine hermeneutics of distrust in the television presentation of the British General Election of 2005.

Strategic Interpretation
In the first week of the Election campaign the political parties launched their election manifestoes. The television channels also launched their special news features for covering the campaign. In some respects there were parallels between the two sorts of launchings. In the case of the Conservative manifesto and ITN news there was a simultaneous launching on the evening s news of April 12.

The ITN coverage of the launching of the Conservatives' manifesto followed a conventional pattern. The story was introduced by the main newsreader, Trevor Macdonald. His announcement of the manifesto and its contents contained an implied interpretation. According to Macdonald "there weren't many surprises although Mr Howard did promise to have more police on the streets, better school discipline, stricter controls on immigration, and lower taxes". The use of the word "although" was curious, implying, but not stating, that the items that followed may have been somewhat surprising. Whatever the precise interpretation, Macdonald was implying that the manifesto generally confirmed (unspecified) expectations.

Then Macdonald handed over to Nick Robinson, ITN's political editor. Robinson's commentary on the manifesto was interspersed with clips of the

Conservative leader Michael Howard speaking at the press conference held earlier in the day. Howard could be heard declaiming that "the sunshine of hope breaking through the clouds of disappointment". Robinson commented:

> "The rhetoric may be soaring but the promises are now familiar and the manifesto slim. That's because it has one simple purpose (.) to channel anger with Tony Blair into votes for the Tories." (The transcription symbols used here and in other extracts are explained in the Appendix)

The comment is not particularly notable. It represents the sort of remark that television news reporters make routinely when reporting on electoral politics. That is sufficient to make the comment interesting as an example of a conventional rhetorical genre.

In a general sense, the presenter was offering guidance for interpretation. The comment was mediating the images of Howard speaking, that the television producers had selected to show. Such images were not left to stand on their own, but viewers were given interpretative guidance. In this case, the guidance assumes a distinction between the manifest scene that is being shown and its latent, unseen and unheard meaning. The viewers might hear the soaring rhetoric, see the slimness of the manifesto and recognize the familiarity of what the politician is promising. But there is something more that the outward pictures and words do not of themselves reveal.

In this instance, as in many others, the 'something more' refers to the strategic purposes of the politician. The presenter tells the audience that the politician has a reason for speaking in the way that can be heard. This type of interpretation, which is commonplace in electoral news presentation, can be called 'a strategic interpretation': it interprets by claiming that there is a strategic reason for the performance of the observed action. A strategic interpretation, such as that provided by Robinson, assumes a distinction between appearance and reality. All viewers can see what the politician is doing/saying: but the why is not apparent. Robinson was claiming that behind the manifest scene of Howard lies "one simple purpose". This purpose is assumed to be non-obvious to the viewer. Expert knowledge is required to produce this behind-the-scene understanding.

Not only does a strategic interpretation rest on the distinction between the manifest behaviour and the underlying, non-observed strategy but also, in the context of broadcast politics, it contains an implicit warning. According to discourse analysts, the suggestion of an underlying purpose, or 'stake', typically functions to throw doubt on, or to discount, another speaker's version of event (Edwards and Potter, 1993; Potter and Edwards, 1990; Potter, 1996). Robinson's own use of the term 'rhetoric' in this context is not accidental. In popular use, the word 'rhetoric' frequently contains an element of criticism, as 'mere rhetoric' is contrasted, implicitly or explicitly, with substance (Billig, 1996). Robinson was saying that there is something behind the 'soaring' words of Howard, thereby inviting viewers to treat what they hear with caution. By offering a strategic interpretation, the presenter is employing a discursive format that, in effect, is saying 'beware of the outward words, for they are a

reflection of an inner. In this regard, the strategic interpretation, which is itself a rhetorical form, belongs to the hermeneutics of suspicion. Its very conventionality in the context of media reporting indicates the extent to which the hermeneutics of suspicion may have become commonplace within the routines of television presentation.

Introducing Unspun
After the report on the launching of the Conservatives' manifesto, the ITN evening news of April 12, introduced its own special election feature – Unspun. Macdonald announced:

> "Throughout the campaign we'll be attempting to help you to separate fact from fiction. We'll be analysing the policies of the parties to try to help tell the difference between spin and substance. To do that we've recruited a panel of insiders and experts and we begin tonight with one of the main promises of Mr Howard's conservative manifesto (.) controlling immigration. Tom Bradby reports on the Conservatives' immigration claims (.) unspun"

Tom Bradby, then began his report, standing against a backdrop of faces: "Trevor, this is the Unspun studio and these are the faces of the insiders and experts who are going to be helping us to get to the truth and unspin the rhetoric during this election campaign; they are leaders in their fields be it the economy, health, security, terrorism or as tonight immigration."

Then Bradby reported on the Conservatives' figures about immigration, calling on experts to give assessments. He commented on Michael Howard's claim that the immigrant population will continue to grow by six million. Bradby added "this is where he does enter the territory of spin". He then posed a question that calls for a strategic answer: "So why does Mr Howard want to make immigration such an issue?" This was followed by graphics of the word UNSPUN revolving, and then a shot of Mr Howard shaking hands with people in a crowd. Bradby answered his own question over the pictures: "One answer according to a former Tory spin doctor is that it resonates strongly with working class voters".

There were then comments from expert spin-doctors about the strategy of using immigration as an issue. Then came other experts talking about the economic impact of immigration to Britain. Bradby concluded his report with the words: "Of course whatever the economic arguments it's an issue we are likely to hear more of and tomorrow I'll be back with our insiders and experts to unspin (.) the next big issue (.) Trevor".

Several points can be noted. First and most obviously, ITN was introducing a set format into their coverage of the election. This slot had been planned well in advance; the insiders and experts had been recruited; the special set – the so-called special 'Unspun studio' - had been designed before the campaign had begun. Above all, the word 'Unspun' had been chosen. This was not a one-off: it was being introduced as a special feature that would remain running throughout the election coverage.

The slot had its own narrative presupposition that rested upon the distinction between appearance and reality. The aim was to separate "fact from fiction", or "spin" from "substance". The implication was that politicians create fiction, spin and appearance and that they would continue to do so throughout the campaign. Special experts would be required to show the reality – including the strategic reality – behind such appearances. The presupposition of politicians' untrustworthiness was not justified. In taking it for granted, the presenters of Unspun was displaying that they took for granted that their viewers would also take for granted politicians' untrustworthiness. It is, of course, a mark of commonplace beliefs that they need no rhetorical justification for their acceptance is assumed (Billig, 1996).

The same news bulletin introduced another feature that was to become a regular item during the course of the campaign: 'The Body Politic'. Macdonald explained: "We've recruited the country's top body language analyst (.) Professor Geoffrey Beattie from Manchester University to help us assess what hidden messages the politicians are sending". In the first report, Professor Beattie claimed that politicians rarely revealed their aggressive impulses in public but such impulses "are unconsciously channelled into hand gestures revealing their true:: feelings". Such claims, regardless of their validity, are interesting because they provide further evidence of the distinction between appearance and reality. Again, it is assumed that the expert can show the reality behind the potentially misleading surface impressions created by the politicians.

Here we can see the hermeneutics of suspicion becoming institutionalised as the guiding principle of regular coverage in the election coverage. The mode is pre-emptive, not reactive. The experts are not called in because a particular politician at a particular stage of the campaign has uttered a remark that needs to be treated with suspicion. The experts are there because 'everyone' knows that the politicians will make utterances, create appearances and even make gestures in ways that conceal underlying realities. Thus, it is announced that the experts will be on hand tomorrow and throughout the election to 'unspin' the next big issue – whatever that issue might be. In this way, the hermeneutics of political suspicion was a matter of routine.

Appearance and Reality
The distinction between political appearance and underlying reality was a widely used trope on all the main news channels in the coverage of the election. On the evening of the launch of the Conservative manifesto, the trope could also be heard on the BBC News. On the 10 o'clock evening news, the presenter Hugh Edwards called upon "our economics editor" in order "to try to establish whether the Tory plans stand up to scrutiny".

The editor began by mentioning the "incomprehensible talk of billions and squillions from Gordon Brown today rubbishing Oliver Letwin's spending plans". The words of the politicians are portrayed as incomprehensible. The folksy tone (as represented by 'billions and squillions') seems to suggest that the economics editor is identifying with the audience's presumed incomprehension. It is as if editor is saying that the all this political talk about

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economics is way over the heads of you and me. But the overall narrative is conveying that the talk is incomprehensible to you, but not to me: the economics editor is attempting to explain and interpret the economic claims comprehensibly.

A series of experts explained the apparently incomprehensible. The experts discuss the main parties' claims to save money by cutting waste. The experts are sceptical. The economics editor concludes:

> "The most dubious claims are actually the ones the parties agree on, they all say they'll save billions of pounds …if you ignore all the pledges to cut waste from Mr Brown and Mr Letwin, you're left with one shining nugget of truth in the river of mud that has flowed today, and that is we can expect the conservatives to spend (.) and tax a little less than Labour (.) Hugh"

Again the words of the politicians are being contrasted with words of truth. Careful expert interpretation is required so that truth can be separated from mud.

Television political presenters and interviewers must be above party partisanship. They use a variety of rhetorical formats to maintain distance and to display neutrality, for example attributing judgements, which could be understood as favouring one party over another, to independent sources (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). In this case, the economics editor is careful not to be understood as implying that the nugget of truth lies on one side or the other. The claims of the political parties are equally dubious. The word "actually" is suggestive, for it conveys a sense of reality: what 'actually' is occurring contrasts with what seems to be occurring. What the parties agree upon is actually – really – the most dubious claim of all. In this way, the editor avoided appearing biased by throwing doubt on all parties equally. There is an implicit claim. In contrast to the dubious judgments of politicians, the judgment of the editor about such judgments is not open to doubt. His claims match what "actually" is the case. The experts and the television journalists can excavate the nugget of truth, which the politicians cover with their self-interested rhetorical mud.

Sometimes the rhetorical trope of appearance and reality was not applied to the claims of politicians but to their visual images, as in the case of the Body Politic. April 13, the day after the Conservative launch, the Labour Party launched its manifesto.
Mark Mardell the BBC's political editor was reporting on the BBC News that evening. He was standing outside a plant in Northampton with a copy of the manifesto in his hand. "The message isn't just delivered in words", he was saying. Then he went on to give a strategic interpretation of the physical characteristics of the manifesto:
> "Think of the things that people say they don't like about New Labour, the spin, the glossiness (.) well Tony's little red book the new manifesto [holds up manifesto to camera] seems almost designed to counter that, in fact it seems designed in another decade, [riffles pages] lots of thick text and only one picture in black and white (.) it may be targeted

aimed at traditional Labour voters but the other parties aren't impressed"

In mentioning the disliked aspects of New Labour (the spin, the glossiness) he uses a distancing device, attributing the accusation to others (Clayman and Heritage, 2002).   Thus, he claims "people say" that they don't like the spin of New Labour. By such an attribution, he indicates that he is not personally making the accusation: that would have been a transgression of the norms of neutrality. He then explains the physical characteristics of the manifesto are designed to counter the accusation that 'people' make. The text has a strategy between the lines that needs to be interpreted. To display the strategic purposes, the pages need not be read. It is sufficient that they are visibly riffled and the underlying meaning disclosed.

The distrust of appearances was at times applied to the pictures of politicians that the news programmes were themselves presenting carrying. Viewers are shown visual images but then are warned not to trust the apparent straightforwardness of the pictures. An example from late in the campaign can be given. On May 3 Shaun Ley reported on BBC News that the party leaders were concentrating their efforts on marginal seats.

His report included shots of Blair and Brown on the campaign trail. It looked as if they were walking in a car-park. Blair then was seen to buy two ice-creams from an ice-cream van. He then offered one to Gordon Brown and could be heard saying "Here Gordon, not often a chance to get something free". The soundtrack continued with guffaws. At this point Shaun Ley's voice-over continued:

 "It may look relaxed but every aspect of this last few days of campaigning is carefully calculated by the parties [close-up shot of ice-cream in Blair's left hand, as he signs an autograph with his right while the soundtrack has further background guffaws] Labour's fear underlined by the latest opinion polls is that the lead it appears to have nationally [shot of Blair smiling] could in the seats that matter simply melt away" [Blair bites into the ice-cream]

The rhetorical format "it may look…but…" conveys suspicion. The format, when used in a voice-over, deictically points to the images that are being shown. In this case, the images are the 'it' that may appear to depict a relaxed scene. The 'but' warns that 'things are not as they seem': the appearances deceive. The viewers might think the scene depicts two relaxed figures, joking about an ice-cream, but they would be naïve to accept the images at face-value. "Every aspect", it is said, has been "carefully calculated". If every aspect has been calculated, then this must include the appearances that are being shown and that are being indicated deictically. Thus, the apparently relaxed images are being interpreted as anything but relaxed and spontaneous. Like everything else they are the product of careful political calculation. Appearances are deceptive, so the interpretation warns.

In this way, the voice-over anchors the seemingly relaxed scene in the hermeneutics of suspicion. The ice-cream is not just an ice-cream; the joke is not just a joke. They are products of strategic calculations that would have

remained concealed from the innocent viewer but for the expertise of the expert.

Promoting the expert
In the trope of misleading appearances and underlying strategic reality the role of the expert is crucial. If politicians are skilled in the arts of hiding underlying truths, then it takes equally experts to disclose these rhetorical tricks of the trade. The role of the expert, then, is to be the trusted guide in the territory of misleading appearance. Without the expert, the viewer might never be able to discover the nuggets of truth.

In this context, the television programmes promote the skills of their experts. Their status is talked up. When ITN introduced 'Unspun', the people who were going to help "get to the truth" were "experts and insiders" who were "leaders in their fields"; the presenter stressed the word 'leaders'. Before the first 'Body Politic', Trevor Macdonald described the expert decoder of gestures as "the country's top body language analyst" with his professorial status emphasised. In this way the credentials of expertise are routinely advertised. In contrast with the politicians, the experts are being presented as credible figures whose judgements are to be trusted. They are the agents, not the objects, of the hermeneutics of persuasion.

The difference between the presentation of experts and politicians can be seen in the respective ways that interviewers treat them. Politicians are regularly subjected to adversarial interviews, in which interviewers use a variety of hostile question-formats to challenge what politicians say (Clayman, 2002; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Heritage, 2002). For example, interviewers frequently use 'negative interrogations' or 'negative tag questions' which are seen as challenging the statements that politicians make. Interviewers often pose quandary questions, inviting politicians to agree with one of two alternative answers in the knowledge that both answers are equally damaging to the interviewee's credibility (see also Bull, 1998 and 2002; Bull et al, 1996).

This style of questioning differs from that which prevailed forty years ago. Today's interviewers, such as Jeremy Paxman, when reflecting on their craft as interviewers, tend to criticise their more deferential forebears. In earlier days, the interviewer tended to play 'pat-ball', feeding the politicians with open topic-questions or 'respectful prompters' to which the politician could give unchallenged answers (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). The successful political interviewer is nowadays expected to give politicians a far rougher ride.

As Clayman and Heritage stress, this is not merely a matter of professional advancement, although there are undoubted rewards and celebrity status for those who gain the reputation of being tough, uncompromising interviewers. Interviewers tend to justify the aggressive approach by claiming a public duty to question politicians rigorously because politicians in general have matters they wish to conceal. Jeremy Paxman, for example, is reported as saying that it is a sound principle, when interviewing politicians, to ask oneself 'Why is this

lying bastard lying to me' (Clayman and Heritage, 2002, quoted p. 31). In this way, professional ideology breeds suspiciousness.

When interviewers talk to the experts of suspicion, however, they use a very different interview style. The setting may physically resemble the political interview. Interviewer and interviewee might, for instance, be seated in the studio. The interviewer may use conventional beginnings and endings to mark the openings and closings of the conversation (Clayman and Heritage, 2002, chapter three). But in between the openings and closings, the questions have a very different design. There is an absence of the adversarial question formats that are used to challenge politicians. Instead, there are the straightforward 'pat-ball' types of question that cue the interviewee to a broad topic without further adversarial follow-up.

A particularly striking type of this gentle interviewing occurred on Newsnight April 14, when Paxman, famed as the fiercest of all television interviewers, played pat-ball with Frank Luntz. The latter was introduced as the American pollster who advised on Republican campaigns in the United States. Luntz was being asked to comment on the language being used by the various parties in the election. His answers gave strategic interpretations. Paxman's 'questions' were, in the main part, not questions in grammatical form but pointers to the topic that Luntz should talk about next:

> Paxman: err, now let's start with the Lib Dems they launched their manifesto today.
> Luntz: well the two words that you're going to hear from them constantly positive and fair…

Luntz talked about the Liberal Democrats use of the word 'hidden' and the strategic purpose of the word. Paxman's supplementary question does not challenge Luntz's prediction or knowledge. He merely asks "Could it work?" inviting Luntz to speculate expertly on the potential efficacy of the Liberal Democrats' rhetorical strategy. And then it is on to the next party: "Ok what about Labour" and Luntz then talks about Blair and how he is attempting to appear non-ideological. Paxman then raises the topic of Gordon Brown, again without a statement not a grammatical question: "Now Brown, he's obviously been playing a much bigger part than expected". Luntz interprets this not as an opinion offered by Paxman but as cue to talk about Brown's rhetoric. Luntz then discussed Brown's use of the phrase "personal to all" and he commented "I actually think it's good language I think it may be effective."

After that Paxman feeds the next topic: "Now as far as the Conservatives are concerned". Luntz interprets this, not as a preface for remarks that Paxman might make, but as a cue for his own analysis of the Conservatives' rhetoric. Paxman poses a question, regarding the Conservatives: "But why all the focus upon Howard?" Luntz answers in terms of the Conservatives' strategy of exploiting Blair as an electoral weakness. Paxman responds with a tag question "It's turning out to be quite an interesting election isn't it?" This question is not the sort of negative tag, which challenges the interviewee, by asserting a criticism of the interviewee's position and then adding the format

'isn't it?' to turn negative assertion into question. Instead the assertion is a coded compliment: Luntz's analyses have demonstrated how interesting the election is becoming, haven't they?

Throughout the exchange there were no probing or adversarial questions. Given the dominance of such questioning in contemporary political interviewing, one might claim that the pat-ball type of questioning represents a pseudo-interviewer. The interview is being used not to question interviewee but to permit the experts to display their expertise within a conversational format. In the Paxman-Luntz interview, it was the interviewee, not the interviewer, who controlled when to present the illustrative clips of film that showed politicians using particular pieces of rhetoric.

The pat-ball format reflects the way that the appearance-reality trope is presented on television. If a hidden underlying reality is to be exposed, then the news programmes need to promote and protect their experts who expose this reality. Politicians are not the only professionals with an interest, but the programmes have an interest to present their experts as knowledgeable, respected and without an interest to promote. Thus, they might be described as leaders in their field, the country's top expert etc. In this regard, the news presenters may find themselves using phrases that come close to the language of advertising. Even experts like Luntz, who in the past have worked for a particular political party, are treated as being above the fray and unmotivated. They are now 'insiders' who are revealing the hidden story. When questioned, they are treated with old-fashioned deference.

Challenging the Expert
Occasionally a politician will challenge the judgements of an expert. When this occurs, the reactions of the interviewer are interesting, for they reveal the assumption that the politician, not the expert, should be the object of suspicion and challenge. An example occurred on BBC's Newsnight on April 6 just before the official announcement of the Election but at a time when the unofficial campaigning had already begun. Again Jeremy Paxman was involved.

The incident occurred during an item about the economy. Three politicians had been invited for a discussion with Paxman: David Miliband (a Labour minister), David Willetts (Conservative) and Vince Cable (Liberal Democrat). Sitting next to Paxman on one sofa and opposite the politicians was the BBC's economic correspondent, Stephanie Flanders. Paxman introduced her, mentioning her expertise and giving her a feed question to display her expert judgment: "Well we'll be talking to the politicians err in a moment but first Newsnight's economic guru Stephanie Flanders [turning to Flanders] how good has the economy been and do you think Gordon Brown deserves the credit for it?' Flanders, in the course of outlining the state of the economy and Gordon Brown's role in it, commented on the "small difference" between the two parties relating to cut in public spending.

Then Paxman questioned the three politicians in turn. He started with Miliband. His questioning was typically adversarial. He began with a question,

which called into question the honesty of his party. The question semantically seemed to call for yes/ no answer, but either 'yes' or 'no' would be equally disastrous for the politician. Analysts have termed such questions as 'avoidance-avoidance' questions (Bavelas, 1998; Bull, 2002). It has been noted that politicians, when faced with an avoidance-avoidance question appear to equivocate, for they cannot deliver the 'yes' or the 'no' that the question seems to invite:

> Paxman: Err David Miliband, you came from a meeting tonight in which the manifesto was apparently finalized signed off on. Is it going to be any more honest about err tax plans than the last one?
> Miliband: Well the government has lived up to all of its commitments
> Paxman: ah come on you said last time you wouldn't raise income tax instead of which you raised taxes on income

Miliband starts to answer and Paxman begins to interrupt. It is in this sequence that Miliband criticises Flanders's assertion about there being only a small difference between the parties:

> Miliband: just let me finish this (.) a low debt high employment economy does not come about by accident. A low debt unem- high un- high employment economy comes about because of economic political choices that are made and Stephanie [noise from Paxman as if trying to interrupt] for Stephanie to say for Stephanie to say that the differences between the parties are not significant is completely false if=
>
> Paxman: =Are you questioning her judgement? [using a tone that conveys incredularity]
> Miliband: I certainly am because I think that [shot of Flanders] a commitment on the part of the Conservatives=
> Paxman: =you're a brave chap
> Miliband: a commitment on the part of the Conservatives [Paxman: right] to say that we should reduce the share of national income that's spent by the state <u>first</u> to forty per cent and then according to Oliver Letwin and others to thirty-five percent is a <u>major</u> <u>major</u> assault on the economic <u>the</u> British economic model that has been developed and I don't think we should minimize that I think it's a very significant difference…

The exchange deserves a more detailed analysis than can be given here, but several points can be noted. Paxman, who can challenge the politician's honesty, does not let the challenge to the BBC's expert pass unquestioned. This is not a challenge about facts or figures. Paxman characterises it as a disagreement with Flanders's 'judgment'. He succeeds in interrupting while the minister is making his statement disagreeing with the BBC's economics guru. In fact, the Minister has not given the reasons for his disagreement.

Paxman, thereby, is questioning not the basis for the disagreement but the very act of disagreeing with the expert's judgment.

Paxman's style of challenge should be noted. It takes the form of an adversarial question that seems to imply that questioning the judgement of the expert is somehow unusual and has to be accounted for. The design of his question, or at least its tone of delivery, possesses what conversation analysts would term a structural preference for agreement (Bilmes, 1987; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Pomerantz, 1984). Where questions have a preference structure, then one sort of answer can be supplied without justification, typically by a simple assent. On the other hand, the 'dispreferred' answer needs justification: the recipient will need to do more than merely dissent from the assertion embedded in the question.

In this case, the tone of the delivery is implying that 'surely you are not questioning her judgement, are you?' Such a question invites a denial that would show agreement with the presupposition that is embedded in the question: namely Flanders's expert judgement is not to be questioned. Miliband gives the dispreferred answer. He emphasises his answer – "I certainly am" – rather than replying simply 'yes'. He then goes on to justify his non-acceptance of Flanders's judgment: "because I think that…" Both the emphasis and the justification are features of 'dispreferred' responses, as the responder rejects the invitation to confirm the question's embedded presupposition and then explains the rejection (Sidnell, 2004).

By employing such a question, Paxman was indicating that Miliband was doing something unusual in challenging the judgment of the expert. The acceptance of the expert's judgment would have needed no special justification. Nor under normal circumstances would it provoke a challenging interruption from the interviewer. Paxman, having received confirmation that the politician was indeed challenging the judgment, then tries to interpose what can be heard as a jokey man-to-man aside – "you're a brave chap". It is implied, but of course not stated, that the unchallengeable status of Flanders might lie with her gender – only a brave man would challenge a powerful female guru. Miliband ignores this aside. Paxman drops the matter at this point.

However, Paxman does not let the issue remain dropped. Later in the interview Miliband refers to the cost of some spending plans but he does not give the precise figures. He then says to Paxman: "Stephanie will give you the decimal points". Paxman intervenes with a statement that challenges Miliband, as if exposing the minister of a contradiction: "Now you respect her judgment apparently". Unusually for an interviewer such an intervention is not framed as a question (Clayman and Heritage, 2002), but it is an assertion that challenges the interviewee.

The assertion is making a rhetorical point. Paxman's assertion is designed to resurrect the status of the previously challenged expert in the eyes of the viewer. His intervention refers back to the previous exchange. <u>Now</u> you respect her judgment, Paxman is saying. Paxman has upgraded the

characterisation of Miliband's reaction: before he was 'questioning' her judgement, now he is 'respecting' it. The implication is that if Miliband now respects her judgement, then surely he should have accepted it previously. It should be noted that again Paxman poses the issue as one of accepting/respecting the expert's judgment in general – not her judgment on a particular issue. In his interventions, it is her status as an expert that is posed as being at stake. The implication is that if her expert status is accepted – if she is the 'guru' that she is presented as being – then everyone, including government ministers, should defer to her judgement, whatever that judgment may be.

Miliband does not let Paxman's second challenge pass. He extracts himself from the quandary of seeming to respect her judgment at one point but not at another. He responds by saying that he respects the judgement of the Treasury that has provided Stephanie Flanders with the figures; and that as a Treasury minister it would be absurd not to do so. Paxman laughs. It was a rhetorically skilful escape.

The sequence may have ended with humour, but it illustrates something serious. The adversarial questioning of the interviewer is directed against the politician, not the expert. In a matter of judgement – whether the differences between the political parties are great or small – the expert opinion is presented as the one to be deferred to. The politician is the one to be distrusted. If the politician challenges this, then surprise is expressed and the politician is made to justify himself. The common-sense assumption is revealed: how can a politician – someone who has just been marked as a figure of dubious honesty – question the judgment of the media's own expert?

Concluding Remarks

Much more analysis would be required in order to show how the hermeneutics of suspicion was reproduced in its detail by the television news coverage of the election. Even so, a preliminary analysis reveals some interesting features. The suspicion of politicians is in-built into the formats and rhetorical conventions of reporting. One conventional trope in this reporting is the distinction between political appearance and reality. Politicians produce appearances, and sometimes untruths, but news programmes, courtesy of experts, will show viewers the underlying realities. The trope requires a distinction between untrustworthy, biased politicians and trustworthy, unbiased experts. The latter are required to reveal, or to unspin, the misleading appearances of the former.

Of course, modern political parties do use sophisticated techniques to promote their own messages. Techniques of advertising are employed to 'sell' the message and to project the desired images. But there is a danger in seeing the presentation of politics as being a one-way business in which all the manipulation and self-interested rhetoric comes from the politicians, while the unbiased media seeks to get beyond the rhetoric to the truth on behalf of an otherwise helpless and confused electorate.

The media have their own interests and rhetoric. The presentation of experts and their own demonstration of their expertise cannot be free of rhetoric. The news programmes use their own promotional rhetoric when presenting these experts. Experts are 'leading' experts; they are gurus whose judgement should be accepted. When Trevor Macdonald and his reporter introduced ITN's new 'Unspun' feature, they used the word 'unspun' several times. The word was flashed on the screen graphically. Like any advertising promotion, the product-name was being repeated, as its reliability and trustworthiness were being claimed.

Yet the hermeneutics of distrust stops short at this point. The news presenters and their chosen experts are presented as being above suspicion. The rhetorical decoding and unspinning is directed against the parties who are competing in the electoral contest. The experts do not need to seek votes – they have no such interests and therefore can be respected. Their words do not require decoding: their appearances conceal no hidden realities. There is no conscious strategy here – just routine conventions that are so familiar that they appear natural. But this is the way that the hermeneutics of political distrust and the promotion of media trustworthiness are routinely reproduced.

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Appendix

Transcription Notation

The transcription conventions, which are being used here, are based on the simplified notation of conversation analysis that Potter and Wetherell (1987) present.

Underlining is used to indicate increased loudness or a speaker stressing a particular word or phrase.

(.) indicates a noticeable short pause

= indicates that one speaker's turn is being followed immediately by another speaker's turn without a pause. This typically occurs when one speaker might interrupt another without an overlap between the two speakers' talk

:: in the middle of a word indicate the elongation of the preceding vowel sound

Square brackets [ ] are used to convey information about what is being said or shown.

… conveys that material is being omitted

The Internet and the 2005 UK General Election

Dr John Downey and Mr Scott Davidson

This account of the role of the Internet in the 2005 UK General Election is divided into three parts. First, we examine the use made of the Internet by political parties during the campaign. Second, we discuss the role of 'mainstream' Internet news providers. Finally, we assess the impact of political blogs.

The Internet and Party Political Campaigning

During the first days of the General Election campaign a number of journalists argued that the Internet would play an important part. George Trefgarne in the *Daily Telegraph* confidently predicted that the Internet would have a 'major role' (6/4/2005 p8). John Naughton in *The Observer* argued that the increasing importance of niche voters and the ideal character of the Internet to reach such voters would signal a sea-change in campaign strategies hitherto based upon print and broadcast media: 'arcane competencies may prove to be a diminishing asset in a narrowcast world'(10/4/2005 p6). Such predictions, however, proved to be overblown and the Internet did not play a qualitatively greater a role in the 2005 election than it did in 2001 (Downey, 2001).

As in 2001 post-election analysis turned to the question of why the Internet played such an insignificant role. Owen Gibson in *The Guardian* explained the relative lack of importance of blogging, for example, in UK politics in comparison to the USA through referring to the different characters of print journalism in the UK and USA (6/6/2005). As far as the UK is concerned a cycle seems to occur at General Elections: different aspects of the Internet are hyped at the beginning of campaigns (on-line voting, blogging) and then the failure to make an impact is analysed after the dust has settled.

Why is this cycle emerging? On the one hand, the Internet is a relatively immature medium that is evolving rapidly in terms of technological possibility and in terms of use. In other words, there is always some new facet that can be hyped by an information elite. On the other, the Internet is likely to remain of marginal political importance in UK General Elections for the foreseeable future. Why is this?

Political parties are reluctant to make full use of the potential of the Internet to appeal directly to voters (disintermediation) by-passing the broadcast and print media because a large majority of voters who are on-line and interested enough to visit party political websites are unlikely to be floating voters and thus investment in on-line campaigning is not a cost-efficient way of winning votes.

In comparison to the last UK General Election in 2001 more UK households have access to the Internet (52% in October-November 2004 compared to 38% in April-June 2001). The growth of Internet household penetration is slowing, however. After jumping roughly 10 percentage points in 2000 and 2001, growth is now running at around 3% per annum. The recent boom of

Loughborough University

Communication Research Centre

broadband access (up 40% since 2003 so that now 36% of households have broadband access [Dutton et al, 2005:20]) means that the digital divide appears to be deepening even further. In terms of Internet access we may speak of three roughly evenly sized groups: the well-connected, the connected and the disconnected. Floating voters are underrepresented in the first group in comparison to the population as a whole and so the Internet is not the most appropriate medium to use in order to attract floating voters.

There are many factors that help to explain the extent of the digital divide (age, location, education, income and so on). If we look at Internet access by household income, we can see at least a strong correlation:

Internet Access by Household Income

Decile	2001/2	2003/4
Lowest 10%	10	15
2	12	15
3	15	20
4	25	37
5	33	41
6	43	55
7	49	60
8	59	71
9	67	78
10	80	89
All	39	48

Source: adapted from Expenditure and Food Survey, Office of National Statistics

John Naughton is correct to a certain extent, however, to argue that niche marketing to voters is growing in importance and sophistication. In the 2005 General Election, for example, the Conservative Party used Voter Vault software that had been used by the Republicans in the 2004 US elections. This software categorises voters based on information drawn from the 2001 UK census, the electoral roll, credit databases, house price data and so on. Households were divided into 11 categories. It has been calculated that four of these categories provide 90% of the Conservative vote. Four other categories were identified as potential vote winners. Their campaign made strenuous efforts to appeal to these groups in marginal constituencies (roughly 900,000 voters). These four groups were called: Happy Families (10.76% of electorate), Ties of Community (16.04%), Blue Collar Enterprise (11.01%) and Urban Intelligence (7.19%). While no doubt many households in the Happy Families category have access to the Internet, only the Urban Intelligence category were identified as users of the Internet for the purposes of gathering information about politics and current affairs (Smith, 2005).

This poses a problem in terms of use of the Internet for campaigning purposes in that the three largest groups of target voters are either not

connected to the Internet or tend not to use the Internet to find out about politics. As Mark Pack, e-campaign spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, stated 'the number of floating voters coming to a website is relatively small' (Pack, 2005). Much more reasonable are niche marketing techniques to appeal to these voters such as phone calls, DVDs, letters, leaflets and the arcane practice of door step visits. Party websites and other Internet activities are aimed primarily, therefore, at the information elites, at journalists, at supporters, and at party activists who may then influence floating voters. The use of technology to rally and organise supporters, collect donations and so on is probably far more significant than its direct vote-winning potential. Many of the most significant uses of technology (databases, coordination of campaigning) are actually hidden from the vast majority of voters.

On-line donations were significant in the 2004 US presidential election with around twenty per cent of funds collected on-line. All UK parties used the Internet to encourage supporters to donate money. One Labour Party email to supporters was claimed by the Party to have resulted in £50,000 of donations in less than 24 hours. Certainly the Internet is an ideal medium for parties to communicate with their largely well-connected supporters and activists. However, on-line donations as a percentage of funds raised remains very small. The Labour Party, for example, appears to rely overwhelmingly on large unions (AMICUS, TGWU) and a small number of private wealthy individuals for campaigning funds (http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/ regulatory-issues/registers.cfm) in a context of dramatically declining membership numbers since 1997.

In stark contrast to parties' strenuous attempts to raise funds on-line it should be pointed out that UK political parties do not give members of the public an opportunity to engage in debate on their websites (in contrast to parties in Germany). One of the potentially most beneficial aspects of the Internet for encouraging political participation and dialogue is, therefore, not being used by UK political parties. Their concern to retain control over the process of political communication apparently overrides concern for reinvigorating the political process through on-line dialogue. This is an example of the Internet being *normalised* (made into a quasi-traditional medium) by the parties.

Functional Review of Political Party websites

	Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrat	SNP	PC	UKIP	Green	BNP
News/Press Releases	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Email sign up for news	Y	Y	Y		"suspended"	Y	Y	
Donate money online	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Leaders' Blog	"Tony Blair's	Leader's Wife blog	"The Battlebus					

	Campaign Diary"		Blog"					
Senior Party Officials Blog	"Catch Up with the Prescott Express"		Links to blogs from Peter Black, Sandra Gidley, Richard Allan, Lynne Featherstone	Y				
List of candidate blogs			Y					
Watch edits of PEBS	Y	Y	Y	Y				Y
Watch other videos	Y		Y					
Send an E Postcard			Y					
local candidate information	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	
Text Messaging Sign UP	Y	Y	Y					

All the parties included the core functions of access to news releases and policy information, online donations and the option to sign up for email communications, and it is these areas which were the most likely to have been updated on a regular basis. The three main parties also incorporated regular blogs or diaries from senior figures from the campaign trail. Labour put up several video diaries, including one from Tony Blair and a picture and text diary from deputy leader John Prescott, which was updated daily. The Conservatives did not provide a blog or diary from their leader, Michael Howard, but instead opted for a regular campaign diary from his wife Sandra. The Liberal Democrats published a "Battlebus Blog" and linked to other blogs produced in the name of senior party officials.

The ability to search for information on the parties' candidates was provided in varying formats. Labour also offered web site visitors a chance to see "Our Personal Promise to You" by submitting some personal data, such as housing status, age of children etc. Once this was submitted a web page would be generated with summarised policies in areas relevant to the submitted demographical information with some localised facts and figures according to postcode. This provided an interesting attempt at providing the kind of personalised communications content that is not attainable through mass

communications channels. However, features such as this tended to be the exception rather than the rule.

Segmentation – the process of defining and targeting markets – enables the tailoring of communications to reach target audiences with increased effectiveness and is an increasingly important component in UK electoral campaigning. Yet, in 2005 there appeared to be little, if any, significant Internet developments in this area. In the 2001 campaign Labour did establish the R U UP 4 IT? web site aimed at younger voters. Labour did not replicate the exercise this time around, and no party set up segmented micro-sites or sub-brands that in any way resembled the John Kerry and George W Bush campaign sites for the 2004 presidential campaign, which both created targeted content aimed at African American, Veteran and Hispanic voters. Political parties do have a number of sites that appeal to different groups of activists and there is some evidence that constituency party websites in marginal seats tailored content to suit the particular character of the constituency (in Guildford, for example, a Conservative –Liberal democrat marginal the conservative Party website fore-grounded the issue of crime and disorder because of perceived Liberal Democrat weakness on this issue (Westlake, 2005)).

For all the hype about the onset of web elections, in many ways the most intriguing aspects of the analysis of the functionality of the party web sites is what functions or features do *not* feature. The importance of blogs? The Labour Party did not offer links to its own candidates' blogs. Increased interactivity between citizens and politicians? No party hosted forums for the public. A platform for smaller parties to run imaginative campaigns? No, the smaller party sites provided, on the whole, fewer functions than the bigger parties.

There are risks associated with cultivating greater interactivity for parties who have carefully built up internal centralised systems of command and control in their attempts to manage their image against a news media constantly on the look out for "gaffes" and divisions. A hard-headed assessment by political parties of the benefits of heightened interactivity will likely be weighed against the potential costs of losing an element of control of campaign communications. The economic costs of e-campaigning are also a factor. If only 3% of British Internet users actually visited party websites during the 2005 campaign (Ward and Lusoli in Hansard, 2005: 16), it is unlikely that parties will spend substantial amounts of party funds on e-campaigning.

For the political parties, the key functionality of the web is the opportunity it offers for them to communicate, unmediated by sceptical media filters, with a self-selecting audience – their activists and supporters. The web also offers the chance to cultivate images of modernity for the parties, even if blogs, video diaries and jokey emails do not win many votes, there is a perceived danger of being out of touch with the online world. At one point in the campaign the Liberal Democrats claimed to be the first party to do a "podcast" by offering an MP3 of a Charles Kennedy speech. Yet, this begs the question, if podcasting is an effective campaign tool, why did they only do it once in the

campaign, and not since? In essence, it appears to be a case of the perception of the medium being more important than the message.

'Mainstream' News Providers

As in the US, it is clear that mainstream news organisations dominate the Internet provision of political news in the UK thus contradicting a common fallacy about the supposedly decentralised free flow of information that many people still believe the Internet to be. Two UK sites stand out: Guardian Unlimited and BBC News. They both provide free access to in-depth analysis of British politics. They are also the two news sites with the greatest reach. In May 2005 the Guardian Unlimited site as a whole (i.e. not just the news site) had nearly 10 million unique users, of which over 3 million were UK users. According to Neilson, BBC online as a whole had 9.8 million unique users from the UK in May 2005 reaching nearly 40% of active Internet users (Neilson Netratings, 2005). According to The Economist, number of unique global users of the BBC news site has grown from 1.6 million per week in 2000 to 7.8 million per week in 2005(Economist.com, 2005). In March 2003 there was a 29% increase in unique UK users of BBC news to more than 4 million (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/2948833.stm) in response to the USA and UK invasion of Iraq. During the 2005 election campaign an estimated 28% of on-line British users sought out political information on-line, around 15% of the population. However, only 6% of users went on line at least once a week (Ward and Lusoli in Hansard, 2005: 14). The most popular source of information was BBC News: 17% of British users visited the BBC site (Ward and Lusoli in Hansard, 2005: 16).

In 2003 KPMG carried out a review of BBC Online services. Drawing on MORI research they showed that BBC News and Guardian unlimited are the two UK news sites with the biggest reach and time spent viewing (BBC reach 50%; time spent viewing 50%; Guardian Unlimited reach 22.3%; time spent viewing 8.2%). 21% of an UK sample of Internet users had visited the BBC News site at least once in the previous four weeks (55% of these people were educated to degree level or above) (KPMG, 2003: 210). Of the 4 million unique users from the UK, therefore, well over 2 million were educated to degree level or above. In November 2004 Forrester conducted user research for the Guardian: 73% of users are between 18-44; 74% are educated to degree level or above; 64% of users belong to socio-economic groups AB; and 36% were based in London (Guardian Unlimited, 2005). Both of these sites therefore tend to be used by well-connected information elites (or 'young, upmarket professionals' as The Guardian describes them) who have a considerably higher income and educational achievement than average. This elite display particular patterns of media consumption (Guardian Unlimited users watch 7 hours of TV per week compared to 9 for the Internet average and 31% of users spend 5 hours a week reading newspapers and magazines compared to 18% of all UK Internet users).

The BBC, in line with its public service remit, offered a comprehensive and wide ranging web presence for the election. In addition to the large volume of news stories published each day, visitors could look up reference data on past

results, details of candidates and see the projected impact of the polls on the composition of parliament. Feature coverage ranged from the very simple, how to physically cast a vote, to more complicated explorations of social and economic issues.

The BBC also attempted a series of fact checking articles, a trend which was echoed by Channel Four News who established a separate fact checking web site called "FactCheck" – for which the broadcaster claimed would scrutinise interviews, speeches and manifesto pledges - informing public debate by creating a popular resource for an information-hungry electorate. Many of the newspapers also invested considerable energy into covering the election. Although, in essence, what titles such as the Guardian and Financial Times produced was either the same as or more of what they do anyway: more news, more features, more commentary, more sponsored blogging.

In contrast to the political parties, the media sites actively sought interactivity at all possible times (although the BBC once again pre-moderated their sites in order to observe their public service obligations). This ranged from the fairly passive invitations for audiences to email or sms their views and questions about the issues to the cultivation of audience participation in programme output, often with members of the "general public" replacing the journalists in putting the questions to politicians in interviews. There was also a wide range of discussion forums and message boards hosted by news producers.

Blogs
Before the election campaign a number of commentators suggested that blogs would play a significant role in the UK election largely because of their recent impact in the USA. In the USA there are a number of influential blogs (Daily Kos, Instapundit) that have attracted sizeable audiences and blogs have also been responsible for breaking significant stories (for example, the story that led to the resignation of CBS anchorman Dan Rather). According to Pew, 2% of adult Americans regularly read such blogs and an additional 3% sometimes do so (2005: 3).

The impact of political blogs in the US encouraged the Hansard Society to investigate the potential of political blogging in the UK. The conclusion of their report would seem to support caution with respect to UK blogging potential. A pertinent point made is that blogs to a certain extent have become 'normalised' as mainstream news organisations (such as Guardian Unlimited and BBC News) have jumped on the blogging bandwagon. This has been commented upon critically by a number of 'real' or 'authentic' bloggers (such as Guido Fawkes) but as they rely on mainstream media links for a good deal of their traffic, a sort of accommodation has developed that permits the mainstream to feel themselves to be cool and bloggers to feel as though they are not talking to themselves.

Significantly, the reception research conducted by the Hansard Society reveals that the vast majority of people are not greatly enthused by blogging. Jurors found it 'difficult to connect with bloggers', 'could not find enough to empathise, or even disagree with, in what they read', and the blogs reviewed

Loughborough University

Communication Research Centre

were 'marked by low levels of debate between visitors and this proved to be another turn-off for our jury'(200?: 11). As the Hansard Society chose some of the more high profile and interesting UK political blogs to test on the jurors the results are salutary for those who consider that blogging could serve to revive democratic participation in the UK.

Data concerning unique visits are available up until April 15th 2005. From the beginning of April until the 15th 4 political blogs were featured consistently in the daily top 10 of most visited UK blogs run by Britblog (bloggers have to register in order to be counted – there are currently 174 registered political blogs): Tim Worstall, perfect.co.uk, UK Polling Report, Guido Fawkes. On one day, April 12th, all four featured in the top ten and had a total of under 5000 unique visitors between them (Britblog.com, 2005).

While political blogs may struggle for readers and commenters, there are a very large number of blogs that serve a wide variety of purposes. Researchers at the Centre for Mass Communication Research at Leicester University found 312 political blogs and categorised them in the following way:

Partisanship of UK Political Blogs

	Frequency	Percent
Anti-Blair Left	29	9.3
Conservative (MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	19	6.1
Pro-Conservative (Not MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	6	1.9
Anti-Conservative (Not MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	5	1.6
Pro-European (Single Issue)	6	1.9
Euro-sceptic (single issue)	1	.3
General/Observational (No Clear direction)	89	28.5
Pundit/Pollster	6	1.9
Labour (MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	65	20.8
Pro-Labour (Not MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	24	7.7
Anti-Labour (Not MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	4	1.3
Independents/Other Parties (MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	15	4.8
Anti-Independents (Not MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	3	1.0

Liberal Democrats (MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	17	5.4
Pro-Liberal Democrat (Not MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	3	1.0
Anti-Liberal Democrat (Not MPs, Candidates, Councillors)	1	.3
Media	10	3.2
Pressure/Lobby Group	1	.3
Spoof Blog	8	2.6
Total	312	100.0

Source: Dr James Stanyer, Centre for Mass Communication Research, Leicester University

It would appear from this data that the right in the UK is lagging behind the centre and left in the blogoshere. It should also be noted that the blogosphere is often a far from civil civil society. There are numerous sites devoted to ad hominem attacks on politicians, local as well as national. This prompted Sheridan Westlake, editor of conservative.com, to call for greater regulation of blogs (2005). This would presumably treat blogs more like broadcasters (who must observe certain rules concerning public service such as impartiality) rather than newspapers. However, it is questionable to say the least to what extent such a suggestion is either desirable or practicable.

While it appears that the audiences for political blogs in the UK are very small and made up almost entirely of political and media elites, that does not necessarily mean that they are entirely without influence. Certainly a few provide an extremely high level of political analysis that can rival commentaries in national newspapers. In addition, some commentators argue that the value of blogs is that they can break news that mainstream news organizations will not initially touch for whatever reason. They may be small but they act as a conduit for stories to the mass media and are, therefore, important.

While there are a number of blogs that aim specifically to break damaging stories about political parties in the UK (for example, newlabourunplugged.com), this has not occurred. During the General Election campaign not one story was broken via a blog. (Bloggers are very keen to catch the mainstream media plagiarising their work but the results of investigations so far actually show the very limited influence of blogs on mainstream political journalism either attributed or unattributed to their blog source.)

One potential story that could well have received mainstream coverage was the claim made by two of the most well-known UK political bloggers, Guido Fawkes and Tim Ireland, that the Labour Party had broken the 2003 Data Protection Act because their agents, software company *Email Reaction*, had embedded spyware into some emails that would allow responses to be tracked. While a complex and extremely well-informed discussion of the Data Protection Act and whether Labour had in fact broken the law occurred in the

blogosphere, it failed to register at all in national newspapers despite the relatively high profile of Zack Exley, head of Labour's e-campaign, and the newsworthy character of a story claiming that the Labour Party was 'spying' on its supporters.

Why were no stories broken by blogs during the campaign? Some argue that it was simply bad blogging luck and that it is a matter of time before this happens. Neil McIntosh, assistant editor of Guardian Unlimited, for example, argues that sooner or later a Private Eye-style UK blog will develop and break big stories. There are good reasons to be cautious about such thinking, however. First, it is not clear whether a Private Eye type blog would survive financially as Internet users are generally unwilling to pay for their news. A web rival to Private Eye might well serve to drive them both out of business. Second, and most importantly, the British press, in contrast to the US press, trades in scandal, intrigue, and opinion. There is no tradition in the UK of print 'objectivity' that encourages the US press to be balanced in their coverage of political parties that can act as a barrier to breaking sensitive stories. In the UK, why would anyone choose to break a story for free on the Internet to a few thousand people when it would be possible to go directly to a mass circulation daily and additionally be paid handsomely for the information? A good deal of the popularity of blogging in the US is that it provides citizens with explicit political opinion across the political spectrum in contrast to much of the mainstream media. In the UK, national newspapers provide this to a certain extent already and so there does not appear to be a compelling reason to visit the blogosphere.

Although less hyped than blogs (at least for the moment), developments in applications of mobile phones appear to be just as, if not more, significant. In particular, the ability to take pictures and videos is increasingly being applied in a campaign context. Both the BBC and Channel 4 encouraged the public to send in pictures from the campaign, as the notion of the "citizen reporter", a more formal role for the passer-by as news gatherer is cultivated. Amateur mobile phone video, for example, was used extensively in mainstream media coverage of the 2005 London bombing.

Conclusion
In comparison to the 2001 General Election, more UK citizens were on-line in 2005 and a sizeable minority had broadband access thereby accentuating the UK digital divide. Also the number of individuals, albeit mostly restricted to relatively privileged socio-economic groups, who sought information and political news on-line was significantly greater than in 2001. While the provision of political news by mainstream news providers is clearly coming of age in the UK, most of the content tends to reflect material to be found in the off-line world.

In a manner strikingly similar to 2001, our key conclusion is that the Internet played an insignificant role in the 2005 General Election. Political parties, realistically, clearly do not see their websites as a large-scale direct vote-winners and tend to focus their on-line activities on providing information for certain groups (journalists, supporters, activists), all of whom belong to a

relatively small information elite. Both political parties and mainstream news providers have tended to 'normalise' the Internet. It is very much politics or news as normal repackaged for well-to-do Internet users.

There also does not appear to be an overwhelming desire for alternative sources of political news, opinion, and information on the part of the electorate. The UK political blogosphere did grow in profile during the election but its political importance remains (and is likely to continue to remain for the foreseeable future) extremely marginal in comparison to political blogs in the US. The hope that the Internet would usher in a new age of participatory politics populated by active e-citizens has, as yet, proved to be forlorn.

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Chapter 4: Women's Magazines and the 2005 Election

(Dominic Wring and David Deacon)

Whereas there has been a notable decline in the circulations of national newspapers over the last two decades other media have, by contrast, experienced significant growth in their sales, audiences and influences. Publishers in the women's magazine sector have been particularly successful in gaining new readerships and launching new titles. The burgeoning range of weeklies is especially noteworthy and it offers an alternative kind of news media to the more established formats. Though dominated by popular culture, some of the titles have featured politicians with or without their co-operation and this kind of reporting represents another manifestation of the way senior elected figures are increasingly being portrayed like celebrities. There is of course no more high profile example of this than the present Prime Minister, a leader who has long been viewed as an adept and versatile media performer.

Like his predecessor John Major, Tony Blair has consciously attempted to communicate his message to women, particular demographic groups of whom are often portrayed as being essential to any party seeking to win office. During the run-up to 1997 the most prominent target of this kind was 'Worcester Woman', whereas the 2005 equivalent became 'School Gate Mums'. The latter were in evidence in a variety of broadcast formats, notably Channel Five's experimental day of audience based discussion programming featuring the three main leaders some weeks before the formal announcement of the election. Several women, most notably a nurse together with the mother of an autistic child, memorably confronted the Prime Minister on aspects of his health and education policies. Blair and his rivals also made attempts to reach women voters by appearing in other less formal current affairs discussion programmes like GMTV and This Morning.

Another variation on 'School Gate Mums' was the overwhelmingly female readership of *Take A Break* (i.e. *Take A Break* woman) a remarkable publishing phenomenon that now sells in excess of a million copies every week. Consequently, as an innovative experiment, the research team monitored a wide selection of women's magazines during the period covered by the project to gauge whether and in what ways these media were interested in the election. Whilst campaign related material appeared in prominent monthlies such as *Cosmopolitan* it was felt the weeklies offered, by definition, a news driven format likely to be more sensitive to and engaged with the unfolding campaign. The chosen sample comprised all magazines defined as 'Women's Interests: Women's Weeklies' by the Audit Bureau of Circulation barring one title primarily aimed at the Republic of Ireland.

List of publications monitored

Title	Circ. (millions)
Bella	422,963
Best	400,638
Chat	623,567
Closer	500,202
Heat	539,983
Hello	323,591
My Weekly	233,744
New	357,523
Now	597,827
OK	468,928
People's Friend	341,506
Reveal	239,907
Star	176,983
Take a Break	1,211,016
That's Life	597,016
The Lady	34,419
Woman	512,158
Woman's Own	436,356
Woman's Weekly	401,965

Conscious of its massive circulation, the eve-of-poll edition of the largest selling *Take A Break* self-consciously proclaimed that its near four million readers could make the difference in what it declared to be the 'UK's first Women's Election' (5th May). A major three page feature, 'Votes for Sale', concentrated on those deemed by the editors to be women's priority issues: childcare, pay, pensions, safety, health-care and, more specifically, abortion. Each of the three major parties' policies was briefly elaborated upon but the only printed comments from the three main leaders were clarifications of their stances on the latter issue. *Woman's Own* also incorporated a similar feature over the course of successive issues (11th and 18th April) in which two different groups of readers aged between 32 and 49 were able to ask Blair and Howard questions. The agenda differed from that of *Take A Break* and, reflecting perhaps the magazine's slightly older, more conservative readership, concentrated on crime and personal security. Howard received a decidedly warmer response from his interrogators than did Blair.

Closer magazine had journalist Sophie Barton question Blair in an interview in which he consciously acknowledged the 'stressful life' pressures facing those 'trying to bring up kids, work and pay off a mortgage' and responded to a very

similar agenda to that of *Take A Break* (30th April). In doing so he would have been conscious of his own strategists' prioritising of 'hard working families' as a key target group. The interview also highlighted Labour's pledge to improve breast cancer treatment as well as more details about Blair, his son Leo and his justification for invading Iraq. Mention was made of his heart problems and there were several references to his health and whether he was quite as recovered as he appeared. Interestingly the cultural agenda-setting *Heat* almost managed to avoid mention of any politicians but for one full page, long range photograph of a naked to the waste Tony Blair (7th May). The picture featured in the magazine's 'Torso of the Week' might be easily dismissed as another minor feature but for the favourable subtitle 'Yes, it really <u>is</u> him!' and the clear impression it gave of a man who was very fit for his age. The health of the nation rather than Blair informed another feature that was similarly favourable to the Prime Minister and which demonstrated his ability to use incumbency to maximum publicity effect. Consequently by inviting the Jamie Oliver into Downing Street for a meeting he acknowledged the importance of the chef's Channel 4 television crusade to improve the quality of school food whilst gaining a *Hello* photo-opportunity and story which was complimentary about Blair's pledge to spend an additional £280 million on catering for children's meals (11th April).

The only other political figures to appear in women's magazines were Ann Widdecombe, Harriet Harman and Sandra Howard. All three interviews concentrated on non-intrusive aspects of their personal lives and discussed their career trajectories. A *Hello* feature with Harman was dominated by photographs of the minister in her home and with her mother and sisters together with a brief review of her life and achievements. The interview steered clear of the election but touch on the issue of maternity rights whilst focusing on the difficulties facing a professional career woman seeking to developing a work-life balance (5th May). The Widdecombe interview with *Woman's Own* hardly touched on politics at all (25th April). Far more intriguing was the *Closer* piece billed 'At Home With the Howards' but which only featured the Conservative leader's wife Sandra (9th April). The interview, conducted in the politician's home, focused on the couple's family life and enabled her to present her husband Michael as far less austere than his popular image suggested. The subsequent discussion ranged over the success of Jamie Oliver's campaign, abortion laws and a diplomatic avoidance of questions about the Blairs. Mrs Howard's many media appearances contrasted with those of her predecessor Ffion Hague who was often seen but never heard in the 2001 campaign.

The Conservatives were also the only party to advertise in the women's weeklies and placed variations on their core slogan 'Are You Thinking What We're Thinking' in the best-selling title *Take a Break* and the more glossy and fiercely competitive *Hello* and *OK* magazines. The messages conveyed the kind of sentiments that would probably have originated in a focus group session with target female voters:

- 'Put Matron in charge and we'd soon get cleaner hospitals' (*OK* 19th April; *Hello* 28th April; *Take A Break* 28^{th;} April 3rd May; *Hello* 5th May)

- 'Seeing more police on the streets would make me feel safer' (*OK* 19th April; *Hello* 21st April; *Take A Break* 5th May; *Hello* 5th May)
- 'How can my daughter learn anything if teachers aren't allowed to discipline unruly kids?' (*Hello*, 21st April; *OK* 26th April; *Hello* 28th; *OK* 3rd May)

It is noteworthy that Conservative strategists restricted their messages to core 'bread and butter' issues of health, education and crime and thereby avoided reference to either the controversial 'dog whistle' issue of asylum and immigration or Blair's own allegedly untrustworthy reputation, topics which both featured widely in other party advertising.

Overall the most obvious point to note about the women's weeklies' election coverage was the lack of it. 12 of the 19 titles in the sample featured no advert, photograph, story or mention of the general election or any of those involved in it. Even the birth of Charles and Sarah Kennedy's son Donald at the beginning of the campaign failed to generate much human interest reporting although it is understandable that the Liberal Democrats were cautious to avoid being accused of using the event to gain publicity. Ultimately the lack of women's magazine coverage suggests that politics, politicians and their family members were not likely to increase or even maintain sales in this highly competitive market. It was therefore understandable that no title attempted to develop a distinctive campaigning identity in the style of one the more popular national newspapers.