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Media Ownership, Differential Coverage, and Effects on Public Attitudes: The Case of News Coverage of Labour Unions

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

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Liam Kneafsey

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Summary

This dissertation examines the relationship between media ownership structures, the influence ownership has on news content and the effects of differential coverage on citizens who consume this content. It examines the news coverage of labour unions as a case study of how this causal mechanism operates. The study uses a combination of quantitative text analysis, laboratory and survey experiments, repeated-measures survey designs, and qualitative interview evidence to address the components of the causal mechanism sequentially.

Chapter 2 focuses on a quasi-experimental design where the unusual circumstances of a newspaper takeover are leveraged to test whether a change in ownership structure causes a change in the tone of coverage of unions as the incentive and ability to control journalists and editors shifts. The chapter utilises newly collected archival newspaper data, dictionary-based text analysis, and a combination of treatment tests, changepoint analysis, and difference-in-difference methods to establish the causal effect.

Chapter 3 explores the effects of differential framing of a contemporary news story regarding the regulation, activities, and role of labour unions drawn from commercial media organisations with different ownership structures. The chapter tests for effects of differential news content on attitudes through a combination of traditional laboratory and state-of-the-art online survey experiments.

Chapter 4 leverages the salience of the 1984-85 UK Miners' Strike to explore whether and how the news coverage of the strike by differentially owned outlets affected citizens' broader attitudes to unions. The chapter combines content analysis of newly collected archival data from a number of major UK newspapers and the BBC with survey analysis of repeated measures of attitudes to identify how news coverage shaped opinion during the strike.

Chapter 5 uses semi-structured qualitative interviews with editors and journalists drawn from media organisations with a variety of ownership structures to examine the methods by which owners control the news coverage their outlets produce. The chapter allows for an investigation of

patterns of direct and indirect influence and demonstrates how the hypothesised causal effects discussed in earlier chapters operate in practice.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Motivation

The vast majority of the information that citizens receive about political and economic issues comes from the mass media whether through traditional print, television news or on new digital platforms (e.g. Graber and Dunaway, 2014; Entman, 1989). The media is therefore central to how citizens form political attitudes and make decisions about what is in their best interests. News organisations provide the information that underlies these decisions and influence the nature and level of citizens' participation in politics and the degree of support for a variety of social and political actors and campaigns. It is therefore crucial to understand the mechanisms linking media organisations' production of news content, how and why the information presented by news organisations may vary, and how in turn this shapes citizens' attitudes.

Journalists and editors are subject to a variety of organisational factors that influence on a daily basis the processes of news gathering, news production, and news presentation. Of these influences, ownership and owners' preferences have long been established as the primary or ultimate factor affecting news content at the organisational level (e.g. Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Curran and Seaton, 1997, Hanitzsch and Berganza, 2012). However, the structure of media ownership has far-reaching implications for whether and to what extent we should expect owners to be able to exercise influence and control over journalists and editors within these organisations (e.g. Hamilton, 2004; Hanretty, 2014; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011; Dunaway, 2008). As economic issues commonly make up the largest proportion of daily news coverage (Pew, 2011, 2012; Media Standards Trust, 2015) and media owners are commonly argued to have their own strong preferences on socio-economic issues (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 2015; Page, 1996), it is particularly important to examine whether media ownership structures affect how politico-economic news is produced. Similarly, understanding the effects of ownership on news organisations and scrutinising this causal relationship empirically and comprehensively can also inform how news audiences relate to and perceive their media outlets. According to the latest survey findings, more than three in five news consumers do not believe that news media are independent of business and commercial influences (Reuters Digital News Report, 2017). A

variety of potential commercial market influences affect news media and journalists, for example the need to compete more vigorously for audience attention or the relationship with advertisers but the most powerful 'in-house' organisational influence rests with media owners (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Page 1996). This further motivates an empirical examination of whether and under what conditions journalists and editors can achieve independence from this pervasive power.

The core theoretical argument is that the centralisation of owner control within a media organisation affects the ability of owners to influence their journalists and editors. The more centralised ownership is within a media firm, that is, where an individual or family group is the primary controlling owner, the greater the influence over journalists and the more limited journalists' autonomy. Where ownership is more widely held, the ability to control journalists either directly or indirectly will be necessarily more limited. Alternative ownership models such as trust ownership or public service broadcast organisations lack the incentives to control or the avenues of influence present in private outlets. As a result, journalistic autonomy is better protected with clear implications for the news coverage these outlets will produce.

The primary aim of the research presented here is to establish and test an integrated causal mechanism linking this variation in the structure of ownership of media organisations with patterns of differential news coverage, and resultant variation in content with effects on the attitudes of the citizens who consume this content. In this way, the study illustrates the ultimate effects of media ownership on citizens by tracing under what conditions owners can influence their organisations' news content and through this, influence the public.

Empirically, this mechanism is tested through a combination of strategies to address particular causal relationships. Specifically, I employ quantitative content analysis of news coverage produced by media organisations with different types of ownership structure (chapter 2), survey designs and experiments to test for the effects of differential coverage on individuals' attitudes (chapters 3 and 4) and in-depth, qualitative interviews with media practitioners from media organisations with different types of ownership structure (chapter 5).

The introduction now addresses in turn the motivation for examining firm-level media ownership, the rationale for selecting coverage of labour unions as a case study topic, and the theoretical focus on the liberal market/Anglophone model.

Ownership, the Limited Diversity of Voices, and Effects on Content

The degree to which owners can exercise control within media firms becomes particularly important when considering the pattern of diminishing diversity of ownership in major content news media. This pattern has been the subject of substantial and contentious debate in the media studies literature.

First, the speed at which media concentration is rising has itself been widely disputed (e.g. Compaine, 2001; Bagdikian, 2004) and in turn there have been utopian predictions about the democratising power of online media in diminishing media moguls' power even if these predictions have been heavily scrutinised since they were first made (e.g. Winseck, 2008; Curran, Fenton and Freedman, 2013). The empirical reality is that concentration in content media is increasing worldwide even if this is occurring at a slower pace than some media pessimists contend (Noam, 2009; Noam, 2013).¹

As social scientists, we are particularly interested in the degree to which media markets approximate the pluralist 'marketplace of ideas' (Peters, 2004) and the availability of independent perspectives for citizens to get their news from. In one view, a broader array of differently owned outlets in competition allow rational consumers seeking valuable, objective information greater choice as media organisations compete to satisfy consumer demands for the provision of substantive information (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006). More commonly, the liberal marketplace of ideas involves providing consumers with news coverage that aligns broadly with their ideological beliefs. The media market should therefore tend towards ideological segmentation to match demand-side preferences (e.g. Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005). Of course, the marketplace of ideas is difficult to practically define and measure by scholars or competition

¹ Scholars (e.g. Doyle, 2013; Noam, 2016) typically distinguish concentration in the content media industry (those organisations who produce content) from concentration in the platform media industry (those organisations who provide the platform for access to content). As we are concerned primarily with news content, this project concentrates on content media figures. There is however inevitably some crossover here.

authorities. Instead, the most effective approach is to examine the diversity of 'voices' in the market. That is, a diversity of perspectives should provide for a diversity of coverage in terms of tone, framing and focus. In this sense, the number of 'voices' is the number of differently owned media outlets within each sector of the content media market in a state. If there are only a limited number of differently owned outlets in the print or radio markets then the degree to which the owners of these outlets are able to influence and control the news coverage they produce becomes all the more important in establishing whether there is a plurality of information and views available to consumers. Greater within-firm control over journalists and editors is all the more restrictive where set of alternatively owned voices available in the market is more limited.

Noam (2016) provides the first large-scale, cross-national study of concentration of voices in media markets. This collaborative study helps illustrate the number of content media sources in each sector of the content news market. I therefore briefly present data on the number of substantive voices (with a market reach of >1%) in each of the Anglophone liberal markets for which data is available. These illustrations focus on traditional content media as, apart from the presence of news aggregation sites, the most visited news sites in major news markets and the online presence of traditional print and broadcast outlets overlap (Kenny, 2012; Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2016). In particular, the role of traditional print media remains critical in many markets. While print circulations decline worldwide, these organisations continue to dominate the news agenda by breaking stories, which constitute the lead for much of the coverage broadcast and online platforms. Print outlets also provide many of the most substantial and most visited online news presences across all outlets in Anglophone states.

As we can see in Figures 1.1 and 1.2, the number of voices in the Anglophone liberal markets has remained reasonably static or declined in the last fifteen years and by the standards of any other industry, the level of concentration is already relatively high. Only the US and Canada have a print, radio or television news markets with more than ten substantive voices and this is largely a product of the fact that the news markets in these countries is much more regionalised than, say Britain and Ireland (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Even in these North American countries, recent mergers and the relaxation of competition regulations by the FCC means that consolidation has actually increased in the

last five years and there may in fact now be even fewer voices in these markets than this data here suggests. For example, the recent takeover in May 2017 of Tribune Media in the US by Sinclair Broadcast Group consolidates control of local television further into the hands of one owner with clear political leanings (Ember and Merced, 2017). Other markets show similar developments. For example in Britain, only seven print media voices remain after *The Independent* decided to cease the print edition. Outside of North America, the diversity of voices in the national media markets is even more limited. By 2012, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia did not have a content media sector with more than ten substantive perspectives. This is even before taking into account the cross-ownership of print and broadcast outlets by one individual or conglomerate. In addition, the data on content media diversity illustrates that claims about the democratising effects of digital media were somewhat optimistic. Instead, the number of outlets and owners with a substantive share of the market remains limited. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate that from the mid-2000s to 2012, there is no real evidence of a move towards greater diversity in liberal markets. If anything, the number of content media voices has slightly declined.

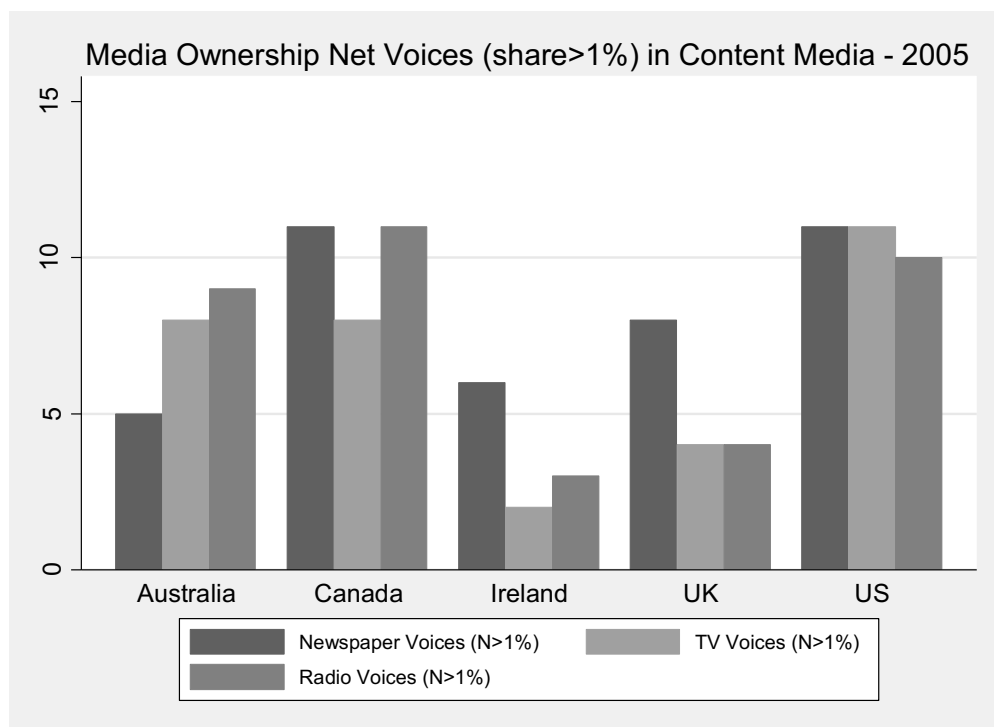


Figure 1.1: Anglophone Content Media Voices – 2005. Source: Noam (2016) *Who Owns the World's Media?*

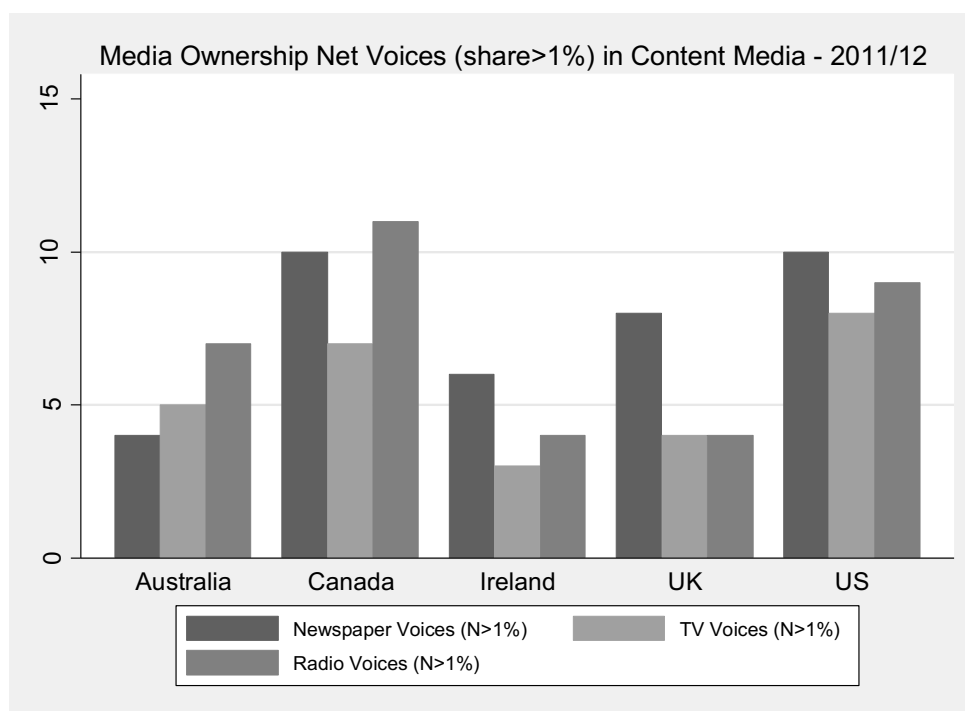


Figure 1.2: Anglophone Content Media Voices – 2011/12. Data is for last period available. Source: Noam (2016) *Who Owns the World's Media?*

Given the limited diversity of ownership in these sectors, it is critical to consider the extent to which the voices available are in fact the voice of the owner of that outlet or whether there is a diversity of perspectives available *within* an outlet. This depends on the degree to which journalists and editors have autonomy in their production of news coverage. The degree of journalistic autonomy is dependent on the level of influence that comes from the owners of the outlet. Under certain ownership structures, as Compaine and Gomery (2000) argue, thousands of shareholders control media outlets. By extension, they reflect an array of views in the market and are less likely to inculcate and direct a concrete ideological voice. Similarly, there are outlets with trust charters and no meaningful owner in charge to direct operations or public broadcast outlets that (in theory) are 'owned' by, and dedicated to providing for the public.² On the other hand, individuals and families continue to control many of the major outlets and in these cases, to varying degrees, these outlets provide a voice for these owners if they can utilise their outlets in this way.

² More concretely and realistically, these ownership models differ from private ownership in their capacity and incentive to interfere so as to shape journalists' and editors' behaviour and the news coverage they produce. I set out this theoretical account more clearly below and specify its implications in much more detail in later chapters.

For example in the British print sector, out of the seven remaining substantive outlets, four are controlled by individuals or families, two are owned by publicly traded, diversely held companies (Trinity Mirror and Nikkei) and one is controlled by a trust (Scott Trust). In the radio sector, the BBC as a public broadcaster and ITV as a diversely held PLC are the only non-privately held media outlets that are not open to direction from an individual or individuals. In Ireland, the diversity of voices in the print market is heavily reliant on the crossover UK publications that produce Irish editions. Even still, there are only two outlets that are not privately controlled by individuals or families, the *Irish Daily Mirror* owned by the UK-based Trinity Mirror and *The Irish Times* owned by the Irish Times Trust. In national radio news, the public broadcaster RTÉ provides the only national broadcast voice not controlled by a single individual. In the United States, where the move to publicly traded ownership has (or had) advanced furthest, a substantial number of the major media voices including News Corporation, Sinclair, the Washington Post, Advance Media and the Cox Media Group are ultimately controlled by individuals or families.

These examples illustrate that while there is variation in outlets' ownership structures and there may have been moves towards diverse shareholdings for a time in the US broadcast sector in particular, private ownership continues to play a significant role in many Anglophone markets. This project thus provides an examination of the degree to which owner control within the media firm amplifies the voice of certain owners and restricts a plurality of opinions in the context of limited diversity at the market level. Political communication scholars have also recently highlighted a decline in the study of media influence at the macro- or meso-level (Strömbäck, 2014). This has motivated a new wave of studies of media organisations and institutions' impact on news content rather than focusing exclusively on the effects of content (e.g. Dunaway, 2013; Wagner and Collins, 2014). Literature specifically examining the relationship between types of media firm ownership and news content has been very limited especially outside the US or the rather exceptional case of Rupert Murdoch (van Aelst et al., 2017: 10). One recent study seeks to address this gap in the literature by examining the relative role of meso-level ownership and national media systems in expanding or limiting diversity of coverage and diversity of voices in online political news coverage (Humprecht and Esser, 2017). While Humprecht and Esser classify ownership types in a somewhat different manner

than in this thesis, they do find significant differences in content between public and private outlets. This project contributes to this recent research agenda by tying ownership and its influence at the meso/institutional level on news to how this content can in turn affect public attitudes with strong implications for how we understand ownership influence in a consolidated environment.

While the posited links between ownership structures and the degree of control over journalists is discussed and tested in substantial detail in the later chapters, it is worth setting out the core arguments briefly at the outset. The theoretical approach focuses on differences in the incentive and capacity to control across types of ownership. As outlined, the incentive to articulate ideologies and interests through news sources is greatest for private owners where the voice is distinct, does not have to be shared with a variety of other shareholders, and provides a form of political power and influence. Where shareholdings of public companies are diversely held, this dilutes the propagandistic value and political voice available. Publicly held companies are typically owned by an array of actors with a variety of interests and other investments. These shareholders lack the incentive or ability to instil a political position, and instead focus on the rate of return on their investment, as ultimately, this is the sole interest that the various shareholders have in common. In seeking out maximum returns, these various owners appoint senior editors to whom they can delegate responsibility for successful management of the journalistic staff and allow them the space to work towards providing a successful, consumer-satisfying product. In this sense, delegation allows editors and their journalists a greater degree of freedom. This contention that private owners have distinct incentives to prefer greater interference draws upon more recent theoretical arguments in the communication literature (Hanretty, 2014; Picard and van Weezel, 2008) as well as established traditions in the industrial organisation literature (e.g. Berle and Means, 1932; Demsetz, 1989).

Importantly though, incentives to interfere are only part of why concentrated ownership produces greater limits over journalistic autonomy and furthers the pursuit of systematic agendas. Alongside differential incentives, the capacity to inculcate views and values is similarly strong under private ownership as power is centrally held and journalists are answerable either directly or through selection processes to an individual or small number of family members. Private owners can also leverage selection processes and more robust monitoring

procedures to better establish an organisational culture or 'mission' that accords with their personal views or classwide preferences on political, economic or social issues. This provides a lasting form of indirect control that limits the need for constant day-to-day direction from above. The capacity to enforce a political agenda or set of preferences through direct interference is clearly restricted in publicly traded corporate firms by the diversity of ownership and the 'distance', literal and figurative, between shareholders and the newsroom floor. Similarly, the inculcation of an organisational 'mission' through more hierarchical organisational structures and indirect means such as newsroom staff selection and anticipation of owner preferences is much more difficult to achieve in publicly traded media companies because of the diversity of shareholders, the problem of coordination, and the costs in terms of time and effort that monitoring requires where ultimate ownership is widely spread. This has clear implications for the autonomy of journalists and editors in their production of news content. In taking account of the capacity of different media owners to control their outlets alongside the differential incentives to interfere between private and publicly traded ownership, this project synthesises theoretical insights from work on the principal-agent theory of media organisations (Napoli, 1997) as well as the above work on industrial organisation.

In other types of ownership structure, the relationship between ownership and control takes on a very different form and these differences have tended to be somewhat understudied in comparative work. In particular, the differences in the capacity and incentive of ownership to influence and interfere in these outlet's news coverage versus the above commercial models has rarely been directly specified or empirically assessed. Trust ownership of media outlets is typically introduced by forward-looking owners or staff consortiums with the explicit purpose of protecting an outlet's independence from owners or any commercial interests. Trust-owned newspapers also often have a traditional mission and ethos through which they seek to provide the news to their audience that often if not by necessity seeks to provide a freedom to its journalists and provide a platform for a diversity of views. Trust structures provide an autonomy from ownership by directly prohibiting private or commercial ownership. Finally, the fourth major type of ownership in (some) liberal Anglophone media markets is public service broadcasting. While state-funded (to varying degrees), these institutions are designed with the explicit purpose of objectively informing and

educating the public in a way that it is feared that commercial ownership will not allow. Through their charters and regulatory frameworks, they seek to establish de jure and de facto independence from governments and instil a 'public service mission.' While there are undoubtedly limits on public service broadcasters' independence, their bureaucratic management, history, mission, and remit provide protections for the autonomy of editorial and journalistic staff and protection of news coverage from influence that private ownership does not.

The thesis also discusses and tests the theorised mechanisms by which variation in the capacity and incentive to control across the above ownership models may actually shape news content itself in a given issue area where previous theoretical accounts have tended to focus on an aggregate model of the relationship between ownership and control (e.g. Napoli, 1997; Picard and van Weezel, 2008) or focus on aggregate perceptions of owner influence (e.g. Hanretty, 2014) rather than owner influence on the news content that is produced, presented and consumed.

Why a case study of labour unions' coverage?

In order to test these relationships thoroughly and substantiate assumptions of owner preferences in line with previous literature, it is necessary to introduce certain scope conditions. The first of these is the need to identify specific issue areas where we may expect strong owner preferences regarding news coverage. The differential incentives for owners to interfere in the broad political orientation rather than partisan affiliation of outlets are discussed in much more detail in the chapters below. Briefly though, this project investigates the relationship between owners and outlets' *political orientation* on issues which is considered to be much more consistent, embedded and central to certain owner interests than partisan endorsement or providing partisan political coverage at election time (e.g. Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Curran and Seaton, 1997). Similarly, this project seeks to address an issue area where private media owners can access political influence and voice to support narrower private interests alongside broader classwide interests if they are cohesive in their incentive structures and have the capability to shape harder news content to produce the type of coverage that favours these interests.

The theorised relationship between ownership and control has potential relevance for a variety of socio-economic issues, for example privatisation,

welfare state retrenchment or labour market reforms. Here though, I concentrate in this project on the case of the coverage of labour unions given previous claims in the literature of anti-labour bias by commercial media outlets (see below), and their role in the determination of significant contemporary outcomes around income inequality and redistributive policies.

Declines in unionisation have varied considerably across countries but common structural explanations such as globalisation and de-industrialisation remain somewhat lacking. The issue of union decline includes both the fall in the membership and coverage of unions but also a reduced role for organised labour in policy-making. Recently attention has turned to a process of 'delegitimisation' of unions by which the problem-solving abilities of organised labour have been diminished in the eyes of the public in a manner unrelated to the material strength of unions (Culpepper and Regan, 2014). Delegitimisation results from a perception of reduced problem-solving capacity emanating from citizens' information about unions. This development reduces unions' political strength to lobby for policies favourable to members or the wider working population as unions are unable to mobilise the necessary public support. The media has a unique position as a channel of information by which it could serve to accelerate or slow the speed of this process.

While negative attitudes towards unions can contribute to the political marginalisation of unions and the propensity of workers to join unions as they enter the labour force or move between sectors, the decline in union power has also contributed to a reduced focus on these organisations. It is not the case that assessments of union power and their activities, evaluations of union leaders, consideration of labour' societal role or support for union reforms is merely a product of unions' aggregate material strength. Instead, framing of trade unions clearly matters for public opinion. The news media and its associated interests and influences have a key role to play here. In particular, when labour issues move up the political agenda, for example during economic crises, large-scale strike action or where there are moves to amend or reform labour laws or laws governing union activities, public attitudes matter and are subject to shifts and influence. The role of the media in contributing to these attitudinal shifts and the conditioning role of news in public relations conflicts between unions, employers, and political parties/governments is explored experimentally and over time in later chapters.

This project contributes to literature on the changing role of trade unions that is central to various recent strands of political economy work. Scholars have stressed the importance of unions in determining redistributive spending (Lupu and Pontusson, 2011), inequality (Hacker and Pierson, 2010) and as a key factor behind the decline of political voice for the marginalised (Schlozman, Verba and Brady, 2012). The recent decline of unions has produced both materialist and ideology-based explanations (Upchurch et al., 2009; Pierson, 2001; Baccaro and Howell, 2011). Ideological explanations focus on the 'neoliberal turn' away from traditional class conflict politics and an acceptance of the need for flexibility and competitiveness in the labour market. This manifests in the attitudes of citizens towards union membership and union mobilisation. Materialist explanations instead focus on the pressures that globalisation and deindustrialisation have placed on the strength and organising capacity of unions themselves, manifesting in lower membership and coverage rates, and diminished political power. While materialist factors matter, there is a large literature which strongly indicates structural explanations alone are insufficient (e.g. Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Flanagan, 2005; Schmitt and Mitukiewicz, 2012; Culpepper and Regan, 2014). Importantly, non-materialist factors affect materialist factors; reduced propensity of workers to seek union representation reduces unions' material power negatively affecting their effectiveness (Visser, 2002).

News media is the key channel of information about unions as representative organisations for many (Flynn, 2000; Martin, 2004) and the media effects literature illustrates this information can be a central determinant of citizens' attitudes through agenda setting, priming and framing. Ownership-driven slant can therefore have a major impact on union support. Page and Shapiro (1992, p.139, pp. 378-379) argue that the US mass media tilts towards capital interests and displays a distinct tendency towards negativity in its coverage of unions. The authors attribute a substantial amount of the suspicion that the American public has displayed towards unions to these tendencies in the mass media's coverage of unions. Gitlin (2003), Puette (1992), and Parenti (1993) develop arguments for a structural bias against unions within the commercial news media and situate this within their own versions of accounts of union and broader Left decline in the US. A host of other authors provide similar arguments often positioning their claims about union coverage within broader arguments about the bias of mass media and their owners towards the status quo and

current pro-capital societal power structures and thus against left-wing, protest or radical movements (e.g. Herman and Chomsky, 1988; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

In early empirical work on the relationship between unions and the media, Philo and Hewitt (1976) highlighted the overwhelming tendency of media coverage to focus on unions "exclusively as 'dispute' organisations". Walsh (1988) identifies similar patterns of unfair bias against unions in US media coverage and particularly in the coverage of strikes. Union stories related to strike activity and conflict in 92 per cent of cases and there was repeated use of loaded "struggle and strife" terminology that was not applied when discussing employers. Shoemaker and Reese (p.224) likewise identify the US media's tendency to identify union positions as demands and employers' positions as offers.

Schmidt (1993) studied US media coverage of unions over time (1946-1985) and found that overall coverage declined significantly and permanently in the early part of the period and what coverage remained came to concentrate almost entirely on strikes, often exaggerating their frequency. A particularly striking finding is the change in the format of union coverage. Commercial media gradually came to abandon labour 'beat reporting' in which certain journalists would almost solely report on unions and their activities as their daily brief. Labour reporting ceased then to be a staple of daily newspaper reporting. There were also moves to reduce regular coverage of longshore unions known for their relative radicalism (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013) and to place union-related reporting within new business sections. While there are many criticisms that can be made of 'beat reporting', Schmidt hints at the necessity of this kind of reporting in disseminating information about the full spectrum of union activities, reducing the bias towards conflict and strikes.

Schmidt also tests for an effect on public disapproval of unions. The results suggest that the changes in union coverage and the bias towards strike-centred coverage is conducive to more negative views of unions and strikes by the public. She notes that "as this type of coverage increasingly dominates the information available about labor unions [and strikes] and as the number of traditional union sympathizers decreases in society, the media's ability to influence or sway opinions about labor unions and strikes increases" (1993:162). While there are limitations to the aggregated observational

measures of media effects in the study, the conclusion that media coverage may adversely affect public perceptions of unions and their activities is worthy of further investigation. Media coverage of unions becomes ever more critical as alternative sources of information such as direct personal contact with unions in the workplace (e.g. Toubol and Jensen, 2014) have become even more limited since Schmidt's study.

Similarly, the concentration on the coverage of strikes by media organisations is itself important. As Harmon and Lee (2010) point out in their study of US television news coverage of strike events, strikes represent the most graphic illustration of tendencies in news framing of unions and the most direct test of patterns of ownership and control in media organisations. Negative coverage of strikes may have short-term as well as long-term effects. If negative reporting depresses public support for a strike and the longer-term level of public support for unions, this may benefit private owners of media in weakening labour's organisational capacity, bargaining strength, and political support by helping to defeat individual strikes and framing employer-union conflicts into the future.

More recently, labour scholar Bob Bruno (2009) responded to some of the above claims of anti-labour bias and conducted quantitative content analysis of unions in the case of the *Chicago Tribune* between 1991 and 2001, measuring the tone of the paper's content. The findings illustrate a consistent, largely negative sentiment in the paper's coverage of organised labour. Similar to Schmidt, Bruno argues that "the question of the validity of labor's charge against the editorial and reporting practices of the newspaper industry is critically important to how citizens and particularly non-organised workers view labor unions and the modern workplace" (2009, p.386). However, the study concentrates on a single case and therefore it is not possible to generalise any pattern to coverage beyond the *Tribune* or to detect broader tendencies in coverage across liberal markets.

The difficulty with the limited empirical literature above is that some of it is quite dated and much of it has tended to be US-focused. The anti-union bias outlined is though firmly rooted in the logic of employer-labour relations in liberal market economies within the Anglophone sphere and this project therefore extends the context to other liberal media markets where appropriate. As we can see above, there is also substantial variation in the rate of union membership decline across these liberal markets. If media coverage of unions does influence potential

recruits and/or the public's support for a political role for unions then the variation in union strength may be partially explained by variation in media coverage across these states.

The above research into the patterns of coverage of trade unions and its effects also rarely provides a clear theoretical and empirical approach to examining where such a bias against unions emanates from. Many authors suggest that the power and preferences of media owners plays a key role in tilting news content but this does not form a central part of the analysis. Given the variation in the decline of union strength and assuming media coverage and public attitudes play a role here, examining the differences in media ownership i.e. the amount of privately controlled, diversely held or public/trust ownership helps explain when and where coverage may be more slanted against unions.

Importantly then, this project contributes to the literature on both media ownership and the perceptions of labour unions by providing an integrated analysis of the links between ownership, organisational influences on content and resultant attitudinal effects. Specifically, a deliberate mixed-methods approach is chosen to resolve the key issues of causality between ownership, coverage, and beliefs. Establishing and interrogating this causal mechanism empirically could then be extended to assess similar causal impacts of ownership in the coverage of other issues where there are also strong, theoretically grounded owner interests.

Why concentrate on the liberal market model?

Assumptions regarding commercial media owners' preferences vis-à-vis organised labour rest, in the first instance, on the competitive and relatively conflictual dynamic between capital and labour found in the market-focused institutions of liberal market economies (Hall and Soskice, 2001). In this setting, negative coverage of unions and resultant effects on attitudes can provide private and public goods to private media owners, that is, they can support their private and classwide interests (Useem, 1982; Rossman, 2011). In terms of public goods, media owners have a unique venue to represent and further the collective organised interests of business and capital in interest-group conflict with organised labour. In many ways, the private ownership of media firms provides a potential key source of advantage for organised business interests that helps explain tendencies of policy battles between capital and labour

interests to tilt towards the preferences of business owners (see for example, Hacker and Pierson, 2010; Gilens and Page, 2014). Media outlets provide a platform for their owners to propagate and pursue a particular political orientation on socio-economic issues and labour politics in this liberal market setting. This agenda is derived from this core conflictual relationship between capital and labour in the broad context of competitive liberal markets as well as the dynamics at play between capital owners and labour in the media sector specifically.

In particular, media owners in this environment seek to maximise profits within the firm by depressing wage costs while seeking enhanced productivity. This, in the first instance, brings owners into conflict with print and journalist unions. Owners also seek to expand horizontally to consolidate their position in the media market. This is especially critical to secure and enhance profitability given media markets are typically oligopolistic (see in particular, McChesney, 2015). This further induces conflict between owners and unions in firms facing takeovers and potential subsequent wage pressure and/or redundancies. Similarly, structural incentives have generated an appetite for highly lucrative vertical integration of the production and distribution chain between media supplier and consumer (e.g. McChesney, 2015; Kolodzy, 2006; Doyle, 2002). Furthermore, this vertical integration of the news production process requires a process of deregulation typically strongly opposed by media unions. This tends to harden further media owners' attitudes to the organised labour movement. Finally, media proprietors often own firms or hold investments in other industries where liberal institutions again incentivise and facilitate higher levels of class-based conflict between employers and unions along similar lines. Private owners' collective class interests and direct private interests are then served by a weakening of the structural and political power of organised labour in these liberal market economies and control of media content provides a means to negatively portray, delegitimise unions and/or weaken cross-union solidarity. These interests are broadly consistent and embedded in the liberal market framework.

In coordinated market economies, corporatist institutions explicitly seek to bring capital and labour into negotiated, somewhat more conciliatory structures of mutual benefit. The differential incentives of these two market models restrict the ability to make parsimonious assumptions about the relationship between

capitalistic owners and the orientation of their outlets' coverage. The interests of private media owners (both narrow and classwide) are influenced by the institutional framework and less straightforwardly derived in coordinated economies. Similarly, the broad dynamic between capital and labour will of course influence the institutional practices and organisational culture within the media firm. For example, workers' (in this case journalists') representation on the boards of companies is common in certain coordinated market economies and this would likely affect the relationship between the owner/employer and the journalistic staff in a media firm. Concentrating on the liberal markets (broadly) holds constant the management, incentives and decision-making structures of commercial media companies facilitating a more concrete exploration of how and when ownership produces control.

There is also overlap between the varieties of capitalism classification from Hall and Soskice (2001) and the Hallin and Mancini (2004) categorisation of ideal-type media systems. In particular, the Liberal model from Hallin and Mancini maps on directly to the liberal market economies group from Hall and Soskice. The protection of journalistic autonomy, the professional organisation of journalists, and the regulatory safeguards to protect journalistic and editorial independence are generally organised informally within a firm and are non-institutionalised in the Liberal model. This contrasts sharply with patterns in the other continental models outlined by Hallin and Mancini. This relationship between employer organisation and employee is broadly similar to the broader economy-wide dynamics from the Varieties of Capitalism literature. Anglo-American markets are characterised by liberal corporate governance systems and high market orientation scores that together have clear implications for the relationship between owners and employees and capital and labour more generally (e.g. Freeman, Boxall, and Haynes, 2007). The particular media model and set of economic institutions is then important when considering the relationship between ownership, control, and autonomy that is central to this project. Restricting the focus to the liberal market therefore facilitates a thorough empirical test of the theoretical mechanism and the avenues of owner influence without the potential for confounding effects from broad structural differences in the media market or wider economic institutions.

However, that is not to say that this project and its theoretical and empirical insights into the mechanisms and effects of media ownership on news content

are not relevant to coordinated market economies. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), there are tendencies towards convergence of the other two media system groupings towards the Liberal Model through processes of commercialisation, the rollback of state involvement and broader political and economic integration. These patterns of convergence are in evidence outside of established industrialised democracies and that an approximation of the Liberal Model is taking hold in many developing markets. While this project focuses on the traditional Liberal media group, these processes of convergence suggest that ownership effects observed in these Liberal countries may well be observed in other models if/when this convergence of media systems continues.

Similarly, a significant, if contested, strand of recent political economy literature suggests that there has been a convergence of coordinated market economies and their institutions towards those of liberal market economies through recent processes of liberalisation and deregulation including changes in internal corporate management and industrial relations (e.g. Höpner, 2005; Höpner and Schäfer, 2010; Scharpf, 2009). The effects of this convergence on news media could include diversity-reducing effects of media market consolidation as regulation of cross-media holdings are relaxed, challenges to the future sustainability of public broadcasters in these markets (see Hardy, 2008) and a greater divide between politically minded and influential individual media owners and Anglophone-style market-oriented conglomerates.

The focus on ownership and influence in the Liberal/Anglophone world is therefore an examination of a form of ideal-type where there is a tradition of balancing the preferences of individual media barons with the reality of the market. If a convergence towards the Liberal model takes place, continental and emerging media systems may begin to demonstrate similar differences in ownership effects on coverage between these different structures of ownership.

Outline of the thesis

Each of the following chapters deals with a particular component of the causal mechanism linking variation in media ownership structures with control over the production of differential news coverage within media organisations and the effects that this differential coverage then has on the attitudes of the citizens that consume the differential content. In the next three empirical chapters, the project focuses on a case study of media coverage of labour unions to test this

theoretical approach and the logic of the mechanism. In the fourth and final empirical chapter, I investigate the avenues of influence by which different structures of media ownership may influence (or not) journalists and editors within media organisations.

The second chapter focuses on the effects of a change in media ownership on the coverage an outlet produces. Previous literature has struggled to disentangle ownership effects on content from audience preferences or to provide a nuanced theoretical account of how organisational control capacity and preferences vary by ownership structure. This chapter employs a novel quasi-experiment whereby ownership type changes while confounding factors are held constant. Exploring the unique circumstances of the 2000 Baltimore Sun takeover and building on a large new dataset of newspaper content collected from archival sources, this chapter employs quantitative content analysis procedures to measure the tone of labour union coverage before and after the change in the form of ownership. The chapter uses a combination of traditional treatment effects models, change-point analysis and comparison case analysis using newly collected content from a similar newspaper outlet, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, as part of a Difference-in-Difference design. Changes in the tone of coverage of labour unions result from changes in ownership structure. Family ownership tends to be associated with negative coverage relative to corporate ownership. This greater negativity is due to structural variation in the capacity and incentive to control news production. In particular, there is strong support for the contention that publicly traded diverse ownership actually loosens constraints on editors and journalists. The result is news coverage of trade unions that is more in line with what media practitioners produce under more autonomous conditions. The chapter therefore seeks to establish a relationship between the form of ownership and differential coverage.

The third chapter focuses on the relationship between differential coverage and the effects on citizens' attitudes. In line with the media effects literature, I employ a twin experimental design to isolate and examine the potential effects of differential news frames on citizens' attitudes. The chapter derives suitable experimental stimuli from a recent real-world salient news story concerning labour unions drawn from news organisations which vary in their ownership structures and which capture the key determinants of differential coverage. One

news treatment presents the proposals as an effort to reduce harmful strikes and curb 'militant union activity' while the other presents the issue as a partisan attack on fundamental rights. This paper includes two experimental samples; a university undergraduate sample and an online sample of 1700 respondents through the YouGov Omnibus panel. This enables comparisons of experimental effects between a traditional convenience sample in a controlled setting and those obtained in a survey experiment with a much larger, representative sample under quite different conditions. Results indicate that participants exposed to treatments portraying unions as militants and identifying the proposals as likely to reduce harmful strikes tend to agree that unions are too powerful and require strict regulation when compared to participants who read a story portraying the proposals to regulate unions as partisan and stressing the protection that unions offer to employees' rights. The results therefore suggest that differential news coverage, from organisations with different types of ownership, affect citizens' attitudes regarding labour unions and their role.

The fourth chapter seeks to combine elements of the previous two chapters, account for the two-step mechanism of owner effects on news coverage and effects of differential coverage on citizens, and substantiate the media content effects outside of an experiment setting. To sidestep traditional problems of observational media studies in which citizens experience very different levels of exposure to news or where consumers' media preferences and political attitudes cannot be disentangled, this chapter focuses on a news event of substantial salience, the 1984-85 UK Miners' Strike. This helps support assumptions of broad citizen exposure to news coverage of the strike and a sufficient amount of coverage to thoroughly test whether there is attitudinal change for consumers of differentially owned outlets. The chapter employs original datasets of newspaper and public broadcast content from archival sources. The data on coverage of the strike is analysed for the very first time using quantitative text analysis techniques and two sources of panel survey data, while the chapter then assesses in turn whether and how the coverage of this major industrial conflict affected citizens' attitudes. Results indicate that individual ownership is associated with more negative and hostile coverage of the strike compared to public service broadcasters and particularly, coverage from a trust-owned outlet. Importantly, exposure to coverage from outlets under different ownership structures affected citizens' attitudes during perhaps the critical

juncture of modern industrial relations in Britain. Also while sharing some characteristics of the largely negative press coverage; consumption of the BBC's news coverage offset some of the effects of negative coverage from private owners.

The final empirical chapter examines in greater depth the relationship between media ownership and the degree and means of control over media practitioners in various news outlets across a number of states in the Liberal model. I explore direct and indirect avenues of owner influence through a series of semi-structured, qualitative interviews with experienced news journalists and editors from commercial outlets, trusts, and public broadcasters and examine the impact of ownership and organisational structures in establishing an editorial agenda, organisational ethos and ultimately how this affects how they produce and present the news. The chapter finds a clear relationship between the type of ownership and the control owners wield within these organisations. In firms, controlled by private individuals or families, journalists and editors tend to be quite aware of the preferences of the owner and exercise caution and self-censorship when developing news coverage that may conflict with owner preferences. At certain outlets, editors provide a conduit for owner interests although certain editors can and do resist these influences under particular conditions. Direct owner intervention continues to occur even in outlets and under owners who are not typically associated with such instructions. Journalists and editors at trust-owned outlets, in contrast, tend to perceive little or no restrictions on their autonomy beyond the broad principles enshrined in the charters. While public broadcasters are relatively well protected from governmental interference, they can and do come under substantial pressure at times of acute financial crisis in the organisation or during periods of encompassing division and conflict in the state. This chapter has clear implications for how we think about journalistic autonomy and provides an exploration of where and when an outlet can be seen as providing a diversity of perspectives and reporting or where the outlet is ultimately a voice for its owners.

The sixth chapter concludes with a summation of the main results and assesses the implications of this thesis' findings for policymakers and future political communication scholarship in particular. Specifically, it highlights the advantages of identifying individual case topics to examine the impact of

ownership on media coverage while laying out how future work can leverage and extend the strategies employed here.

Chapter 2: Media Ownership and the Tone of News Coverage of Labour Unions: Evidence from a Quasi-Experimental Approach

Abstract

In the media ownership literature, difficulties arise in isolating ownership effects on content because of consumer-side endogeneity concerns or under-specification of organisational control preferences. This chapter employs a novel quasi-experiment whereby ownership type changes while confounding variables are held constant. Leveraging the unique circumstances of the 2000 Baltimore Sun takeover and a new dataset, changes in the tone of coverage of labour unions result from changes in ownership structure. Results indicate family ownership is associated with more negative coverage compared to corporate ownership. This is due to structural variation in the capacity and incentive to control news production processes.

Introduction

The degree to which the identities and concentration of ownership of media organisations has an effect in shaping the nature of the news content these organisations produce has long been a hotly contested topic among scholars, policy makers, political activists and the citizenry at large. From William Randolph Hearst through to Rupert Murdoch, there has been significant debate around the level of input these individual media moguls have had in shaping the news production and news construction decisions of their journalists and editors. Moreover, many observers have discussed the potential effects on consumers' political and social attitudes further down the line. Variation in influence over the tone of news coverage by different types of owners is of substantive importance for policy makers and regulators, as well as political scientists, media economists and other communication scholars interested in the provision of information on political, economic, and social issues to the citizenry.

Social science scholarship in this area has long struggled to identify whether influence by owners is a significant explanatory factor in determining the content of news stories or whether news content tends to be driven by demand-side factors (e.g. Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005, Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010). Additionally, if owner influence on news content does in fact exist, scholars disagree as to whether such influence is actually a systematic product of different structures of media ownership (Lacy, 1991). Building on theoretical innovations from the industrial organisation literature and new avenues in media politics, I identify key patterns in the development of these organisations that tend to facilitate or inhibit the organisational ability and preferential incentives of media owners to portray unions negatively. This is also in contrast to

traditional critical media scholarship that presents commercial media preferences as largely monolithic. I instead argue that the 'managerial revolution' in diversely-owned corporate organisations allows for greater freedom for journalists and editors who seek to present issues in a more objective or positive fashion, while family-owned media firms have remained relatively constrained by the ideology of those ultimately in charge.

Significant difficulties arise in the empirical literature in identifying ownership effects on content due to a relative lack of variation in the identity of media owners over time, endogeneity concerns when studying the takeover of individual news outlets as the takeover or rational anticipation of desired changes in news content by journalists.

It is clearly not possible to address such causality concerns by randomly assigning ownership of newspapers to families or corporations. Therefore, this chapter takes a novel empirical approach by using a natural experimental design in which the form of ownership of a news organisation changes while additional potential explanatory variables are held constant or otherwise restricted so as to constitute an 'exogenous shock' and an example of 'as if' random assignment (Dunning, 2008). Using newly collected data, changes in the newspaper coverage of labour unions measured via text analysis procedures, are therefore argued to causally emanate from the change in the concentration of firm-level ownership from family control to a more diffuse corporate structure and the transformation in the organisational structures, incentives and opportunities for interference that an ownership change brings about.

The key research question is therefore:

RQ: Does a change in the ownership and control of a media organisation impact on the tone of its coverage of labour unions?

Motivation

This chapter forms part of the broader project examining the role of media content and the media organisations that produce it in shaping the attitudes of citizens to labour unions in liberal market economies. In light of the substantial evidence about the primacy of demand-side concerns in the production of much news content (e.g. Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005, Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010), examination of supply-side ownership effects on news content

necessitates the selection of an issue area and institutional framework where demand-side preferences are relatively constrained and supply-side preferences/incentives are sizeable.

I concentrate on the coverage of labour unions within the context of liberal market economies (Hall and Soskice, 2001), where owners of commercial media organisations are likely to have incentives to intervene to shape the nature and tone of news content. The rationale behind this follows from Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010), who propose ownership effects in issue areas “where the financial interest of the owner is strong relative to the likely interest of the reader”. Owner monitoring, direct interference or implicit, anticipated preferences are only likely to manifest where the issue(s) or actor(s) under consideration are relevant to their economic or political welfare (e.g. Stigler, 1971; Napoli, 1997). The institutional conflictual relationship of owners in liberal market economies to organised labour means that their comparative advantage and profits are best realised through approaches that maximise their ability to take control of other commercial entities, horizontally expand, and depress wage costs. Negative coverage of unions can aid them in achieving these goals. The systemic relationships of a variety of capitalism are more encompassing in this way than partisan preferences. Therefore, interference in coverage will be more beneficial to owners than in issue areas in which consumers may themselves have clear and strongly held preferences with the potential for adverse effects on consumption and profits. As Shoemaker and Reese outline in their classic work on influences on media content and production, “when one gets away from the traditional election-style endorsements and coverage, there is greater potential for slanting” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p.167). Similarly, Curran and Seaton (1997, p. 102) outline that what appeared to be a major consumer-driven shift in newspapers’ partisan endorsements in the UK in the late 90s-early 00s was a change of political affiliation but not political orientation on issues. Proprietors may acknowledge changes in party political support and respond to this when endorsing parties at election time but their broader preferences remain protected in their outlets’ coverage.

Media coverage of labour unions appears to be a ripe topic for analysis given common claims about anti-union media coverage in the literature noted in the introduction. This project contributes rigorous empirical testing of a mechanism to the long-running contention that mass media are systematically biased in

their coverage of unions (e.g. Page and Shapiro, 1992; Parenti, 1993; Gitlin, 2003). There is similarly some evidence to suggest that while there may be occasional media owners who hold left-wing views or in this case may be pro-labour, the majority of individual media owners tend to lean to the right in their views, endorsements or political contributions (e.g. Giobbe, 1996; Mitchell, 2000, Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010). Interestingly, Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) find that the share of corporate donations going to Republicans as a share of total donations does not systematically favour Republicans to the extent that individual owners' donations do. D'Alessio and Allen (2007: 435) similarly discuss the relationship between the increase in publicly traded ownership with its diverse shareholder base and the decline in overt endorsements. They also point to the likely decline in control of management and content this will produce, as the pro-business preferences of private owners that motivate attempts to tilt coverage in this direction will be secondary to the need to cater to audiences and increase profits (D'Alessio and Allen: 439). This further suggests that it is worth investigating the effects of differences in the structure of media ownership, that is, corporate vs. individual or family ownership, on the content these organisations actually produce.

Literature Review: Ownership and Influence

Critical political economy scholars have long been concerned with the issue of commercial media ownership and the potential for owners to influence the news coverage produced by their organisation (e.g.; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Bagdikian, 2004). The focus here is on the domain of economic influences as a source of influence (Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011) such as profit maximisation and the need to obtain and retain advertisers and advertising revenues. A difficulty with much of this work is the assumption of monolithic preferences that does not account for structural variation in media organisations. The critical school tends to overlook conditional limits on owner influence emanating from the organisational structure of the media organisation and the degree of control that owners can exercise within outlets, as distinct from market processes that constrain all commercial media organisations.

A second strand of literature grounded in industrial organisation focuses on the effects of within-firm structural factors in determining the incentives and ability of owners to interfere in the newsgathering and news production processes carried out by journalists and editors. An understanding of internal media

organisational practices suggests that journalists and editors have a tendency to present coverage in an independent manner wherein they exercise their journalistic freedom to produce preferable stories. The tone of stories therefore may result from underlying political preferences on the part of the journalist. Equally, the reporting and its tone will reflect what journalists consider the facts on the ground, the desire to produce a quality product, and the opportunity to report from a sophisticated, analytical standpoint (Zaller, 1999: 21-27). All else equal, journalists' independence would only be constrained by editors' requirements or 'line' that is in turn a product of editors' own independence. This tends towards the randomly assigned framing of stories following from the divergent preferences of independent journalists and/or independent editors. Ownership complicates this independence as "ownership bestows control" (Grossman and Hart, 1986) and owners can therefore restrict independence by instituting their own 'line' onto media practitioners.

A key theoretical development is the idea of a non-pecuniary benefit or 'amenity potential' available to owners of media organisations who wish to influence the coverage their outlets produce so as to access potential influence over the consumers of their media product (Demsetz and Lehn, 1985; Demsetz, 1989; Picard and van Weezel, 2008; Hanretty, 2014). Demsetz (1989) argues that the private, non-financial benefits accruing from ownership of a substantial media outlet outweighs the 'amenity potential' associated with owning a firm in the vast majority of industries. In order to access these utility gains, media owners will necessarily have to exercise their control on occasions when it is incentivised. Access to such non-financial utility depends on the capacity to control the media organisation and the ability to restrict the vast majority of these utility benefits for oneself.

In identifying the ownership of media organisations, Djankov et al. (2003) provides a relatively simple model that seeks to identify an 'ultimate ownership interest' via the shareholdings of proximate owners. A proximate owner who controls more than 20% of the company is assessed to see if this proximate owner is an individual or family, employee group or the state and if so is identified as the ultimate owner. If not, this proximate owner is examined to discern whether there is an ultimate owner of this proximate owner. If so, they are deemed the ultimate owner of the media organisation and if no controlling share exists, ownership is deemed to be widely held. The level of concentration

of ownership can thus be identified using the industry standard Bureau Van Dijk Independence Indicator (BvD, 2004) which characterises the independence of a company with regard to its shareholders. The measure calculates the direct and controlling interests of a firm and categorises companies based on whether any individual shareholder exceeds thresholds of ownership share of the firm (see Table 2.1).

Bureau van Dijk (BVD) Independence Categories	Ownership Shares of any One Individual Shareholder
Indicator A	Direct or total ownership not to exceed 25%
Indicator B	Direct or total ownership not to exceed 50% (One or more shareholders own more than 25%)
Indicator C	Direct or total ownership exceeds 50.01% / One shareholder exceeds 50.01% but precise share is unknown
Indicator D	Direct ownership exceeds 50.01%

Table 2.1: Bureau Van Dijk Independence Indicators from BvD Database (2004). This table covers major categories.

Empirically, Hanretty (2014) finds owner influence is greatest where ownership is concentrated in the hands of individuals/families whereas diverse corporate ownership tends to “set free” editors and journalists who can employ their preference for independence as shareholding groups have competing perspectives and are unable to easily control editors. While Hanretty’s organisational logic and findings are convincing, key questions remain. On the theoretical side, the variation in incentives to interfere, i.e. the difference in amenity potential is clear, but the relationship between ownership concentration and the variation in the necessary capacity to control is less developed. In particular, the mechanisms by which control is monitored and enforced must be central to an analysis of how and why certain ownership structures are associated with greater owner influence.³ Further, measurement of influence relies on an expert survey of perceived influence of owners that does not aid our understanding of how news coverage itself varies depending on the influence of owners. Similarly, there is little discussion of the intermediate mechanisms by which owners may influence their outlet’s staff which in turn affects content. This is difficult to assess as owner influence is measured

³ This is a major theme of Chapter 5 but is also specified in more detail in the theory section below.

externally through an expert survey and at a single point in time. In addition, the incentives of owners to interfere in the newspaper will vary by issue. With a generalised measure of influence that does not seek to specify any particular set of owner interests or preferences; we cannot be sure how forms of ownership affect the coverage of any distinct issue where owner interests manifest.

David Demers examines the impact of different structures of organisation within media outlets on newsroom practices and content output from a media economics perspective (e.g. Demers, 1993; Demers, 1996, Demers and Merskin, 2000). His contention is that corporate ownership has positive effects on news production in clear contrast to critical scholars. Evidence from Demers' surveys of journalists suggests moves to corporate ownership do not increase economic pressures or restrictions on journalists' perceived independence. Instead, journalists and editors report perceived improvements in product quality (Demers, 1999). The difficulties here are the reliance on self-reported perceptions by journalists rather than direct effects on content while ownership is only one element of organisational structure and therefore isolating the causal effect of ownership becomes more difficult.

Finally, Dunaway (2008, 2013) addresses the impact of forms of ownership on the degree of negatively, positively, and neutrally toned news coverage. Examining media sentiment, in contrast to Demers, she finds significant negative effects of corporate ownership on the degree of issue coverage as opposed to 'image' or 'horserace' coverage. However, there are positive effects of corporate ownership on the amount of positive news coverage when compared with firms with more concentrated ownership. These results offer additional motivation for the examination of an issue area where owner intervention may not run up against strong consumer preferences.

Theory

Access to the 'amenity potential' and non-pecuniary benefits described above is argued here to be a function of the degree of control that an owner has over the media organisation which logically follows from the level of concentration of ownership of the firm and the voting rights stock associated with the ownership share an individual or family has accrued. In contrast, corporate ownership, where ownership is relatively diverse (i.e. the absence of a dominant individual/family shareholder) means various ownership blocs struggle to

exercise control over the organisation and its output. They cannot then access the non-pecuniary benefits potentially on offer. This is particularly the case as publically traded corporate media shareholder blocs often have divergent incentive structures. As a result, the shareholders have more divergent preferences for content output. For example, a media organisation such as the UK-based Trinity Mirror Group with very low concentration of ownership includes a diverse set of shareholders from banking and investment companies to a Trinity Mirror employee bloc to the county of Yorkshire's local government pension fund. These are all entities with incentives and preferences that should vary in their political and socio-economic outlook. Any political basis for the selection of editors and/or influence on editorial decisions and content is unlikely to be as clear and coherent as would be the case in a corporate media entity where one or two owners had substantial control.

The 'industrial organisation of the media' literature as well as broader conceptions of organisational behaviour in the corporate sector allows us to more concretely specify how and when the independence of editors (as managers) and journalists (as news production entrepreneurs) is likely to be maximised and minimised. In contrast to the assumptions of critical accounts, the now widely accepted 'managerial revolution' thesis posits that the dilution of ownership control in corporate entities requires the devolution of day-to-day control of operations to managers, in this case editors. This necessity for delegation is due to the increasing number of capital sources with a stake in the company and the greater diffusion of professional investors who own or more likely operate assorted investment portfolios not limited to individual companies (e.g. Berle and Means, 1932; Galbraith, 1971). In virtually all forms of commercial organisation, this requires the array of diverse shareholding interests to relinquish a large degree of control to technocratic managers or those with extensive expertise in the running of the particular form of firm and familiarity with its regular operations. In the case of media organisations, this requires ceding control to editors (the management) who have substantial leeway to operate according to their own preferences (e.g. Demers and Merskin, 2000; Compaine and Gomery, 2001; Picard and van Weezel, 2008).

This follows from the theoretical propositions of the 'managerial revolution' in which diverse shareholding blocs face substantial difficulties in forming coherent voting sets so as to block management drives for greater independence. Where

ownership is concentrated and director-voting rights enable the relatively easy development of owner win-sets, owner influence becomes substantially easier to execute and editors/managers are far more easily constrained. Similarly, due to the inability of any one shareholder to select and thus control the editor, each shareholder is likely to be further inclined to defer to an editor with the requisite technocratic expertise but a desire for relative independence.

There is the potential for clear variation between corporate and more concentrated ownership in their ability to exercise many of the forms of overt owner control outlined by media scholars (e.g. Bagdikian, 2004) and media professionals (e.g. Evans, 1984). Direct methods of control include memos and phone calls to editors, presence on the newsroom floor and in planning meetings, involvement in hiring, and firing as well as direct contact with reporters.⁴ The diffusion of ownership in corporate organisation limits interference and the need for editors and/or journalists to feel the need to bow to the interests of any one shareholder. Similarly, more covert or institutionalised control in which the editor and/or journalists "rationally anticipate" the tone the owner may desire is inhibited by the difficulty in identifying which shareholder's interests and preferences to internalise. Where such interference is present, it largely derives from the 'amenity potential' available from control of a media organisation with a direct input into the discourse of public life (Demsetz, 1989). The realisation of this utility through interference is largely dependent on clear control of the firm and the excludability of this utility from a range of other owners and therefore is compatible with relatively concentrated rather than diverse ownership.

Therefore control over news content is limited in less concentrated firms for three reasons: firstly, the diversity of shareholders and their incentives limits the scope for political bases for editor selection and limits on editor independence when reporting to directors during his/her term. Secondly, the diversity of shareholders limits the ability of individual shareholders to exert influence over editors and journalists day-to-day. Thirdly, the incentive to control content is reduced due to the difficulties in personally accruing the non-pecuniary benefits of influence for any individual shareholder. The firm under concentrated ownership therefore 'succeeds' in producing the type of coverage

⁴ See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of how control operates in practice.

of unions that owners desire because the ability and incentives to produce it is greater than under diverse ownership. Put another way, the individual or family-owned media firm can provide stronger and more effective monitoring of journalists and editors working at a particular outlet they own than diversely owned corporate media entities can. This is characterised by Napoli (1997) as the principal-agent approach to media organisations.

How does variation in control over journalists manifest itself practically in news coverage? First, journalists and their editors operating in conditions of more decentralised control have greater freedom in newsgathering and the particular stories they choose to cover. Second, they have greater leeway in the language and framing that they employ in covering these topics. The freedom to select and frame stories could change the partisanship of news content journalistic staff produce. This would likely result in more liberal or left-leaning coverage as this is primarily where journalists in western industrialised democracies tend to place themselves (e.g. Patterson and Donsbach, 1996; Groseclose, 2007). This represents a form of ideological shirking where monitoring of journalistic staff behaviour is more difficult (e.g. Napoli, 1997). As noted earlier, the evidence available suggests that individual media owners do in fact lean right. In Patterson and Donsbach's survey evidence, journalists also place themselves as relatively more left leaning than the news organisations they work for suggesting journalists can identify owners' preferences.

Owner influence need not necessarily manifest as a change in the overt partisanship of coverage though. In reality, the practicalities of news production and the weighing of professional norms of objectivity likely limit the desire of journalists to introduce slant or partisan bias directly and deliberately into their news outputs (see Donsbach, 2004; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011).⁵ Similarly, journalists tend to indicate that diverse ownership promotes autonomy in how to report and in what fashion to report, rather than autonomy in the partisan slant they might employ in their reporting (e.g. Demers, 1998). Instead, greater flexibility in news production allows journalists a less constrained selection of proximal news events and topics to cover and the language that they use in this coverage. If centralised ownership constrains the coverage of objective union successes or positivity in how union-related stories are covered, both of these

⁵ See also Chapter 4 for further discussion of the relevance of the professionalism norms for journalists and editors.

will manifest in different, more positive news coverage.

All taken together, these factors produce the major hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *Under less concentrated ownership, the tone of the coverage of labour unions will be relatively more positive.*

The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in tone between different forms of ownership. Such a null finding may result from a number of alternative explanations. Firstly, taking the critical political economy approach, there is unlikely to be any significant difference in tone between commercial media with concentrated ownership and less concentrated corporate ownership as the fundamental preferences of capitalist media owners remain the same and these preferences are institutionalised within the newsroom. Scholars focusing more on demand-side explanations would similarly posit that there should be no significant change in tone because of a shift in ownership from concentrated to relatively less concentrated ownership. Any such changes would likely be driven by demand-side shifts; it is most likely therefore that a relative weakening of labour unions within the newspaper market would result in a more negative tone to the coverage associated with these actors in the relevant media.

Research Design

This chapter employs a relatively novel quasi-experimental approach which seeks to identify a plausibly exogenous 'shock' to the ownership of a media outlet (the Baltimore Sun) through a takeover and trace any potential resultant change in the tone of the coverage of labour unions as a result of this. To this end, I collect and analyse Baltimore Sun coverage of labour unions for a six-year period before and a six-year period after the newspaper changes ownership from the Chandler family to the corporate Tribune Company in 2000. I seek to address concerns raised about previous studies of ownership effects in which the ownership of the media outlet does not change and therefore isolating the independent effect of ownership and causal inference becomes problematic. In light of concerns about whether certain supposed quasi-experimental designs do in fact achieve the desired 'as-if random' assumption (e.g. Dunning, 2008; Sekhon and Titiunik, 2012), I discuss the rationale behind the particular case selection in some detail below and the plausibility of considering the assignment of distinct values in the independent variable (ownership) to be as-if random.

The Baltimore Sun and the 2000 Takeover of Times Mirror

The Baltimore Sun presents an interesting case to test the relationship between ownership and coverage against as its takeover had certain unique components. Firstly, the quasi-experimental approach in this case requires that the takeover of the newspaper be not directly related to the tone of the particular newspaper. The Baltimore Sun satisfies this condition as it was clearly not the primary target of the takeover of the Chandler family-controlled Times Mirror company (concentrated ownership) that owned it prior to 2000 by the corporate media conglomerate (diverse ownership) Tribune Company.⁶ The Baltimore Sun was, at best, the third most important newspaper under the ownership of Times Mirror and the Chandler family. The Tribune Company's takeover of Times Mirror was almost entirely directed at acquiring the Los Angeles Times, the fourth largest newspaper in the US by circulation at the time (AdAge, 2015), and getting access to its very high circulation and the potential advertising revenues available from the lucrative Los Angeles media market. The LA Times was considered the 'crown jewel' in the Chandler family collection (DePamphilis, 2003; Jones, 2009). The Times occupied this place of particular prestige not just due to its daily readership of over 1.03 million but also the gravitas acquired through its extensive foreign reporting apparatus and its status as one of the US's four dominant quality newspapers having won 23 Pulitzer prizes under Chandler ownership (Jones, 2009; LATimes.com, 2015).

Compared to these, the Baltimore Sun lagged considerably behind in the priorities of the Tribune Company given that it ranked 27th in the US by circulation at the time. The circulation figures (see Table 2.2) underline the difference between the LA Times and Newsday and the Sun that possessed a far smaller circulation in a lower-income market than many of Tribune's other assets, especially the newly acquired LA Times.

⁶ This was, at the time, the largest newspaper acquisition in US history.

	Average Daily Circulation (2000)
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	1,033,399 (4 th)
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	617,097 (7 th)
<i>Newsday</i>	576,345 (8 th)
Baltimore Sun	315,306 (27 th)

Table 2.2: Tribune Company Newspapers Circulation after 2000 takeover of Times Mirror. National rank in brackets. Data: AdAge Datacenter.

These figures underline that the financial benefits of the takeover to the corporate Tribune Company were likely to accrue both in terms of circulation and advertising revenues from the LA Times and Newsday with the Baltimore Sun representing something of a makeweight in the deal. For this reason, any desired alterations to the news coverage of purchased Times Mirror Company would be focused on those newspapers with large audiences and national political sway. The Baltimore Sun was unlikely to rank particularly high as an outlet to take an active role in shaping the news content of.

A second concern in assessing the independent impact of ownership change on news content is that editors and employees of the newspaper being taken over may rationally anticipate the takeover. That is, the journalists and editor may attempt to give the new or anticipated owners what they want by altering coverage even before the takeover takes place thus altering the tone and making causal inference regarding the independent effect of the takeover more difficult. A series of reports regarding the takeover from contemporary sources and later analysis (e.g. (DePamphilis, 2003; New York Times, 2000) outlined the secrecy behind the deal with negotiations between the Chandlers who owned Times Mirror and the purchasing Tribune Company conducted behind the back even of Times Mirror CEO Mark Willes. Willes himself reported to the New York Times (Barringer and Holson, 2000) that he was unaware of the deal and in fact unaware that the company was in any way available for sale. These reports were further underlined by former Times Mirror CFO and Chandler family advisor Thomas Unterman who negotiated the deal with Tribune and who confirmed that the deal had been agreed between the parties without the knowledge of Willes as CEO who was told of the takeover at the beginning of March 2000. Under conditions in which the CEO of a media organisation is unaware of the sale of the company, subordinate editors, and journalists are unlikely to be aware of

the deal to rationally anticipate tone changes desired by new owners. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis, I identify March 1st 2000 as the point at which the 'shock' or treatment is applied, as it then became common knowledge.

While it is central to the notion of natural experiments that the assignment process itself restricts the need for control for confounding variables statistically (Dunning, 2012), it is worth considering the advantages of this particular case with respect to alternative causal factors. Firstly, focusing on a distinct metropolitan area prior to- and post-takeover allows us to hold reasonably constant the underlying demographics and political landscape of the region. In particular, changes in partisan preferences and electoral effects are limited in Baltimore given its status as a Democratic stronghold where a Republican has only once held the position of mayor in modern times and left office in 1967. No Republican has been elected to the City Council since 1939 (Reutter, 2011). The Baltimore city and county area has voted Democratic in every Presidential election in the period under analysis (Leip, 2015). We may therefore consider the underlying political conditions to be held more or less constant. Similarly, the potential for effects of competition on news tone is also likely to be minimal in the Baltimore Sun case. The Sun is by a distance the highest circulation newspaper in the Baltimore metropolitan area in the period under examination (AdAge, 2015) and faces little in the way of market competition.

Finally, changes in the comparative power of unions in the Baltimore area may be expected to affect the tone of stories. Baltimore and Maryland experienced a similar pattern to most other US states/metropolitan areas in the late 1990s and early 2000s with a fall in coverage from 18.9% in 1994 down to 15.9% in 2006 (Hirsch and MacPherson, 2015). This may raise concerns that changes in the newspaper's tone in its coverage of unions may have resulted from this weakening of union strength rather than because of a change in ownership. A reassuring component of the form the takeover takes and the hypothesis under examination is that the tone of coverage of unions is hypothesised to become relatively more positive post-2000 after the takeover. If changes in the tone of coverage of unions follow from changes in the relative power of unions on the demand-side, this would surely be expected to produce more negatively toned coverage as there are fewer readers covered under union agreements.

More qualitatively, the Baltimore Sun provides a useful case to examine the broader issue of the changing relationship between ownership and the

production of news content because this was to some extent observed by those familiar with the organisation. The former editor of the Baltimore Sun and later the LA Times, the late John Carroll, outlined the variation in the relationship between ownership and control of newspapers. In the context of a discussion of how an owner can influence an editor, he said, "An editor who is too hard-charging might find himself in another part of the paper, like the copy desk. If the owner's priority is compliance, ultimately you get a flat newspaper. Unfortunately, most people hunker down and adjust. However, the spark goes out. The editor who has spark will be gone, or will change his ways and compromise. The compromises that one is asked to make are very often not stark decisions between right and wrong. They are incremental" (Auletta, 2007). In a discussion of the change in the pattern of ownership from individual proprietors to corporate holdings, he said, "Who are the owners today? Have you ever actually met one? In order to track down the owners, you've got to knock on doors at such places as Private Capital Management of Naples, Florida, or Ariel Capital Management of Chicago, or Southeastern Asset Management of Memphis" (Carroll, 2006). These comments illustrate quite clearly the potential differences in organisational hierarchy and the degree of monitoring that occurred in privately owned and publicly traded media companies.⁷ This further justifies an exploration as to whether this had effects on the news coverage of particular issues.

Dependent Variable: Tone as a key component of news coverage

To identify shifts in the way unions are covered in news media, a scheme must be devised to examine how coverage changes. Quantitatively, one could employ measures of the frequency of reporting on unions, the topic(s) that union coverage relates to, or the tone, negative or positive, that stories are presented in. The limited literature looking at media coverage of unions has tended to focus on one or both of the former (e.g. Schmidt, 1993; Walsh, 1988; Philo and Hewitt, 1976) but these do not identify how such material is presented and the way in which journalistic professionals are treating or being told to treat the

⁷ Carroll was however critical of publicly traded companies for their focus on profitability and the cost cutting this often involved. This is a common criticism of publicly traded ownership. The quotes here though identify that the potential for monitoring and resultant compliance on editorial issues is more likely where there is a clearer relationship between identifiable individual owners than corporate management.

issue. An examination of the tone of coverage of unions could take the form of measuring the partisanship of the coverage. As outlined earlier, this does not necessarily tap the practical production of news in terms of both story selection and language.

The selection of topics to cover by journalists is likely to interact with the desired tone of the reporting as it is more difficult to present 'good news' in a negative light for example than 'bad news' in a negative way. The tone of the story will likely partially reflect the topic of that story but newsgathering processes in quality newspapers are such that journalists retain considerable leeway in both the stories they select and the way in which they present them (see for example, Gans, 1979). Positive coverage may result from coverage of a successful union recruiting drive or agreement with management which are typically considered to be 'good news stories' (e.g. Bruno, 2009) or from support or praise of the events by the author or the sources the reporter selects to speak to. If journalists tend to cover what are objectively negative events related to unions such as failures of union strategies or provide criticism of unions' activities then both of these will produce negative coverage. These are all components of news production by journalistic practitioners who (in theory) select what to cover, how to present it and who to speak to about it. If stories about labour unions are positive or negative in tone, this will result from an interaction between journalists' story selection and the language they use to present the story, but all of these elements should be captured in the tone of the story.

The theoretical account above suggests journalists will have greater freedom both to pick stories to cover and the language they use to cover them where they are subject to reduced constraints and this should then manifest itself in the tone of the coverage. Interestingly, during an episode of direct owner interference in a newspaper's coverage of a major political event, the Lisbon Treaty referendum in Ireland, a key instruction issued by the owner was to alter the language used in stories so that the tone of the stories was more negative. On other occasions, owners and editors require the tone of filed copy to be adjusted to match the outlet's ethos or agenda.⁸ The focus on tone therefore matches practitioners' own experiences of owner interference.

⁸ Author interview with an experienced sub-editor, 29th April 2017. See Chapter 5 for more details.

There are additional reasons to focus on the tone of coverage in particular. Previous work has addressed the impact of organisational structure, editorial position and professionalism norms on the tone associated with coverage of a number of specific topics such as local coverage of Presidential visits (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2008) or campaign news (Dunaway, 2008). I extend this approach to a topic issue of substantial socio-economic importance where assumptions of institutional bias are common and theoretically plausible. Similarly, in the context of the broader project to which this chapter contributes, I am concerned with the effects of differences in the form of media coverage on citizens' attitudes. There is significant evidence to illustrate that the media-opinion relationship is likely to be shaped by the tone of stories which offers a broad indication about the way in which the issue is being covered and is important in determining news effects on attitudinal outcomes (e.g. Schuck and de Vreese, 2006; Hopmann et al., 2010; de Vreese and Boomgarden, 2006).

Tone is therefore identified as a major constituent of the frames media operatives and organisations apply to the coverage of labour unions. In line with other literature, tone may be conceptualised as the relative positivity or negativity of news stories produced by a media outlet (e.g. Eshbaugh-Soha, 2008; Dunaway, 2013). I measure tone quantitatively as a percentage of net positivity of words within an article divided by the length of the article (see below). The text analysis is conducted using the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary (Young and Soroka, 2012) which was developed specifically for examining news content (Young and Soroka, 2012b). I discuss the data collection and computation of tone scores for stories in more detail below.

The rationale for examining the hypothesised ownership impacts on tone at the article level is based primarily on expectations about newsgathering, news production, and news presentation decisions by journalistic staff within media organisations. The influence of owners, either directly or indirectly, on journalists' decisions regarding story selection and news presentation will manifest themselves as the journalist constructs the article and decides how to frame the story. These patterns of decision-making are usually theorised at the news story or article level and not, for example, at the sentence level (e.g. Entman, 2007). Using a story level measure of tone also brings this quantitative approach in line with similar, hand-coded research into the determinants of tone in news (e.g. Dunaway, 2013). In addition, the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary,

employed here to measure the tone of news content, also performs most effectively and efficiently at the article level rather than at the sentence level (Young and Soroka 2012a, 2012b).

Finally, it is worth stating explicitly that this analysis does not attempt to identify all the potential variables that may affect tone or explain variation in the tone of news coverage across time and space. Such a generalised exploration of the determinants of news tone is beyond the remit of this chapter. The purpose of the case selection and research design here is to examine whether there is specifically an effect of media ownership on tone within a purposefully selected context.

Data Collection

In order to analyse news content, news stories were first scraped from the Baltimore Sun online archives for a six-year period before and six-year period after the takeover in 2000 thereby covering the period 1994-2006. These twin six-year periods together provide a sample large enough to assess meaningfully any differences between pre-takeover and post-takeover coverage.⁹ 1401 relevant stories were collected in total with 830 stories collected from the period 1994-1999, 111 stories were collected from the year of the takeover in 2000 and 460 stories were collected from the 2001-2006 period. The drop in the absolute number of stories post takeover is in line with overall trends in media coverage of labour over time identified by a number of scholars (Philo and Hewitt, 1976; Schmidt, 1993; Martin, 2004) and noted by a number of current or former labour reporters themselves (Serrin, 2001; Greenhouse, 2015).

The data collection process involves search terms from a similar study by Bruno (2009) with very slight adaptations.¹⁰ First, all stories with "unions", "union" or "labor" in the title of the text as well as those containing the keyword phrases "labor unions" "organized labor," "labor organization" "labor movement," "big labor" in the body of the text were identified and

⁹ The potential critique of examining stories from the six-years pre- and post-takeover is that the further from the changeover, the more difficult it is to attribute any potential change in coverage to the change of ownership. However, a narrower time frame and consequently substantially fewer articles in the dataset may make the tone measure much more susceptible to noise. I apply a number of different strategies to deal with these issues below.

¹⁰ The only difference between the two sets of search terms is the use of "big labor" as an additional keyword term here whereas it is used as a classification category in the qualitative analysis in Bruno.

downloaded. Duplicate stories were removed from the downloaded database during this process. The articles were further assessed to determine whether they related to labour unions. Ideally, union content could be determined quantitatively by counting the use of labour signifiers in an article but sometimes due to simple variation in language usage, stories that clearly focused on labour union activities/organisation would employ terms such as “employees” or “workers” that were not labour signifiers but clearly related to the same topic. The appendix (2.1) provides examples of commonly occurring terms or topics identified using these search terms but then excluded as unrelated. Even if the stories collected do not represent the entire population of union-related stories, there is little reason to believe that this will have a systematic relationship to the quantities of interest here. There are clear trade-offs between quantitative and qualitative measures of tone. In many ways, qualitative human coding of tone prioritises nuance and subtlety while quantitative coding delivers measures with greater reliability for assessing tone in the aggregate. With regard to sampling news stories, complex human coding of tone is necessarily more subjective and can create inter-coder reliability problems. However, less attention perhaps needs to be paid in selecting which stories to analyse in the first instance. The quantitative measure here applies a precise formula to measuring tone and has advantages in providing reliability and transparency in its measurement. It does require more care in selecting stories to ensure they match the topic that is under consideration.

The measurement of the key independent or treatment variable, i.e. the shift from concentrated family ownership to less concentrated corporate ownership, was conducted using the Bureau Van Dijk’s database (2004) and the examination of filing reports, historical accounts and relevant contemporary news reports. The Times Mirror Company pre-takeover was controlled by the Chandler family who owned more than 65% of the voting shares in the company and had exercised near-complete control over the company for many decades before the acquisition in 2000 (Shaw and Hofmeister, 2000; Barringer and Holson, 2000; Halberstam, 1979; DePamphilis, 2003; Jones, 2009). This gave the company a BvD independence categorisation at level D indicating the highest category of concentration of ownership. By contrast, the owner after the takeover, Tribune Media Company, had a diversified corporate structure of

ownership with no shareholder owning more than 25% of the voting shares at any point for which records are available giving a BvD independence score of A indicating the lowest category of concentration. These records are supported by news, historical and industry accounts of the deal (e.g. Tribune Media, 2000; DePamphilis, 2003).

Methodology

The tone of the stories collected was analysed using the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary (LSD) and accompanying Lexicoder software (Daku, Soroka, and Young, 2011). The LSD contains two large valence categories for positive and negative sentiment, comprising 4,567 unique entries. Using a sentiment dictionary developed for general news content to analyse coverage of unions specifically is of course not ideal. The dictionary approach however allows for comparison with other work on similar topics and due to the greater reliability and feasibility, it provides compared to human coding. The LSD has already been successfully used to examine tone in a host of topic areas including analysis of the effects of media tone on economic perceptions (Soroka, Stecula and Wlezien, 2015), local and national news coverage of immigration in Britain and Canada (Lawlor, 2015), political rhetoric regarding class groups and inequality (Rhodes and Johnson, 2015), and historical newspaper coverage of employee leave policies in the US (Daku, 2015).

Following the completion of specifically-designed pre-processing procedures¹¹, Lexicoder employs a relatively simple, bag-of-words approach which computes from the dictionary list the number of 'positive' and 'negative' words per article and then measures net tone using the following easy-to-understand formula:¹²

$$net\ tone = \frac{\sum positive\ words - \sum negative\ words}{\sum words} \times 100$$

The word total here includes all words in the article (positive, negative, and without tone). The measure thus captures both the direction and magnitude of

¹¹ The pre-processing routines operate as follows. The first standardises punctuation. The second removes capitalised words apart from the first word of a sentence to remove proper nouns that by definition cannot have tone. The third standardises negation terms so that these can be easily detected using a negation dictionary. Finally pre-processing removes 'false hits' which are multi-toned or non-toned phrases which correspond with toned language e.g. 'crude oil' or 'an awful lot'.

¹² A second run is conducted using a negation dictionary to pick up negated positive and negated negative words in articles. This improves performance non-trivially as outlined in Young and Soroka (2012).

tone, controlling for article size. As values tend to be relatively small due to the mechanics of the measure¹³, I follow Soroka, Stecula, and Wlezien (2015) and multiply the net tone measure by 100 providing a percentage positivity score (Soroka, Stecula and Wlezien, 2015, p.462).¹⁴ It is important to note that there is no 'true zero' point that corresponds to true neutrality.

Young and Soroka (2012b) outline in detail the LSD's significant performance advantages in the analysis of news content when compared with alternative sentiment dictionaries such as the General Inquirer, Roget's Thesaurus and LIWC and also when compared with human coding. They find that the LSD performs better than the other dictionaries when applied to news coverage. Soroka, Stecula and Wlezien (2015) note that the LSD provides reliable measures of tone for both economic and non-economic newspaper content and that it provides very similar results to common alternative measures of tone in communication literature such as the coefficient of imbalance devised by Janis and Fadner (1943). Finally, data is analysed using a number of methods generally appropriate to natural experiment, pre- and post-treatment designs including difference in means tests, treatment effects models and reduced-form localised regression (Dunning, 2012).

Results

The distribution of union-related stories by year is illustrated in Figure 2.1. As mentioned above, there is a decline in the frequency of stories that concern unions over time. The six-year period post-collection ensures that the sample size remains reasonably large given the increased performance of Lexicoder/LSD as the number of observations and corpus size increases. One may wonder why there were such a small number of stories in 1995 but there does not seem to be any systematic reason for this.¹⁵ Summary statistics relating to variation in the tone of news coverage are presented in Table 2.3. The nature of the LSD net tone measure means that values do not tend to be especially large even when multiplied by 100. This is at least partly due the

¹³ Dividing the #positive words-#negative words in an article by the length of an article by definition cannot be greater than one. Multiplying by 100 provides a percentage point difference between positive and negative words for an article.

¹⁴ One could of course measure tone as net negativity i.e. (negative words-positive words)/word count* 100.

¹⁵ Alternative union-related search terms and search terms relating to other substantive issues were tried with results produced as usual. Exclusion of 1995 entries does not affect the results.

proportional nature of the measure. Additionally, Young and Soroka (2012b, p.210) point out the difficulties of resolving the ambiguity of valence and valence categories. For example, the General Inquirer (GI) is the oldest and most expansive sentiment lexicon but “its large valence categories of positive and negative words tend to be overly general and lack discriminative capacity” (Young and Soroka, 2012b, p. 210). Therefore, these issues of ambiguity and imprecision associated with other generalised sentiment lexicons are addressed in the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary and will likely produce sentiment scores that are more conservative than if another dictionary had been used.

The average tone of a newspaper article concerning labour unions in each year of the study is illustrated in Figure 2.2. This basic graph illustrates a broad clustering of the pre- and post-takeover averages as relatively more negative and relatively more positive on the left- and right-hand side of the figure respectively. Indeed, there appears to be a difference in the tone, i.e. the net positivity. Compared to the stories under the Chandler family ownership, the tone of stories under Tribune corporate ownership becomes more positive. We see some variation by year but there is a certain degree of consistency particularly in the post-takeover tone that never falls below a pre-takeover yearly average at any point after 2000.

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Net Tone	1401	0.142	1.46	-7.37	4.76

Table 2.3: Summary statistics for net tone of articles

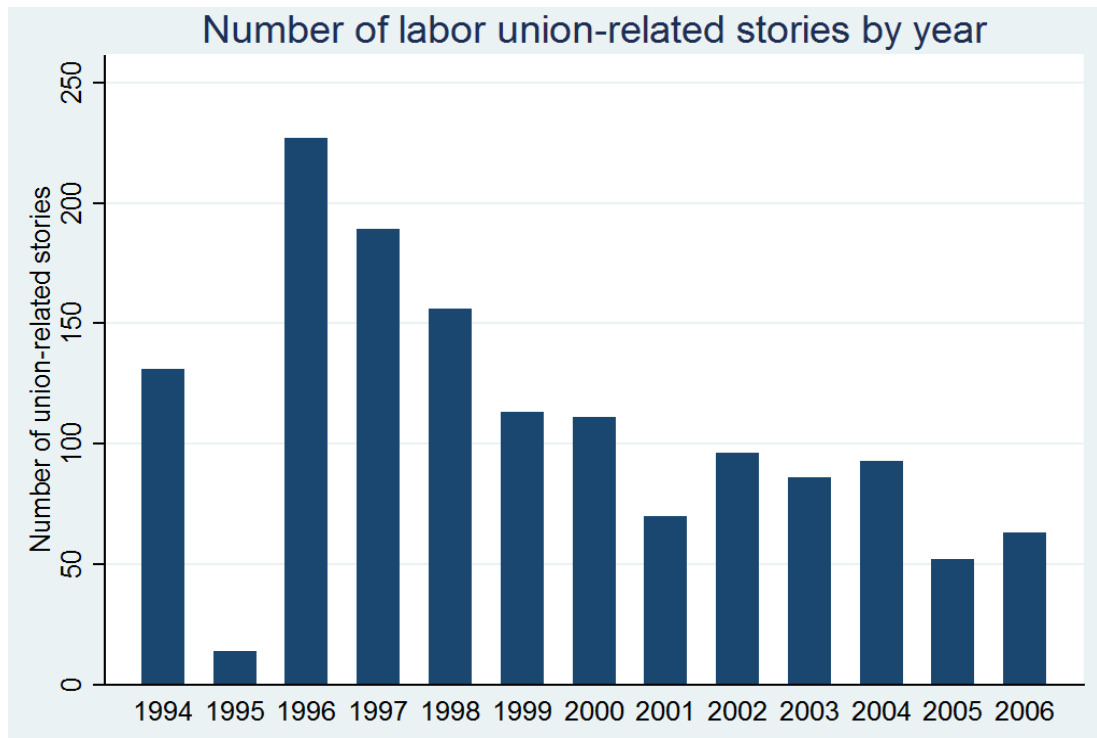


Figure 2.1: Union Stories by Year

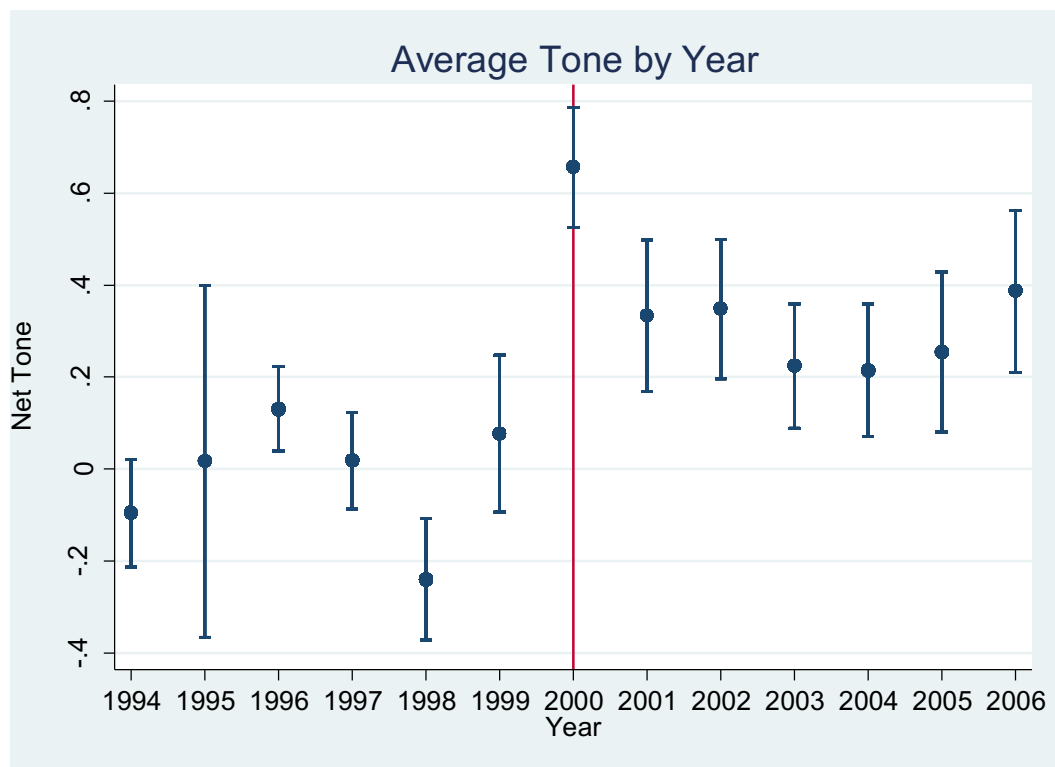


Figure 2.2: Average Story Tone by Year

I begin the examination of an ownership effect with a simple two-sample difference-in-means test examining the mean of samples before the date the takeover was reported, 1st March 2000, and after that date. These results are

displayed in Figure 2.3. There is a highly statistically significant difference, at the 99% level, between the tone of coverage after the takeover as compared to under Chandler ownership and in the direction expected in line with hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 above. The mean of the pre-takeover tone while negative is not statistically distinguishable from zero but here we are interested in whether there has been a relative change in tone between the two forms of ownership rather than absolute values.

The ownership influence of the Chandler family with their traditional antipathy to organised labour (Halberstam, 1979) may have the effect in left-leaning Baltimore of reining in to the centre any editors and journalists keen to exercise their own preferences or appeal to demand-side preferences more readily. The Chandlers were unlikely to be willing to sacrifice the bottom line to the extent that they would encourage such a negative tone to coverage that may be seen as unacceptably deviant relative to audience views and potentially harm readership. The ownership effect here is to place a ceiling on the tone of content, while under diversified corporate ownership the tone becomes more positive. The average treatment effect of the takeover is a 0.32 percentage-point increase in the tone of a union-related story which although perhaps small substantively (due to a certain extent to the nature of the measure) is an important finding given the kind of quality broadsheet newspaper being assessed here which tend to be relatively restrictive in emotive tonal language when compared to their tabloid brethren.

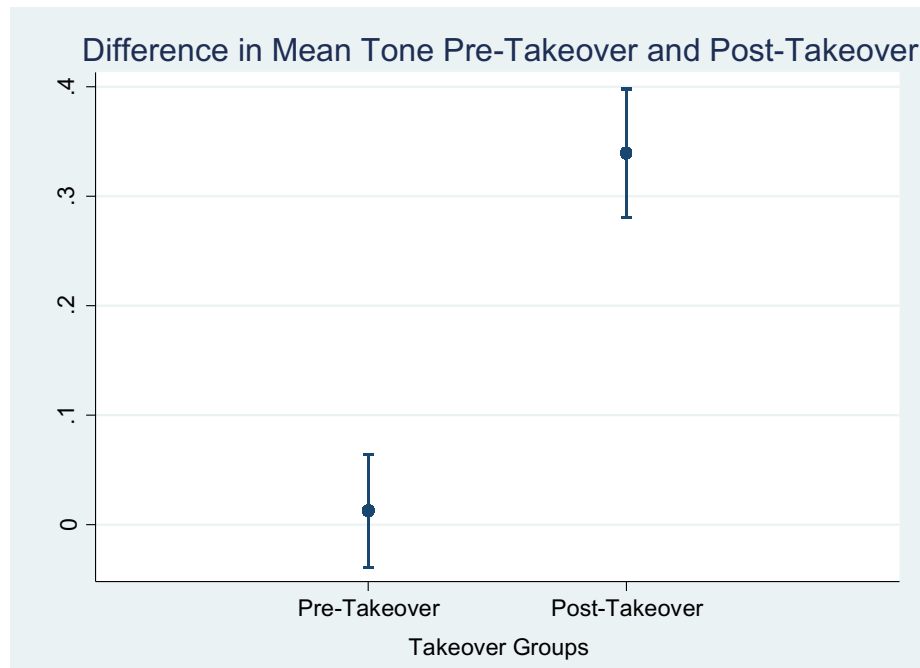


Figure 2.3: Difference-in-Means Test of Tone of Union Coverage before and after Takeover. Difference is significant at $p < 0.01$ level.

Treatment-Effects

Having observed results that seem to indicate a treatment effect, we can consider in more detail the distribution of such effects across the post-treatment periods. In order to do this, I now consider the treatment effects on story tone in the years just before and after the takeover. The year in this formulation represents the 'treatment' so stories in the years 2000-2006 (that is, post-March 1st 2000) have received the 'treatment' while a year such as 1994 or 1996 represents a 'control group' that has not received the treatment. The specification of these models attempts to 'zoom in' on the treatment effect to aid in causal inference. This is achieved by assessing the effect of being assigned to the 1999 and Jan-Feb 2000 'control group' (coded together as 1999) rather than the post-March 1st 2000 'treatment' group. These results are outlined in Table 2.4. While the number of observations is quite limited given the concentration on just two years, the estimates continue to be in the hypothesised direction but drops short of statistical significance at conventional levels. This sounds a note of caution in determining a causal effect of the takeover on tone but the direction of the estimate is such that the findings are at least worthy of further examination. Additional investigations (not presented here) comparing various pre-takeover control years against post-takeover treatment years indicate consistent positive point estimates in line with the

theory even if these results vary with regard to whether they are statistically significant at the 95% level.

	Coefficient	z	P> z
ATE – 1 vs 0 (2000 v 1999) N= 224	0.374	1.76	0.079

Table 2.4: Treatment-effects model comparing groups either side of the cut-off. 2000 'treatment' group is post the March 1st takeover announcement.

Limited-Observations Regression

One alternative approach to causal inference is a regression discontinuity design (Dunning, 2012; Hahn, Todd and Van der Klaauw, 2001) but the limited number of observations directly around the takeover do not allow for a genuine RD model. In this vein, I present an informal limited-observations regression in Table 2.5 examining solely observations from a 24-month period taking articles from the year before and year after the takeover as a form of basic intention-to-treat analysis and localised linear regression (Dunning, 2012, p.87). This conveys an informal estimate but is intended as a "complement rather than a solution" to more formalised parametric procedures (Lee and Lemieux, 2009). There are of course concerns about the reliability of comparing observations (stories) from a period of this size either side of the takeover but given the limited observations available, it may be indicative. We do in fact see a statistically significant effect in the hypothesised positive direction on the tone of a story if it occurred post-takeover. This is again suggestive that there is a causal effect of the ownership change.

	Coefficient	t	P> z
Takeover	0.564	2.62	0.009
N= 222. R-squared=0.0303. Adj R-squared=0.0259.			

Table 2.5: Limited Linear Regression using observations limited either side of the takeover i.e. 1/3/1999-1/3/2001.

Taken together, these results indicate that the effects of a takeover lag somewhat as changing the structure of the organisation takes some time with the need to possibly replace editors from the previous regime and institute new

newsgathering and production practices. Journalists and new editors may also require a certain degree of time under the new ownership regime to realise the relative increase in their independence or to come around to the idea of focusing more on demand-side preferences. The overall treatment effect of ownership in increasing the relative positivity of union-related coverage may reflect this even if we cannot definitively observe it precisely around the takeover point.

An alternative Changepoint approach

Change point models offer an alternative approach to determining a point when the tone of the coverage of unions changes contrasting significantly with the parametric tests conducted thus far. Until now, the tests have involved the assumption of a structural break in the net tone of coverage in early March 2000 when the takeover was announced and have tested whether there is a significant difference in the average tone before and after this point using a takeover dummy. However, a comparable approach treats the location of the change point as a parameter to be estimated and assumes the timing uncertain. This enables a change point detected before the takeover date to count against the hypothesised pattern of effects (Western and Kleykamp, 2004). In this way, the data is allowed to 'speak for itself.' Major advantages of the changepoint approach are that confidence levels for changes are provided as well as confidence intervals for the timing of the change. Similarly, changepoint analysis is capable of detecting subtle shifts that other methods cannot pick up as effectively. I therefore employ a change point model with the assumption that the point of the structural break is unknown. The results, including credible probability intervals, are displayed graphically for ease of interpretation in Figure 2.4 below.¹⁶ First employing changepoint analysis software in R (Killick and Eckley, 2014) and specifying an asymptotic penalty to test for the statistical significance of a change in mean, I test for a single changepoint and then move to multiple changepoint detection¹⁷. In addition, the error bands for significant changepoint(s) are then computed using Monte Carlo Markov Chain (MCMC)

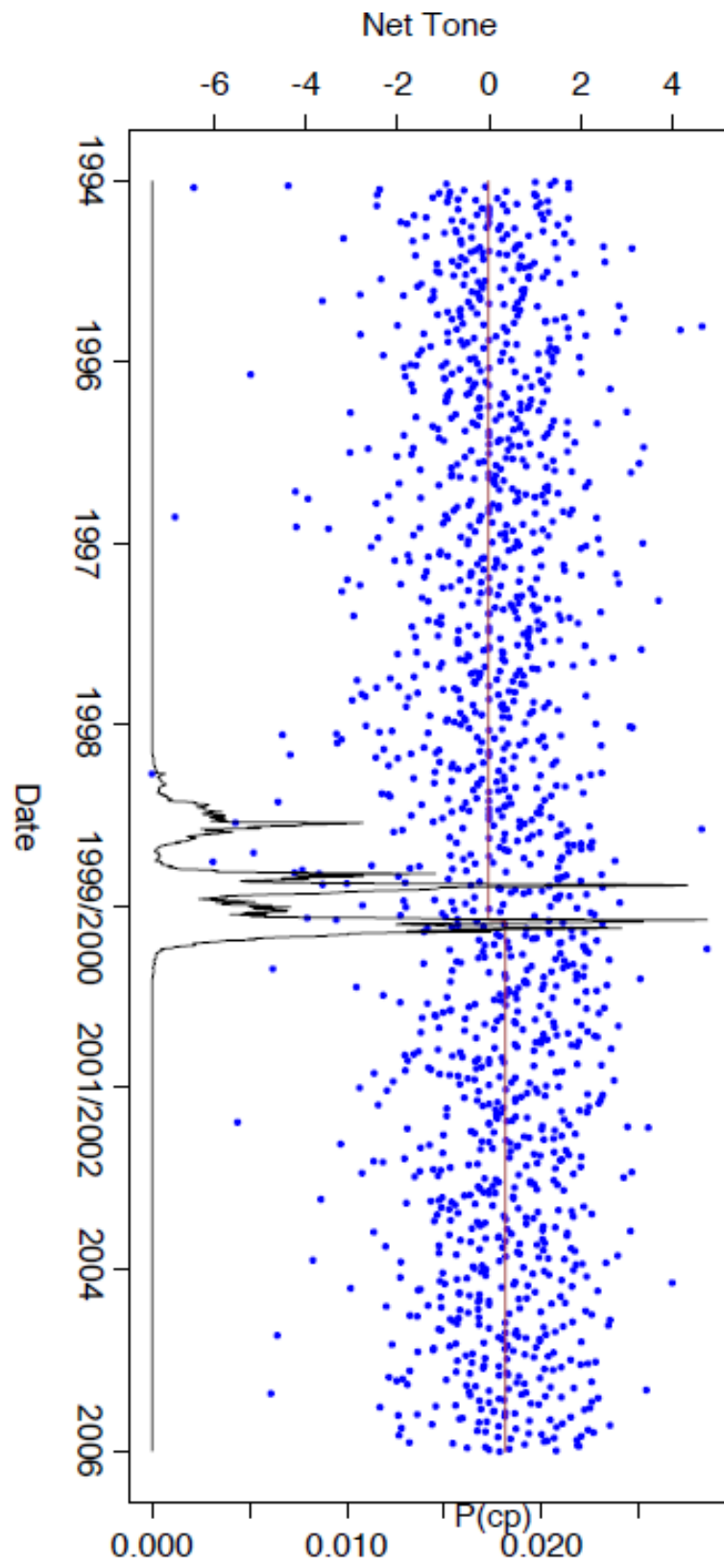
¹⁶ The x-axis ticks correspond to observations but have been labelled with the corresponding period for ease of interpretation. The change point falls within a credible interval of March 1st 2000, the takeover date.

¹⁷ The corresponding methods in the changepoint package are 'At Most One Change' for single changepoint detection and 'Binary Segmentation' as the most commonly used multiple changepoint method. Binary segmentation tests first for a single changepoint and then if a break is detected, splits the data into two new data sets before and after. This process is repeated until no new changepoints are detected. In this case, only one significant changepoint was detected.

sequential sampling techniques to produce a Bayesian credible interval.

Using a credible probability interval with a conventional 95% significance level, the singular structural break in tone that emerges is approximate to the date the takeover was announced and is in the direction hypothesised. There is no evidence of a statistically meaningful change point prior to the takeover or indeed in the years afterward. There is also no evidence of multiple changepoints at conventional levels of significance. Similarly, the credible interval indicates that it was the announcement of the deal on March 1st 2000 that triggered the change in tone rather than the handover itself as the interval identifies a change between the final weeks of 1999 and April 2000. The impact of the announcement suggests strongly that journalists and the editorial team, knowing they would very shortly be transferring to new corporate ownership and were no longer plausibly subject to Chandler family instructions began to afford themselves greater independence in the reporting of unions and likely other comparable issues. These results further strengthen inferences that the change to corporate ownership, via the Tribune takeover, was indeed the key causal factor in altering the tone of coverage in the Baltimore Sun. This effect appears to be driven directly by the loosening of credible control over journalistic staff as the family owners announced they would imminently be relinquishing hold over the company.

Figure 2.4: Bayesian Change-Point Model across Range of Observations



The Baltimore Sun and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: A Difference-in-Differences Approach

Having concentrated solely on the useful attributes of the Baltimore Sun case for causal inference to this point and established support for the theoretical claims, it is now helpful to examine potential ownership effects in comparison to a baseline control case that did not experience an ownership change. By comparing the tone of coverage of unions before and after the takeover in Baltimore across the two newspapers, we can establish whether there is a difference between the treatment group and the control group over time. Demonstrating a difference between papers can more conclusively illustrate that the change in tone of Baltimore Sun coverage was specific to the ownership change it underwent and not indicative of broader trends across many newspapers.

To this end, I selected the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette as a control group case as it displays similar characteristics to the Baltimore Sun on a number of relevant social and contextual indicators while remaining under family ownership throughout. The Post-Gazette has remained under Block family ownership since 1927 without meaningful interruption even if at times between the 1960s and 1980s joint operating agreements meant that some advertising and sales responsibilities were spun off to the Press Company. However, since 1992, even these non-editorial departments have returned to Block family control. The newspaper therefore does not undergo any comparable ownership change 'treatment' as was the case with the Baltimore Sun.

The Post-Gazette, like The Sun, was also the dominant metropolitan newspaper throughout the period under analysis (Lamis, 2009). Major local market competition essentially folded in 1992 leaving the Post-Gazette for a time without a major rival whose coverage and slant it could potentially be influenced by. While Pittsburgh does not dominate Pennsylvania in the manner that Baltimore dominates Maryland, the pre-eminence of the Post-Gazette in its geographical locale is comparable to The Sun given that Pittsburgh and Philadelphia sit at extreme opposite ends of the state and the city newspapers of each are not in direct competition with each other. The Post-Gazette was the 41st most read newspaper in the US in the period under examination with a circulation comparable to the Baltimore Sun in terms of proportionality to each city's population. The newspaper is also stylistically similar to the Sun in its

broadsheet design, orientation towards the quality end of the market and reputation.¹⁸

Socio-economically, Pittsburgh also bears reasonable similarities to Baltimore. Both are industrial cities generally classified as within the Rust belt and experiencing similar patterns of traditional industry decline. Politically, Pittsburgh has leant Democratic in mayoral and congressional elections in recent decades while union coverage in the two cities sat at similar levels across the period.¹⁹ While there are of course differences along certain demographic lines, these major indicators strongly suggest that the news market and demand-side characteristics are such that we should expect the coverage provided by the newspapers to be broadly comparable absent ownership effects.

Following an identical search scheme as in the Baltimore Sun case and using LexisNexis²⁰, I identified 1,888 relevant stories relating to labour unions in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette archives over the same period of 1994-2006. I again employed the same pre-processing and Lexicoder Sentiment analysis procedures in order to calculate the net positivity tone of each union-related article for the second newspaper.

First, the results of a classic comparison of means test of the average tone before the Baltimore Sun takeover was announced are displayed in Table 2.6. As we can see, there is no statistically significant difference between the average tone of union-related articles when both newspapers were under concentrated family ownership. In other results not displayed here, there is also no significant change in the tone of Post-Gazette coverage of unions before and after 2000 when the Baltimore Sun was taken over.

¹⁸ See for example mondotimes.com entry. The Post-Gazette has recently faced more direct competitive pressures from the Tribune-Review that has extended its operations substantially in Pittsburgh from Greensburg. The 'Trib' was however far less of a factor during the period under analysis.

¹⁹ 18.9% in Baltimore in 1994 falling to 17.2% in 2000 and down to 15.9% in 2006 while Pittsburgh stood at 22.6% in 1994, 19.7% in 2000 and 15.5% in 2006 (unionstats.com).

²⁰ Ideally, one would use the same archival source for both newspapers. Unfortunately, the functionality of the PPG archive did not allow data to be straightforwardly downloaded and collected. However, the search terms used are identical across the two papers and the Lexis searches correspond with those produced by simply searching on the PPG archival site.

Variable	N	Mean	95% Conf. Interval	
Post-Gazette Tone (Pre-BS Treatment)	1,036	0.067	-0.023	0.158
Baltimore Sun Pre-Takeover Tone	848	0.012	-0.088	0.113
Difference		0.0547	-0.081	0.190

Table 2.6: Difference in Means Test of average tone between Post-Gazette and Baltimore Sun tone of coverage before Sun takeover

As demonstrated above, we did however see a significant positive change in the tone of coverage of unions for the Baltimore Sun from the announcement of the takeover by the Tribune Corporation onwards. Table 2.7 now displays results of a difference in means test between the tone of coverage for the Baltimore Sun after the takeover versus the tone of coverage by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that did not undergo an ownership change and remained under family ownership. Here we see a significant difference between Post-Gazette and Baltimore Sun coverage with the Sun displaying a more positive tone but this is only true after the takeover and not before.

Variable	N	Mean	95% Conf. Interval	
Post-Gazette Tone (Post-BS Treatment)	852	0.128	0.025	0.231
Baltimore Sun Post-Takeover Tone	553	0.339	0.224	0.454
Difference		-0.211	-0.365	-0.05

Table 2.7: Difference in Means Test between Post-Gazette and Baltimore Sun tone of coverage after Sun takeover

Finally, we consider classic difference-in-difference regression results in Table

2.8. In this case, the tone score (net positivity) for both newspapers is the dependent variable and the explanatory variables are a Baltimore Sun dummy, a post-takeover announcement dummy and the interaction of Baltimore Sun and post-takeover. As expected, the only statistically significant effect is for the interaction demonstrating that the only significant change to the tone of coverage of unions occurred at the Baltimore Sun and this is true only after the takeover. Taken together with all of the previous evidence, we see that the move from family ownership to diversified corporate ownership increased the positivity of the coverage of unions in comparison both to the newspaper itself beforehand and compared to a similar newspaper that did not undergo a move away from family ownership. As argued above, this emanates from the increase in journalistic and editorial independence under corporate ownership.

DV: Net Positivity	Coefficient	t	P> z
Baltimore Sun*Post-Takeover	0.266	2.50	0.013
Post-Takeover	0.060	0.88	0.377
Baltimore Sun	-.0546	-0.79	0.428
Constant	0.067	1.45	0.146
Obs=3,289			

Table 2.8: D-I-D Regression examining differential effects of newspaper and takeover on net tone of coverage of unions.

Conclusion

This chapter leverages the unique circumstances surrounding the takeover of the Baltimore Sun in 2000 as part of a natural experiment research design that seeks to identify the effect of a change in the structure of media company ownership on the tone of its coverage of a specific issue area. A broad set of results indicate in line with the theoretical premise offered here that corporate ownership is associated with relatively more positively-toned coverage of labour unions while concentrated family ownership appears to produce more negative coverage. These results are robust to within-newspaper analysis, change-point analysis and a difference-in-differences design comparing the Baltimore Sun to a control case that remained solely under family ownership throughout.

In contrast with both traditional critical scholarship on the political economy of the media and more recent work stressing the demand-led nature of coverage, this chapter suggests that in specific issue areas additional non-financial incentives and organisational capacity leads individuals and families to direct the tone of coverage along their desired 'line.' Diversified corporate ownership actually frees editors and journalists to present news about unions in a manner that they consider more in line with their own preferences or the perceived preferences of their readers.

To the extent that an ownership effect is detected here, it is still difficult to identify whether it is journalists and editors' own independence under corporate ownership that leads to more positively toned coverage or whether corporate ownership instead leads newsroom professionals to cater more to what they believe the demand-side wants. Subsequent sections of this thesis will seek to examine the relative responsiveness of journalists and editors to these kinds of factors by engaging in a series of semi-structured interviews with relevant individuals. Similarly, any difference in coverage identified here between individual and family-owned media organisations remains restricted to the commercial sector but says little about the effects on union content when comparing commercial and public media organisations even when public organisations are a major player in certain media landscapes among the liberal market economies. Later chapters seek to examine differences between these differentially structured media entities. Finally, investigation of the relationship between media organisations, coverage of unions and citizens' attitudes to unions must say something about whether differently toned coverage affects citizens' perceptions of unions. The next chapter deals directly with the relationship between differences in content and the attitudes of citizens consuming different types of coverage.

Chapter 3: Ownership, Differential Media Frames and Effects on Public Attitudes to Unions: Evidence from Two Experimental Studies

Abstract

Political economy scholars have extensively detailed the importance of unions in determining outcomes including redistribution and income inequality. Recently, the activities and regulation of labour unions have come under substantial scrutiny in a number of industrialised economies. The news media clearly plays an important role in helping many citizens construct their views on these debates. This chapter employs both an innovative online experimental design and a traditional offline approach. Randomised groups receive differentially framed news treatments drawn directly from real stories in major newspapers with different ownership structures. The experiment involves an examination of the effects of alternative news frames of a major contemporary legislative proposal in the United Kingdom regarding the role and activities of labour unions on the attitudes of respondents. One news treatment presents the proposals as an effort to reduce harmful strikes and curb 'militant union activity' while the other presents the issue as a partisan attack on fundamental rights. Results indicate that participants exposed to the treatment portraying unions as militants and identifying the proposals as likely to reduce harmful strikes expressed more agreement that unions must be strictly regulated and have too much power when compared to participants who read the story portraying the proposals as a partisan attack on unions and workers' rights. The results therefore suggest that differential news coverage can affect citizens' attitudes regarding the role and regulation of trade unions.

Introduction and Motivation

While citizens rely on news media for their information on economic and political issues, there is substantial evidence that illustrates that the framing and slant of this news is determined by a host of factors. These include consumer biases (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006), organisational variation (Shoemaker and Reese, 2013) but also crucially, the ownership structures of news outlets (Hamilton, 2004; Dunaway, 2008). Virtually all theoretical accounts of media owners' preferences and their associated influence on the news content of their organisations assume that media owners largely believe and expect that news content affects the perceptions and attitudes of the consumers that read, watch or listen to it.

By exposing consumers to slanted and differentially framed coverage, certain media owners can exert influence on the national or international political debate and access the additional non-financial utility benefits that media ownership can convey as opposed to ownership of companies in other sectors (e.g., Demsetz and Lehn, 1985; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Picard, 1994; Demers, 1996; Demers, 1999; Hanretty, 2014). As Nelson et al. (2011) argue, examinations of the determinants of media coverage may be important in their own right but ultimately they lead to questions about whether and to what

extent differential coverage affects public opinion. Therefore, while I have demonstrated a robust causal effect of ownership changes on news coverage elsewhere in this project, I turn to the research question of whether differential coverage has an independent effect on citizens' attitudes.

While media owners may themselves believe that controlling their outlet's content may in turn change minds and influence the political agenda, political communication scholars have long debated whether there is in fact any evidence for such an effect of slanted coverage. Similarly, certain scholars for a long period contended that these effects were as minimal as to be substantively irrelevant while others profoundly disagreed (see for example, Zaller, 1992; Iyengar, 1991; Chaffee and Metzger, 2001; Bennett and Iyengar, 2008).

While the vast majority of the media effects literature now agrees that media coverage can influence citizens' attitudes, significant care is still required in the construction of research designs to isolate the causal effect of news media. One of the central problems in identifying an effect of media coverage on public opinion involves overcoming the issue of endogeneity (e.g., Nelson et al, 2011). Experimental approaches are uniquely suited to addressing these concerns. In line with the literature, I argue that causal coverage effects on citizens' attitudes are best tested for in a randomized, between-subjects experimental design.

This chapter presents two experimental studies. The first employs an undergraduate sample broken into two treatment groups. The second study employs a larger fully representative sample administered through an online platform. Each treatment group receives differentially framed news treatments drawn directly from real stories in major commercial newspapers with different ownership structures. As this project concentrates on the case study of media coverage of labour, the experiment examines the effects of alternative news framing of a major contemporary legislative proposal regarding the role and activities of labour unions on the attitudes of participants towards organised labour. One news treatment presents the proposals as an effort to reduce harmful strikes and curb 'militant union activity' while the other presents the issue as a partisan attack on fundamental rights.

Importantly, this chapter contributes to a substantial strand of literature concerning media framing effects on political economy issues and outcomes. There are clearly significant scientific and social reasons to test for a media

effect on attitudes to unions. There is experimental and quasi-experimental evidence of media effects in issue areas that share institutional and ideological similarities to unions such as coverage of social movements and welfare payments to the poor (e.g. Gilens, 1999; Slothuus, 2007; Shen and Edwards, 2005; McLeod and Detenber, 1999). However, contentions that the news media have (negatively) affected the attitudes of citizens towards labour unions and contributed to their decline are at least as common in the literature as in these other issue areas (Parenti, 1993; Martin, 2004; Gitlin, 2003; Page and Shapiro, 1992). However, they have not been subject to the same types of rigorous empirical test. Substantively, the role, activities and regulation of labour unions is under substantial contemporary scrutiny in a number of industrialised economies including Britain (see below), Ireland²¹, many US states²², and Canadian provinces.²³ The news media clearly plays an important role as a conduit for information on these issues and any media effect identified here will have implications for the conduct and outcome of these debates. More broadly, an effect of news coverage on the attitudes of citizens towards unions is important as these general attitudes have significant effects on the propensity of potential members to join trade unions in the future (Visser, 2002). Therefore, an effect of differentially framed media coverage on attitudes to unions would help to specify whether news media content represents a means of shaping the general attitudes to unions of potential union members.

The results of both studies indicate that participants exposed to a stimulus story portraying unions as militants and identifying the proposals as reducing harmful strikes tended to demonstrate more negative views of unions compared to participants who read the story portraying the proposals as a partisan attack on unions and workers' rights. These results are robust to the inclusion of control variables for ideology, age, previous voting behaviour, and gender.

These results therefore suggest that differential news coverage can affect citizens' attitudes regarding the role of trade unions and their regulation, with important implications for contemporary discussions in this area. The two sets

²¹ See Irish Times. Wednesday 6 May. "Nash brings draft Bill on collective bargaining rights to Cabinet."

²² See for example, CNBC. Friday 29 May. "An American workplace war that's reached a tipping point."

²³ See for example, The Globe and Mail. Thursday 6 September. "The sorry state of our unions."

of results indicate that framing effects of this kind hold in both a traditional convenience sample setting but also in online experimental scenarios with broader demographics and in which the exposure and experimental environment are substantially different.

Literature: Framing and its effects

Recent scholarship on the effects of media information has tended to dismiss traditional 'hypodermic needle' or persuasion models and instead focus on three distinct types of subtle effects: agenda setting, priming and framing. Agenda-setting and priming are similar in that they are driven by the amount of attention that the media give to particular political issues and thus the effect is largely to tell citizens which issues they should care about and therefore which issues they should take into account when evaluating political leaders or forming policy preferences. In these models, the media affects the salience of a particular issue area rather than necessarily having an impact on how citizens should think about an issue.

Framing, in contrast, focuses on the content of media stories on a particular issue rather than the weight of coverage devoted to them. The underlying assumption here is that the characterisation of an issue in news stories affects how the public understand and consider an issue and that news organisations necessarily convey to some extent a narrative regarding the causes and/or consequences of a political problem or policy (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Dating back to early experimental psychology work by Kahneman and Tversky (1984), there is substantial evidence to show that the alternative presentation of scenarios, events or broader social issues can have significant impacts on the evaluations and attitudes of the audience exposed to these differing narratives (Iyengar, 1991; Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1997; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; De Vreese et al, 2011). While there is some debate in the literature regarding the precise conceptualisation of framing (see Druckman, 2001a), I adopt a broad, commonly used approach:

"Choices journalists make about how to cover a story—from the words, phrases, and images they convey to the broader 'angle' they take...can result in substantially different portrayals of the very same event and the broader controversy it represents." (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1997, 576)

Framing is commonly argued to affect the weighting individuals attach to a particular belief about an object, issue, or actor rather than altering the belief itself as in traditional persuasion models. Individuals are assumed to hold alternative beliefs about a topic, e.g. trade unions, and attach subjective weights to these beliefs that sum to an overall 'attitude.' By stressing certain narratives over others in reporting, frames can shift the weighting attached to a certain belief about unions. For example, an account of a strike portraying unions as disruptive or unconcerned about the inconvenience or damage a strike causes will increase the weighting attached to a belief that unions are troublemakers or a negative influence that should be controlled, affecting the individual's overall attitude to unions negatively for a time. An alternative account that stresses the needs and concerns of striking workers may alter the weighting attached to the belief that unions protect workers and therefore improve an individual's attitude toward unions. Framing does not necessarily replace one belief with another but instead alters the calculus of competing beliefs and emotional attachments that an individual holds at any given time. It is of course possible for lower salience issues that a frame will generate a more substantial belief that was not fully formed previously. That said, the above perspective on framing theory simply states that it does not have to persuade in this manner to have a significant effect on attitudes.

To identify any potential effect of differential news content on citizens' attitudes towards unions, it is this alternative presentation of identical labour-related information, policy and events that allows for an examination of the independent effect of coverage on attitudes. The limited literature looking at media coverage of unions has tended to focus on the frequency or topics of union-related reporting (e.g. Carreiro, 2005; Amenta et al., 2009) but these do not tell us much about the content of the reporting and little or nothing about its effect on attitudes.

The greatest potential for persistent framing effects occurs where the salience of the particular political issue being covered is relatively low day-to-day and the audience does not have strong underlying views that are impermeable to alternative narratives (e.g. Scheufele, 2000). A framing effect should be more likely to be observable in an issue area such as the coverage of labour unions as opposed to a higher salience political issue such as competitive partisan politics.

The use of alternative frames is one of the key mechanisms by which different media outlets and organisations can represent and present an issue and is therefore a useful analytical framework for this study that seeks to link variation in media outlets with the coverage they produce. Media outlets and their journalistic employees rely heavily on the often-repetitive use of particular frames to construct their stories and coverage of issues and actors, given time and resource constraints and the need to present information in a manner that is consistent, accessible, and easily consumable by the audience (Shoemaker and Reese, 2011).

Frame building is thus a core component of news production behaviour (Scheufele, 1999) and a likely location for social, organisational and indeed ownership effects to manifest themselves in the news content an outlet produces (Cobb and Elder, 1971; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). The framing of unions in this case, but potentially any economic or political issue, involves several aspects of a story, including how it is structured, what information is included, and what tone is adopted (e.g. Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Boyle et al., 2006; Hopmann et al., 2010). All of these factors contribute to the effect of framing on attitudes and fit closely with the theoretical mechanism of ownership effects over news production elsewhere in this project.

As mentioned above, there is substantial experimental evidence illustrating the effects of differential framing on attitudes on issues as diverse as social welfare payments (Slothuus, 2007), social movements (McLeod and Detenber, 1999), free speech versus public order (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1999; Druckman, 2001b) or the accession of Turkey into the EU (De Vreese et al, 2011). While some of these issues bear certain similarities to the coverage of trade unions, there are no studies directly looking at this issue in a causal context. Where the framing of labour unions has been examined at all, it has been solely using a content analysis approach (e.g. Simon and Xenos, 2000) which cannot clearly isolate any causal effect of coverage on those consuming it. That said there are numerous claims in the literature that the decline in the strength of trade unions and many of their defeats in major industrial relations battles are because of the influence of hostile news coverage on public opinion (Puette, 1992; Ryan, 2004). Similarly, there are major contemporary debates in a number of liberal market economies about what societal role unions should play and how their activities should be regulated (e.g. Hyman, 2015; Fine, 2015). If media

coverage can shape public perceptions of unions, then this is likely to be important as these debates evolve. This chapter seeks to test whether the claims of potential media influence have any merit.

Differential Framing of Labour Unions: A Contemporary Example

There are strong reasons to expect that particular socio-economic issue areas are more likely to induce ownership interference in the news content produced than other topics. Commercial media owners have structural incentives to influence the coverage their outlets offer where their own interests are strong relative to their readers' (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010). Examples may include proposals around regulatory frameworks (e.g. Gilens and Hertzman, 2000) with straightforward financial benefits in the immediate term. However, I argue they will also include broader policy arenas in which their long-term capital interests will be served such as the production of pro-business or anti-labour coverage. However, the ability of media owners to impose particular frames or 'lines' onto their journalistic staff is affected by the structure of the firm's ownership as demonstrated empirically in the previous chapter.

Firms under concentrated ownership display more negative and hostile coverage of trade unions than firms under diverse ownership. This greater negativity of coverage is due to their heightened ability and incentive to control staff and their content outputs. Having demonstrated this pattern of coverage in content analysis work previously, I select a contemporary union-related story from a media outlet under concentrated ownership and a diversely owned outlet and examine whether there is an independent effect of the differential framing of this story on citizens' attitudes. This allows for the incorporation of the broader theoretical propositions of the project into the experimental design even if this experiment is not itself intended as a systematic examination of ownership effects on content.

To this end, I present the example of the coverage of a recent set of proposals from the Conservative government in the UK announced in mid-July 2015 that are intended to curb a number of the major instruments available to trade unions to advance their cause and the interests of those they represent. Focusing on a significant contemporary topic such as this avoids the problems associated with presenting 'emaciated frames' (Kinder, 2007) which fail to

produce observable effects among participants because importantly, they fail to approximate framing and coverage as it is commonly observed in news media.

These proposals include measures to implement a 40 per cent threshold for strikes to be valid in the public sector and require repeated mandates for strike action to be valid every four months. The plans also allow employers to hire agency staff to replace striking workers, criminalize 'unlawful' or 'intimidatory' picketing (including sanctions for certain social media practices), alter union membership contributions to the Labour party to an opt-in system and limit the amount of time public service workers can spend on trade union activities. These proposals and their likely effects represent a clear contemporary example of political efforts to affect the strength of trade unions and fit with the pattern of political 'delegitimation' of union activities discussed in the political economy literature (e.g. Culpepper and Regan, 2014). This contemporary case offers significant advantages over hypothetical, constructed stimuli (see below) or more historical coverage. The approach chosen in this chapter increases the experiment's analytic utility and restricts difficulties emanating from the historical context of the articles. Debates over the regulation and legal standing of unions are also contemporary issues in many liberal market economies as mentioned in the introduction.

The articles selected as stimuli are drawn from outlets that differ in their concentration of ownership and ideological orientation and critically their tone and framing of the proposals. The coverage by the first outlet, the *Daily Mail*, concentrates on the militancy of unions and their barons and the number of days of essential services lost to strikes. This report clearly displays more hostility and negativity towards unions and characterises them as disruptive and disproportionately powerful. The second outlet, the *Daily Mirror*, highlights the 'punitive' nature of the proposals, their controversial and ideological nature and the imposition the proposals will place on the ability of unions to organise strikes. This report is more sympathetic and supportive towards unions highlighting their social importance and the threat these proposals present to organised labour. Both stories contain key conceptual components of differential coverage, that is, they differ in their primary slant, tone, selection and emphasis of lead frame (militancy and detrimental effects on services versus attacks on unions' ability to represent members), selection and emphasis of sources (e.g.

employers' groups) and consequently, the presentation, word choice and language while drawing on the same 'proximal' cause.²⁴

Exposure to one of these frames is expected to produce an effect on attitudes to labour unions by altering the weighting attached to competing beliefs about these actors. Given that this example relates to the regulation of trade unions, we expect attitudes to unions to be tapped by two distinct questions that will constitute the dependent variable(s) in both studies. The central questions are (1) assessments of whether unions have too much power, and (2) the need for strong legislation to control trade unions. The questions are in line with slightly adapted question wording from British Election Studies (as well as other election studies and common polling questions) from the last three decades. These represent core, valid and reliable measures of attitudes to unions and closely relate to the alternate framing of these proposals.

The hypothesised effect of these differential frames is therefore relatively straightforward; exposure to the negative and hostile framing of unions and their activities in the coverage of the Trade Union Bill proposals will, all else equal, produce negative effects on attitudes towards unions while positive and sympathetic framing of unions with regard to these proposals will have the opposite effect.

Hypothesis 1: *Participants exposed to the negative and hostile framing of unions will express more agreement that unions have too much power as compared to those exposed to the positive and sympathetic frame.*

Hypothesis 2: *Participants exposed to the negative and hostile framing of unions will express more agreement that trade unions' activities should be strictly regulated as compared to those exposed to the positive and sympathetic frame.*

Two Research Designs: Approaches to Increasing External Validity

The central advantage of experimental designs such as this is that they allow for the isolation of potential causal effects by neutralising the effects of

²⁴ While there is some debate in the literature around the central components of differential news framing, these elements are common to all major approaches over recent decades (e.g., Gitlin, 2003; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Reese, 2001; Entman, 2004; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2006; Shoemaker and Reese, 2011).

confounding or endogenous variables through randomisation (Morton and Williams, 2010). The classic drawback of these studies is that they lack external validity and the results of experiments cannot be expected to generalize to the outside world. While this issue can never be overcome entirely, I move to address some of the typical limitations on external validity from other media framing research. Firstly, I leverage a real-world contemporary story that relates directly to my topic of interest rather than producing a hypothetical set of proposals or otherwise inventing a story topic.

Secondly, I used real alternative accounts of this story from national newspapers rather than artificially constructing the frames. This approach has advantages both empirically and theoretically. By selecting stimuli straight from real newspapers, the treatments draw directly on the decisions and processes that news professionals have engaged in across the two different news outlets and the content they each ultimately produced in their respective organisational environments. While the stories are selected from real-world outlets, respondents in both studies were not informed of the actual identity of the outlet that produced the story they are reading to limit any potential cue that may emanate from the identity of the newspaper (e.g., Druckman, 2001b).

Constructed stories are developed by non-journalists without the experiences and influences that are associated with working in these organisations. Constructed articles will therefore fail to approximate the news style, format, and slant of real, journalist-produced articles because these artificial stories are not derived from traditional news values (see for example, Lee, 2009). Fully constructed stories may produce inaccurate estimates of their effects on respondents' attitudes particularly as we might expect these effects to manifest themselves in citizens' everyday consumption of news coverage. In addition, as the stories are drawn directly from actual news reports, concerns about the unrealistic intensity of frame presentation that may be associated with constructed news stories (Kinder and Palfrey, 1993) is not a major issue here. That said, it is important to address some of the drawbacks associated with actual news reports as stimuli in the design phase.

In the undergraduate study, a standardised summary of the factual aspects of the law being proposed is used in the middle of the article so that the differential coverage treatments such as lead framing, slanted language, and source selection are allowed to vary while central factual elements are retained as

standard across the two articles. The language of these summaries is a balanced composite from the two original articles. The main variation between the articles is therefore based on selective slant, presentation, sources and quotations rather than the presentation of entirely different information (Nelson, 2004; Slothuus, 2007). This first approach leverages the realism and theoretical utility of using real stories while enabling a clear identification of the treatment elements that differ between the two. Standardising core factual elements of the story treatments also enables the use of an easily comparable set of factual questions in the post-treatment phase to examine attentiveness and hide the purpose of the experiment.

There are however two legitimate concerns that this standardisation process and the employment of attentiveness questions may raise. Firstly, standardisation of any aspects of the article beyond the removal of identifiers moves the treatment articles away from their original formatting and journalistic structure thus reducing the 'real-world' basis of the treatments. Secondly, the use of such attentiveness questions while very helpful in ensuring concentration and avoiding random box-ticking may constitute a 'second treatment' and produce a 'quiz effect' from participants who wish to answer the questions correctly (Berinsky et al., 2014). In light of these concerns, the online study removes the standardisation of the facts of the Bill and any factual questions about the key union-related treatment stories as the online platform already provides the incentives for participation and attention to task the factual questions are used for in the undergraduate study.

The stories were also adapted in both studies to remove localised and personalised identifiers in order to render the articles broadly suitable as stimuli in this environment and so that the newspaper, author or named participants do not trigger reactions independent of the story's content and framing. This should have helped to obscure any possible exposure to these stories when they were reported in the real world.²⁵ The stories were edited for length to be suitable as experimental stimuli and to approximate the kind of newspaper-

²⁵ Clearly possible previous exposure is a potential drawback of using real-world stories over constructed stories. However, I argue there are more benefits to using real stories that outweigh this problem. The stories were originally published in July 2015 while the undergraduate and online experiments were conducted in November 2015 and February 2016 respectively.

based stimuli used in similar experiments by other researchers (e.g., Slothuus, 2007).

The other very common concern about the generalizability of experimental results involves the common use of undergraduates as a convenience-based sample because of the perceived distinctiveness of the student population versus the public. While a meta-analysis of framing effects experiments finds that the behaviour of student participants does not differ systematically from the behaviour of non-student participants (Kühberger, 1998), there is still the potential for the lack of demographic diversity to bias results in rare cases (Druckman and Kam, 2011). This chapter offers an opportunity for methodological insights into potential variation in the effects of news framing between the student sample in the first study and a more fully representative online sample in the second study. Given that the vast majority of framing studies of this kind have relied on undergraduate samples, this chapter offers a relatively novel opportunity for direct comparison of whether and how this relatively recent source of experimental samples differs from the traditional student experimental base in its response to framing treatments in a near-identical experimental procedure.

Experiment 1: Undergraduate Participants and Procedure

As in much of the previous experimental research into framing effects, participants in the first study are randomly assigned into two groups with each group receiving one of the two alternative representations of the proposals (Chong and Druckman, 2007). The sample was drawn from first-year undergraduates taking an introductory politics and society course in a lecture hall for access and logistical reasons. This may also help restrict demand characteristics associated with 'true' laboratory settings.²⁶ Following the receipt of informed consent from willing participants, 116 students took part in the study. Students were informed only that the study concerned media information and were not informed that there were different treatments within the overall group. Participation allowed willing students to be eligible for a draw for one of three gift vouchers. The sample size here compares favourably with the samples

²⁶ Requiring attendance in an unfamiliar or formal location to meet with the experimental researcher and strictly for the purposes of participation in the experiment can increase the 'demand characteristics' of experimental designs i.e. the desire to give the researcher what he/she is looking for.

employed in published studies in this area that employ two treatment groups (e.g., De Vreese, 2004; Schuck and de Vreese, 2006).

The students were divided into the two groups based on positioning within the hall. This was to ensure that students receiving alternate treatments were not beside one another in a further effort to obscure the treatment and variable of interest. The only discernible pattern here is gender-based; while the overall sample is predominantly female, the negative frame group is much more equally split than the positive frame group. There is no reason to expect either men or women to be disproportionately influenced by media frames. More broadly, while it is not possible to dismiss a social cohort seating effect entirely, it seems highly unlikely that seating patterns would affect effects of media frames or attitudes to trade unions. The valid sample collected was 113 participants post-test²⁷ (79 women, 34 men), with the first group (positive frame) made up of 61 participants and the second group (negative frame) made up of 52 participants.²⁸

Participants in each group received one of the two newspaper stimuli²⁹, referred to in both cases as the 'Herald Post' and with the same layout. The stimuli included the alternative representation and framing of the proposals and a version of the main headline reflecting this representation as well as an identical second story concerning a recent report on patterns of transport behaviour in Ireland.³⁰ These reports, shorn of identifiers, may have appeared constructed or hypothetical but were not as noted above.

Along with the stimuli, participants received a questionnaire with a series of factual questions on each story along with the test questions regarding attitudes to unions discussed above.³¹ This was intended both to obscure the treatment by suggesting the study related to attentiveness but also as a check against indiscriminate answers. In this study, the union attitudes questions are all on a five-point scale rather than the binary scale used for the power and strict regulation questions in the BES. The five-point scale provides more analytical

²⁷ Three participants who failed to fill out more than half the questionnaire were discounted.

²⁸ In order to obscure the treatment, it was not desirable to move participants to produce equal size groups.

²⁹ See Appendix 3.1 for newspaper stimuli in basic text format.

³⁰ Again, all identifiers of location, individual identities, and original source were removed.

³¹ See Appendix for questionnaire as presented.

utility in an experimental design than binary measures by enhancing the ability to detect differences in attitudes between the groups receiving the different treatments. I move to a 7-point scale in Study 2 as discussed below.

There were also similar pseudo-test questions regarding environmental attitudes drawn from the BES and INES to accompany the second, diversionary story to help obscure the treatment and questions of interest. Participants were finally presented with a set of demographic questions and value questions plausibly related to attitudes towards unions. These included questions on issues such as ideological self-placement and party vote choice in the UK and Ireland. Randomisation should have eliminated other systematic issues regarding union membership or asymmetries of information here.

Experiment 1: Findings

Table 3.1 presents descriptive statistics on demographic and political characteristics by group in the undergraduate experiment. This table outlines the distribution on key variables that might plausibly moderate a media effect or otherwise predict attitudes to unions including gender, age, citizenship, class (based on a parental occupation proxy for a student sample), interest in politics, political ideology, and Irish vote choice.³² Apart from the significant gender variation discussed above, there are no significant differences in the mean of these variables between each group. We do of course see some of the characteristics that we would expect in a university student sample and that should be noted before attempting to generalize results. The largest age cohort is clearly the 18-24 category and no participants are over 54. The social class background (or at least the parental class) of participants is tilted towards professional occupations which reflects patterns of those who are likely to go on to third level education. Finally, the participants ideologically tend to lean left as we might expect of a younger cohort. While bearing these characteristics in mind, there is little reason to expect that any of these factors make them particularly likely to be more susceptible to influence from media frames in the manner hypothesised above than the general population.

³² It was posited that union preferences might not easily map onto Irish political party support so a UK vote choice variable was included in the questionnaire for comparison. However, many participants could not express a preference here so these results are discounted.

	Group 1 (Daily Mirror/Positive Frame)	Group 2 (Daily Mail/Negative Frame)
Gender		
Male	12 (19.67%)	22 (42.31%)
Female	49 (80.33%)	30 (57.69%)
Age		
18-24	50 (81.97%)	48 (92.31%)
25-34	4 (6.56%)	1 (1.92%)
35-44	4 (6.56%)	2 (3.85%)
45-54	3 (4.92%)	1 (1.92%)
Citizenship		
Irish	51 (83.61%)	45 (86.54%)
Non-Irish	10 (16.39%)	7 (13.46%)
Class		
Professional	34 (55.74%)	37 (71.15%)
Managerial/Technical	3 (4.92%)	3 (5.77%)
Non-Manual	6 (9.84%)	5 (9.62%)
Skilled Manual	6 (9.84%)	6 (11.54%)
Semi-skilled	7 (11.48%)	1 (1.92%)
Unskilled	1 (1.64%)	
N/A	4 (6.56%)	
Political Interest		
Very interested	14 (22.95%)	11 (21.15%)
Quite interested	23 (37.70%)	25 (48.08%)
Hardly interested	23 (37.70%)	13 (25%)
Not at all interested	1 (1.64%)	3 (5.77%)
Ideology		
0 (strong left)	4 (7.02%)	1 (1.96%)
1	2 (3.51%)	2 (3.92%)
2	3 (5.26%)	4 (7.84%)
3	14 (24.56%)	12 (23.53%)
4	12 (21.05%)	6 (11.76%)
5	13 (22.81%)	16 (31.37%)
6	3 (5.26%)	2 (3.92%)
7	3 (5.26%)	3 (5.88%)
8	1 (1.75%)	5 (9.8%)
9	0	0
10 (strong right)	2 (3.51%)	0

Vote Choice		
FG	9 (14.75%)	9 (17.31%)
FF	3 (4.91%)	7 (13.46%)
Labour	10 (16.39%)	10 (19.23%)
SF	6 (9.83%)	4 (7.69%)
Greens	6 (9.83%)	5 (9.62%)
AAA/PBP	5 (8.19%)	4 (7.69%)
Renua	3 (4.91%)	2 (3.85%)
Independent	6 (9.83%)	8 (15.38%)
Others	9 (14.75%)	3 (5.77%)
No answer	3 (4.91%)	0

Table 3.1: Demographic and Political Characteristics of Study 1 Participants

We now move onto the effects of the media frames themselves by first examining whether there is a straightforward significant difference between the mean values for each group on the key test questions. As the questions are asked on an ordinal 5-point Likert agreement scale, there is disagreement on whether such items can be treated as having parametric means and therefore whether t-tests can be used. De Winter and Dodou (2010) demonstrate that t-tests and Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests have very similar statistical power and using either does not affect the likelihood of Type I or Type II error when dealing with this type of data. I therefore present t-test results here for ease of interpretation. The MWW test produces substantively identical results. Greater agreement with the statements about trade unions is represented by lower values while disagreement is indicated by higher values. The results are displayed for each question below.

For the first question asking whether trade unions have too much power, Figure 3.1 displays the distribution of responses to the question grouped by treatment. There is a statistically significant difference between the average responses of the two groups that works in the expected direction. Participants receiving the newspaper report with negative and hostile framing of trade unions expressed greater levels of agreement with the statement compared to those who received the alternative positive and sympathetic frame and this effect was significant at the 99% level.

For the second question, asking participants to agree or disagree that stricter legislation is needed to control trade union activities, there was again a statistically significant difference between the treatment groups with those participants receiving the negative frame expressing more agreement with the

statement than those receiving the positive frame. This effect was again significant at the 99% level. Figure 3.2 displays the distribution of responses for this final question.

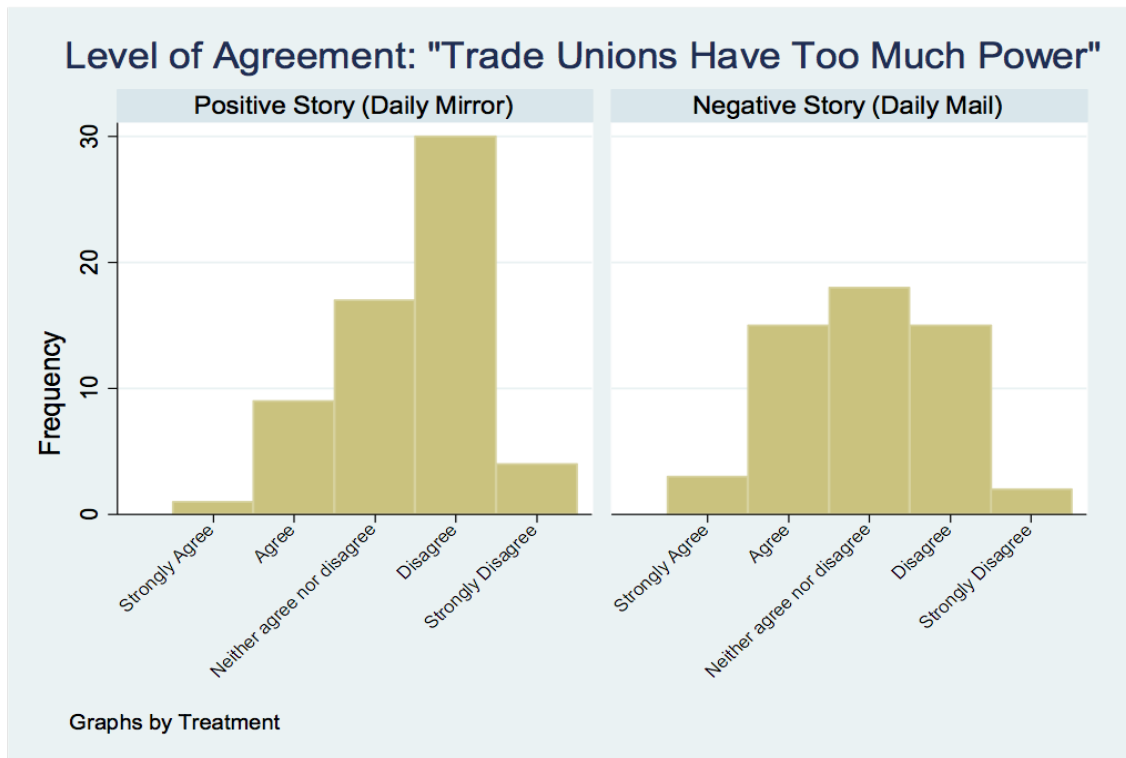


Figure 3.1: Study 1 Level of Agreement that "Trade Unions have too much Power"

Treatment Group	N	Mean	95% Conf. Interval	
Group 1 (Daily Mirror/Positive Frame)	61	3.442	3.215	3.669
Group 2 (Daily Mail/Negative Frame)	52	2.923	2.659	3.180
Difference		0.519	0.175	0.863

Table 3.2: Study 1 Difference-in-Means Test for Agreement with "Trade Unions have too much power." Difference is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

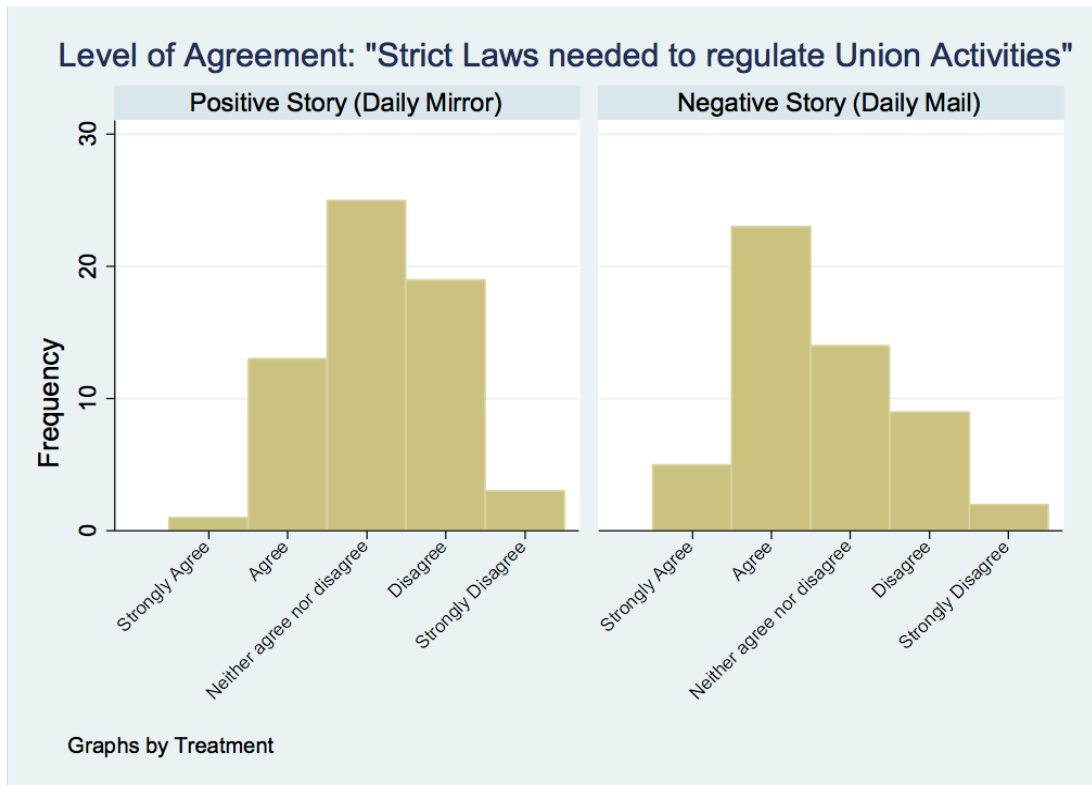


Figure 3.2: Study 1 Agreement that "Strict Laws are needed to regulate Trade Unions' Activities"

Treatment Group	N	Mean	95% Conf. Interval	
Group 1 (Daily Mirror/Positive Frame)	61	3.163	2.938	3.389
Group 2 (Daily Mail/Negative Frame)	52	2.576	2.310	2.843
Difference		0.587	0.242	0.932

Table 3.3: Study 1 Difference-in-Means Test for Agreement with "There should be stricter laws to regulate the activities of trade unions". Difference is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

I now move on to more parametric ordinal logistic models which allow for the inclusion of the control variables outlined above which may moderate the any framing effect. The results of a representative set of these ordinal models are displayed below in Table 3.4. Vote choice, age, and social class are not significant in any model, do not affect the significance of other variables, and

are therefore not presented here. There is no discernible effect of attention (as measured by answers to factual questions) in any version of the models either so this control is excluded from the illustrative model below. Again, lower values indicate greater agreement with the statements about trade unions having too much power and the need for strict laws to regulate union activities.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Unions have too much power	Unions have too much power (Controls)	Strict laws needed to regulate Unions	Strict laws needed to regulate Unions (Controls)
Negative Frame	-1.042*** (0.357)	-1.096*** (0.382)	-1.191*** (0.362)	-1.061*** (0.377)
Female		0.762* (0.427)		0.575 (0.423)
Ideology		-0.309*** (0.103)		-0.151 (0.0957)
High Pol Interest		0.347 (0.405)		0.372 (0.397)
Observations	113	108	113	108

Table 3.4: Study 1 Ordinal Logistic Models. Standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

As we can see, exposure to the negative frame is associated with significantly greater agreement with the statements about trade unions for both the “too much power” and “strict laws needed questions”. In line with the hypotheses above, a media framing effect tends to exist between the two groups with participants receiving the negative frame treatment expressing broadly more negative attitudes towards unions than those receiving the positive frame with this result being robust to the inclusion of the controls above. In fact, these results hold when all possible controls are introduced in other models. The stability of the treatment effects in these models suggests that the randomisation process was reasonably successful in that it appears to be orthogonal to these key control variables. More conservative self-placement is associated with more agreement with the statement that trade unions have too much power as would be expected and although this effect is not significant at

conventional levels in the above model for the regulations question, it behaves as expected and is in fact significant in some alternate specifications of these models. While it similarly lacks significance at conventional levels in the above illustrative models, there is evidence to suggest that female participants tended to display slightly more disagreement with the statements and thus somewhat more positive views of unions but this is not robust to all specifications.

Participants exposed to the negative treatment are approximately 66% less likely to be in a higher category i.e. to express more disagreement with the “too much power” and “strict laws needed” questions than those exposed to the positive treatment. By comparison, a one-unit move to the right on ideological self-placement decreases the likelihood of being in a higher category that is, disagreeing that unions have too much power, by approximately 25%. Perhaps more intuitively, we can observe the effects on the predicted probabilities of agreement with the statements based on receiving the negative treatment and holding other variables constant in figures 3.3 and 3.4. Figure 3.3 presents the effects for the trade unions have too much power question and we see that the results are largely driven by a sizeable increase in the likelihood of agreement rather than moving respondents to “strongly agree”. Receiving the negative treatment produces an increase in the probability of agreement of .167 and the treatment has an effect on “disagree” of -.187. For the strict laws needed question in Figure 3.4, the pattern is repeated with a significant increase in the probability of the “agree” response of .170 while the effect on “strongly agree” is only significant at the 0.1 level. The probability of the “disagree” response falls by .125 if exposed to the negative, Daily Mail treatment. While caution is required given that these results are obtained with a relatively small undergraduate group, these effects appear to be reasonably large. Taken together, the Study 1 results justify testing the hypothesised framing effects against a larger, more generalizable sample.

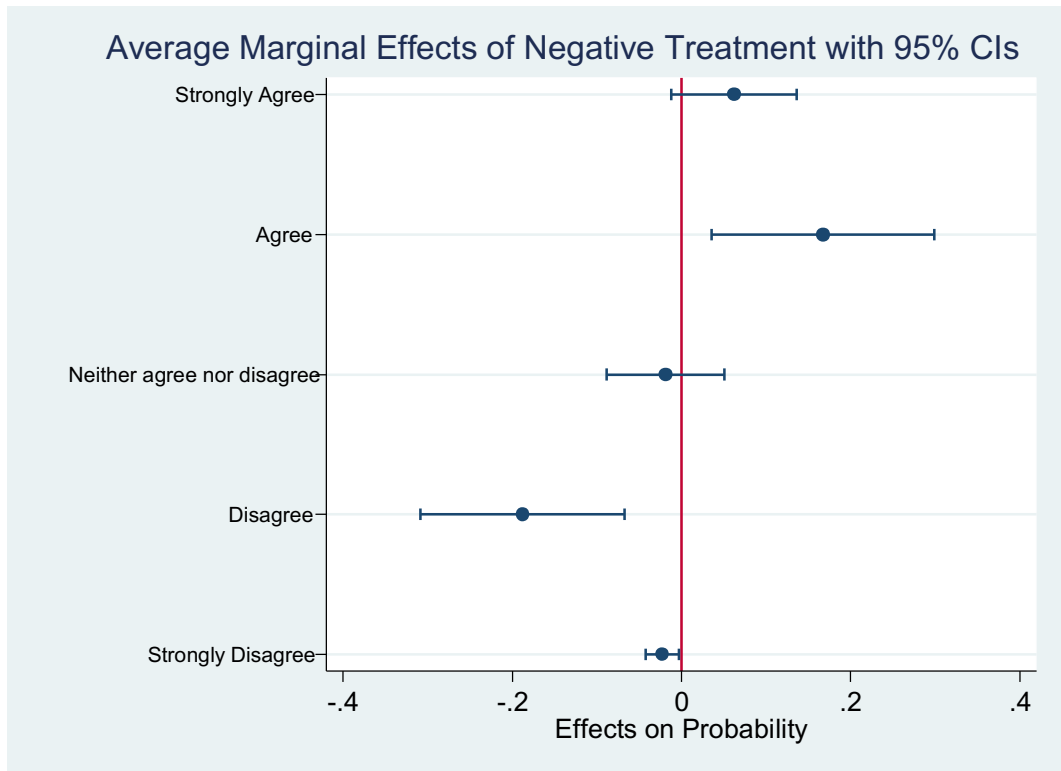


Figure 3.3: Undergraduate Experiment Effects on Predicted Probabilities of receiving negative treatment for the Trade Unions have Too Much Power question.

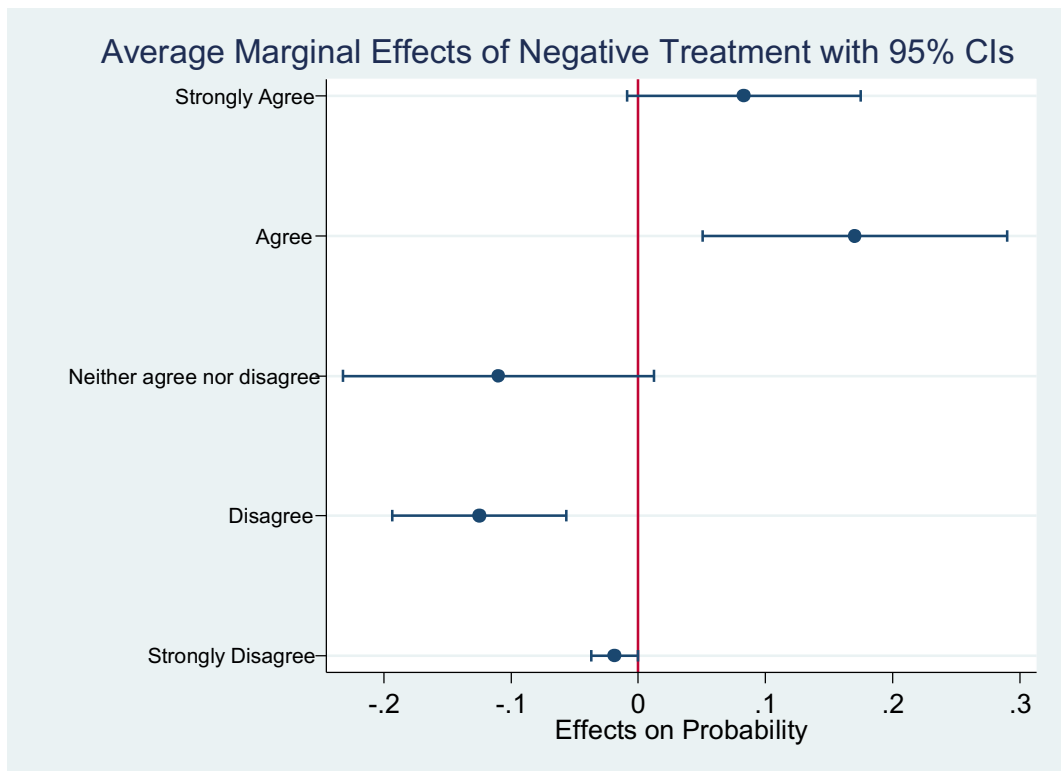


Figure 3.4: Undergraduate Experiment Effects on Predicted Probabilities of receiving negative treatment for the Strict Laws Needed question.

Experiment 2: YouGov Omnibus Participants and Procedure

The second study is an extension of the first approach using a much larger and more fully representative sample in a randomised survey experiment design via the online YouGov platform that was used to recruit a UK-representative, weighted sample of 1700 participants. The advantages of such online, systematically recruited samples for experimental media effects research are more fully outlined in Iyengar (2008). Briefly, online platforms overcome many traditional sampling problems by providing fully representative samples weighted to the general population. This addresses generalizability concerns. Online platforms also provide what Iyengar terms 'mundane realism' (2008: p.18). Unlike lab experiments where participants may be influenced simply by completing a task in an unfamiliar or artificial setting, online platforms allow participants to complete tasks in everyday spaces. These are the same spaces where they would consume normal media content. YouGov's opt-in internet Omnibus panel has been used in a number of studies with similar characteristics in the US and Europe (e.g., Campbell and Cowley, 2014; Borges and Clarke, 2008). While the UK Trade Unions Bill remained the topic of the news treatments, the logistical requirements of the online platform required the treatments to be presented as news stories rather than in the previous mock-newspaper format. Similarly, Study 2 removed the standardised factual account of the Trade Union Bill from the treatment stories in order to remain closer to the original format of the news story.

The standardised factual paragraph provided the basis for the test questions in Study 1 that were included to check for participant attentiveness but this is removed in the online format. This is intended to remove further barriers to external validity and due to potential concerns about the questions as a 'second treatment' or as a source of a 'quiz effect' where participants seek to provide 'correct' answers to both test and attitudinal questions. The concerns about attentiveness in the undergraduate sample are not as prevalent here given the shorter treatments and compensation for participation that respondents receive for joining and participating in the YouGov Omnibus platform. The use of the direct source material to the greatest extent possible is preferable where shorter overall treatments are being presented. In addition, the change of location from Ireland to the UK, where the proposals were more directly relevant and the

details better known, reduced the need for further specific detail in the form of an amended factual summary. The treatments in Study 2 are based directly on the original news stories but are simply edited for length and identifiers, retaining the lead paragraphs and thus the central focus of the stories as they were originally written. Substantively the treatments are near identical to the original Mail and Mirror stories.

Finally, the attitudinal questions in the Online Study are asked on a 7-point ordinal Likert scale rather than the 5-point scale used in Study 1. This is due to concerns about tendencies of participants to avoid extreme response categories and to align closer with recent standards in the public opinion literature. A 'Don't Know' option was also included as this is standard in YouGov Omnibus questionnaires. In order to guard against any potential priming issue because of receiving one of the attitudinal questions directly before the other that may influence the response to the second question, the order of these key attitudinal questions was randomised across the participant pool. The full text of the Study 2 treatment articles and the YouGov implementation of the questions for Study 2 questionnaire are included in Appendix 3.2.

Respondents were recruited by YouGov as part of the YouGov Political Omnibus platform as noted above. Consent is obtained from all participants as a condition of joining the Omnibus pool and respondents are compensated for participation separately by YouGov for joining and participating in the pool. Respondents were randomly divided into two treatment groups who were presented with one of the alternate forms of the news article on the trade union legislation and the total sample was 1700 respondents (764 male, 936 female). Along with the key attitudinal questions, participants were asked standard demographic questions on age, gender, geographic region, socio-economic status, and previous voting behaviour.³³ I present details of these responses below.

Experiment 2: Findings

Table 3.5 below presents raw descriptive statistics for the Study 2 participant pool on the demographic variables grouped by treatment category. YouGov aims for a fully representative sample rather than the kind of convenience sample

³³ These are panellist profiles and these questions were not therefore necessarily asked in the same round as the experiment took place.

employed in Study 1. As we can see though in the raw data here, there are somewhat more female respondents in both groups while there is a much more evenly balanced age profile, as we would expect compared to Study 1 that used undergraduates. On political and socio-economic variables, we see that respondents drawn from higher socio-economic groups are more common in both treatment classes while voting behaviour is evenly balanced across the two groups alleviating any possible confounding effects of over-representation of Conservative or Labour voters in either of the groups.

	Group 1 (Daily Mail/Negative Frame)	Group 2 (Daily Mirror/Positive Frame)
Gender		
Male	388 (46.3%)	376 (43.62%)
Female	450 (53.7%)	486 (56.38%)
Age		
18-24	104 (12.41%)	75 (8.7%)
25-34	119 (14.2%)	147 (17.05%)
35-44	143 (17.06%)	143 (16.59%)
45-54	125 (14.92%)	140 (16.24%)
55-64	162 (19.33%)	146 (16.94%)
65-74	166 (19.81%)	185 (21.46%)
75-84	19 (2.27%)	25 (2.9%)
85+	0	1 (0.12%)
Social Grade		
AB	266 (31.74%)	253 (29.35%)
C1	254 (30.31%)	260 (30.16%)
C2	152 (18.14%)	164 (19.03%)
DE	166 (19.81%)	185 (21.46%)
Region		
1 North East	39 (4.65%)	39 (4.52%)
2 North West	89 (10.62%)	87 (10.09%)
3 Yorkshire and the Humber	88 (10.05%)	74 (8.58%)
4 East Midlands	53 (6.32%)	56 (6.5%)
5 West Midlands	73 (8.71%)	67 (7.77%)

6 East of England	91 (10.86%)	79 (9.16%)
7 London	93 (11.10%)	116 (13.46%)
8 South East	105 (12.53%)	133 (15.43%)
9 South West	86 (10.26%)	90 (10.44%)
10 Wales	35 (4.18%)	46 (5.34%)
11 Scotland	86 (10.26%)	75 (8.7%)
Vote Choice		
Conservatives	231 (27.57%)	241 (27.96%)
Labour	238 (28.40%)	218 (25.29%)
Liberal Democrats	53 (6.32%)	64 (7.42%)
UKIP	87 (10.38%)	84 (9.74%)
Green	36 (4.3%)	30 (3.48%)
Other	54 (6.44%)	40 (4.64%)
Don't Know/Didn't Vote	139 (16.59%)	185 (21.46%)

Table 3.5: Demographic and Political Characteristics of Study 2 Participants – Data from YouGov.

Next, we move to examine whether there are any differences between the two treatment groups for each of the attitudinal questions. Again, I employ difference-in-means tests as a first cut for the reasons outlined above and then present full ordinal logit results in Table 3.6. Figure 3.5 graphically presents the difference-in-means result for the “Trade Unions have too much power” statement using the 7-point Likert scale with ‘Don’t Know’ responses excluded. Again, lower values indicate greater agreement with the statement. The effect here is in the expected direction with the group receiving the negative news frame regarding trade unions indicating greater agreement with the statement than the group receiving the positive frame with this difference significant at the 95% level.

Figure 3.6 presents the difference-in-means result for the final attitudinal question relating to the need for “strict laws to regulate the activities of Trade Unions”. While the difference here is not statistically significant at conventional levels, the direction of the effect is as expected and the difference is significant at the lower 90% threshold indicating that there is at least some suggestion that the differential news frames have had some effect.

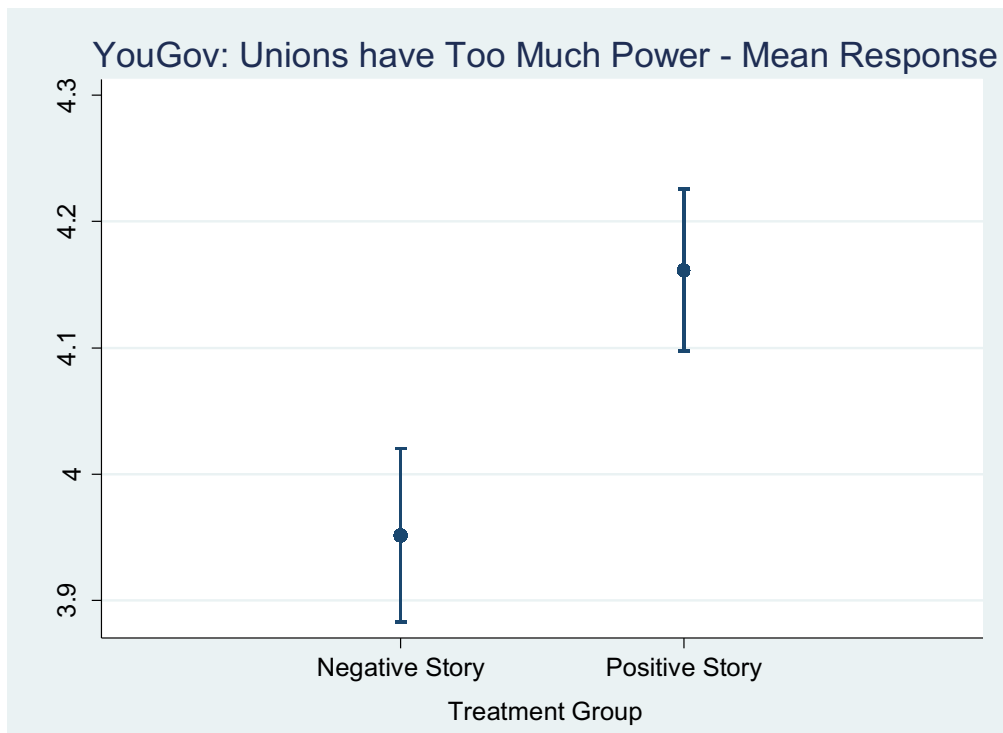


Figure 3.5: Study 2 Difference-in-Means by Treatment Group of Agreement with "Trade Unions have too much power." Difference is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

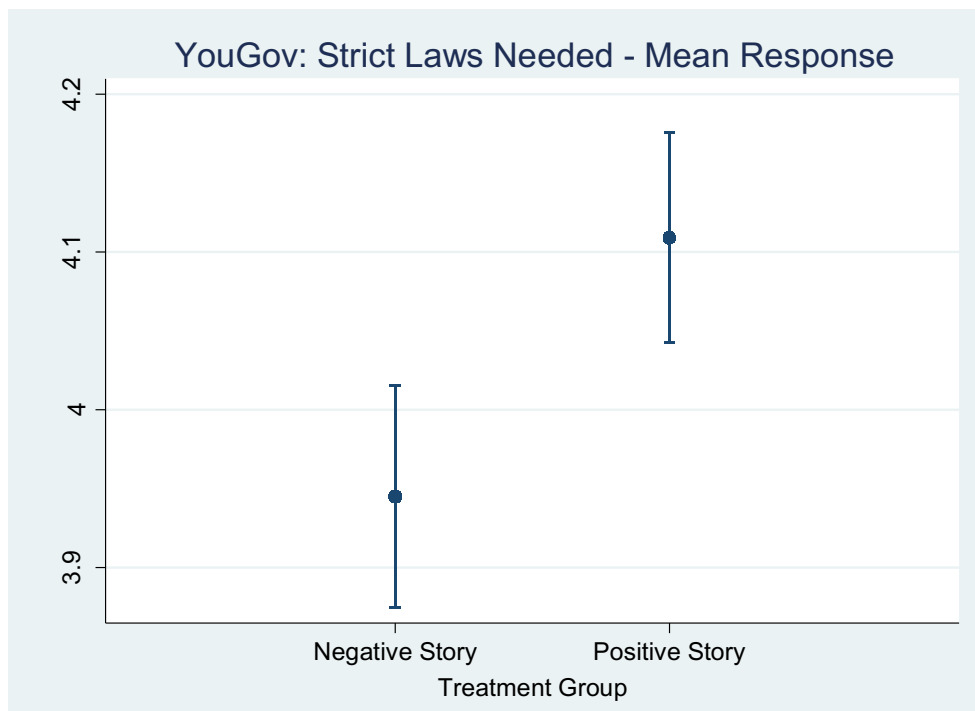


Figure 3.6: Study 2 Difference-in-Means Test by Treatment Group of Agreement with "There should be stricter laws to regulate the activities of trade unions". Difference is significant at the $p < 0.1$ level.

To examine whether relevant control variables exert any effect and/or behave similarly as in the results of Study 1, I again employ ordinal logistic regression models as the dependent variable of attitudes to unions is measured on the 7-

point Likert scale. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 3.6. Along with the treatment group variables, I use key control variables drawn from the YouGov panel demographic data – age, gender and reported past voting behaviour. Again as in Study 1 and the difference-in-means figures above, lower values of the dependent variable indicate more agreement with the particular statement. The randomisation of the order questions are presented has no effect in any of the models and is therefore not presented here.

In the trade union power models, there is a statistically significant effect of having read the news article which negatively portrays trade unions compared to those who receive the positive, Daily Mirror news article. Members of the YouGov panel who read the negatively framed article were, as expected, more likely to agree that trade unions have too much power. This effect is robust to the inclusion of demographic variables that behave as expected. There is no independent effect of gender or age on responses and the partisan effects operate as we would expect, with Labour and Green voters more likely to disagree with the statement while Conservative and UKIP voters are more likely to agree. Holding these other variables constant, receiving the positively framed (Daily Mirror) treatment resulted in odds of higher levels of disagreement that trade unions have too much power of 1.40 compared to receiving the negative (Daily Mail) treatment. Perhaps more intuitively, Figure 3.7 presents the effects on the predicted probabilities of a respondent selecting a particular response to the question regarding whether unions have too much power if they received the negative, Daily Mail treatment. These predicted probabilities are based on the multivariate models and hold additional explanatory variables constant. This figure illustrates that the results hold for each category of outcome apart from the neither agree nor disagree category but tend to be larger for the more polarised categories with negative treatment exposure producing more likelihood of strong agreement (.031) or agreement (.022). While these effects are not strikingly large, the presence and persistence of an effect when introducing controls is still important given that this is a one-shot exercise and we might expect small effects of news framing to be cumulative over time when exposed to these frames in the real world.

For the second question relating to the need for strict laws to regulate unions, the coefficient for the negative frame treatment group (compared to the positive

frame treatment) is signed as expected and, while not significant at conventional levels, is suggestive of a similar pattern to that which was hypothesised above. This movement in the treatment effect suggests that the randomisation procedure across groups is not entirely orthogonal to other key factors and further motivates examination of the effects of other explanatory factors for each question. Indeed when the same controls are introduced, there is a statistically significant effect of reading the negatively framed/Daily Mail article with respondents in this group being more likely to agree that there is a need for strong regulation of unions. Again, gender and age are not significant in this model while partisanship behaves as expected. The results therefore seem to suggest a similar effect is in operation even if it does not meet conventional thresholds for significance in the absence of controls. Citizens who receive negative coverage of unions and coverage that stresses the need for their militancy to be controlled do appear more likely to express agreement with the need for strict regulation than those who receive coverage that is more sympathetic. Substantively using odds ratios once more, we see that those receiving the positive Daily Mirror treatment were approximately 1.32 times more likely to have a higher level of disagreement with the need for strict regulation of trade unions and their activities holding other explanatory factors constant. Finally, Figure 3.8 again displays effects on predicted probabilities of receiving the Daily Mail negative treatment on each of the response categories for the strict laws needed question. Once more, the effects for each of the agreement and disagreement categories are statistically significant and we see comparable effects to those for the too much power question with an effect on strong agreement of .027 and on agreement of approximately .02.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Unions too power	have much Unions too power (Controls)	have much Strict laws needed to regulate Unions	Strict needed to regulate Unions (Controls)
Negative Frame	-0.220** (0.094)	-0.339*** (0.098)	-0.173* (0.094)	-0.280*** (0.096)
Age		-0.002 (0.002)		0.002 (0.002)
Female		-0.019 (0.098)		-0.117 (0.098)
PastVote (Con)		-1.458*** (0.140)		-1.466*** (0.139)
PastVote (Lab)		0.995*** (0.146)		1.003*** (0.146)
PastVote (Lib Dem)		-0.191 (0.211)		-0.060 (0.139)
PastVote (UKIP)		-0.602** (0.234)		-0.703*** (0.224)
PastVote (Green)		1.340*** (0.239)		1.430*** (0.244)
PastVote (Other)		1.018*** (0.275)		0.827*** (0.267)
Observations	1530	1530	1534	1534

Table 3.6: Study 2 (YouGov) Ordinal Logistic Models. Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

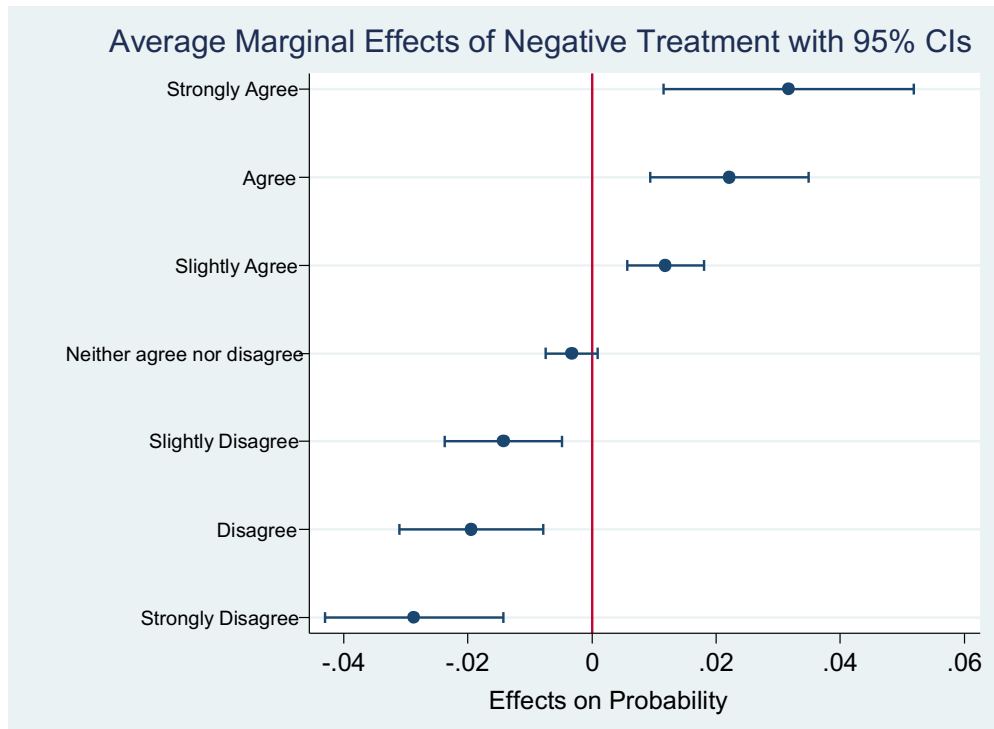


Figure 3.7: Marginal Effects on Probability of Agreement that "Trade Unions have too much power" for those receiving Negative Treatment holding age, gender and voting behaviour at mean levels.

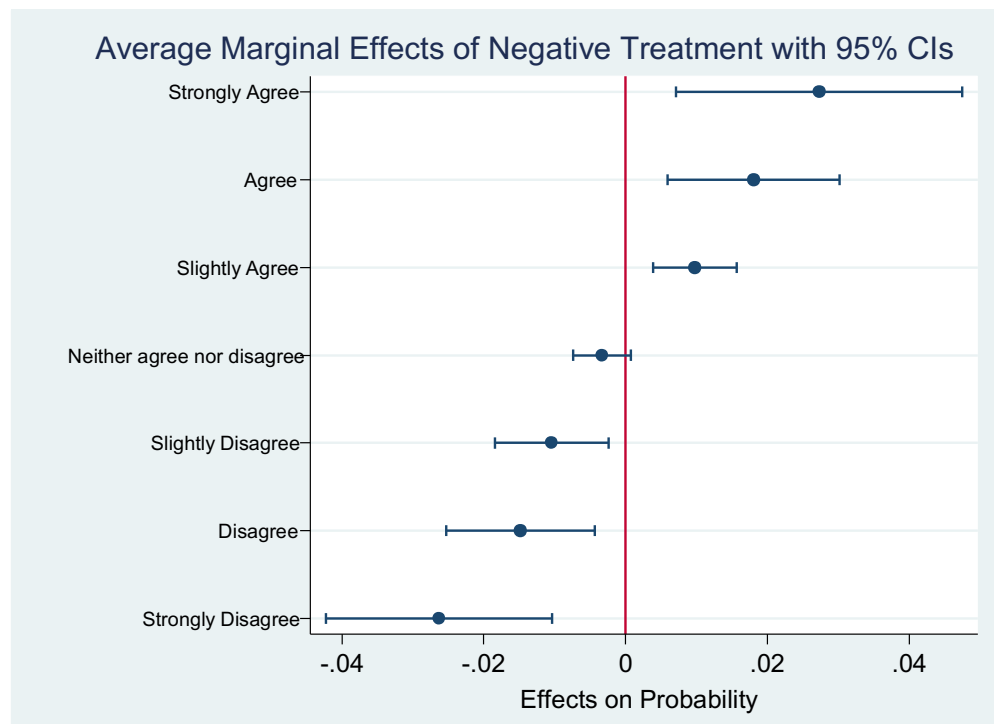


Figure 3.8: Marginal Effects on Probability of Agreement that "Strict laws are needed to regulate trade unions" for those receiving Negative Treatment holding age, gender and voting behaviour at mean levels.

Overall, the results of the much larger online study tend to confirm those found in the smaller, similar undergraduate study. Respondents exposed to a negative news frame of trade unions which stresses their militant tendencies and disruptive behaviour tend to agree that unions have too much power and that there needs to be strict regulation of unions as compared to those who receive news coverage that is more sympathetic to labour unions. These effects persist even when demographics and previous voting behaviour are controlled for. This is particularly important given that this is a one-time exercise and we might expect the effects of such news frames to be largely cumulative in the real world. By demonstrating how different news coverage can independently affect attitudes in this experimental setting, we garner significant insights into how such effects might well operate outside of survey and laboratory settings.

Comparing the undergraduate and online studies, we find that while the direction and statistical significance of the effects are broadly comparable, the size of the effects is substantially smaller in the online scenario. There is therefore support for both schools of thought on the common use of undergraduate samples in framing studies. Student samples and their behaviour may well be a reasonable approximation of the general population given resource constraints but there is also evidence to support the classic concerns that student samples may be more easily and substantively influenced than more fully representative samples (e.g., Sears, 1986). There are a number of potential explanations for the larger effects in the undergraduate study compared to the somewhat more muted results in the larger online experiment which largely relate to the differences in the format of each study. Firstly, the attentiveness questions may have induced a certain 'quiz effect' in the participants who sought to give the 'correct' response to both factual test questions but also the key attitudinal questions after reading the treatment article. This was not an issue as the factual summary and test questions were removed for the YouGov experiment. An effect may also have resulted from the presence of the experimenter in the location when the study took place or the 'authority' of the university setting which may have induced a desire to produce the response the researcher 'preferred.' These effects could not arise in the online scenario. Alternatively, the mock-newspaper format used in the undergraduate study may produce larger effects than on the online platform where the presentation of material is standardized.

Conclusion

This chapter describes two experimental approaches, an undergraduate in-person design and an online survey experiment, used to examine a potential media framing effect on attitudes to trade unions by leveraging differentially framed real world reporting of a contemporary set of proposals to alter trade union activities and organisation. We see that in both studies participants randomly selected into alternate treatment groups differ in their reported attitudes to trade unions in the post-test questionnaire with those exposed to more negative and hostile framing of trade unions more likely to agree that unions have too much power and require strict regulation. These results are robust to the inclusion of a number of control variables that may otherwise plausibly predict attitudes to unions.

The presence of an effect of this kind in both a large, diverse online sample as well as a more traditional undergraduate convenience sample has important implications. It lends some support to the common claims about the effects of negative coverage of unions in the political communication, political economy and public opinion literatures (e.g. Martin, 2004; Gitlin, 2003; Page and Shapiro, 1992) but which have rarely been empirically tested. This study also sheds light on potential differences between convenient offline sample bases like undergraduate students and more representative online cohorts with evidence to suggest that while both sample groups are subject to similar effects, the relative size of the effects suggests that students may be more subject to persuasion by frames than the general population. Students may have less well-formed views of unions than those later in the life cycle and similar patterns may hold for similar types of framing studies in the political communication literature. Online platforms now offer a relatively low-cost method of accessing populations that are more representative to test for the persistence and validity of these kind of effects.

Overall, the results of these studies have important consequences for policy development. The findings suggest that differential news coverage can indeed affect citizens' attitudes regarding the role of trade unions and their regulation. There are important implications for contemporary discussions and policy developments as well as offering insights into theorised processes of

'delegitimisation' of labour unions (Culpepper and Regan, 2014) and the key role of politics and public opinion in explaining variation in union decline. Media partisanship and/or the structural effects of news media ownership and organisational conduct have been demonstrated to produce particular patterns of news coverage regarding issues such as labour unions. This coverage does indeed appear to have an effect on citizens' attitudes that we might expect to be extended and reinforced when exposed to more coverage over time. This has substantial implications for the conduct of policy debates and for the role of the media in providing information for citizens to form attitudes about key political and social actors and activities.

Chapter 4: Media Ownership, Coverage Effects and Dynamic Attitudinal Change: The Case of the 1984-85 UK Miners' Strike

Abstract

Do media owners influence their outlets' coverage of events and actors in order to affect citizens' attitudes? In the media ownership literature, difficulties arise in isolating and testing the two-step mechanism of owner effects on news coverage and coverage effects on citizens because of methodological issues of differential exposure to news or consumer-side endogeneity concerns. This paper offers an approach to overcoming these issues by selecting a news event of substantial salience, the 1984-85 UK Miners' Strike, to support assumptions of broad citizen exposure to news coverage and examining attitudinal change of consumers of differentially owned outlets. Leveraging the unique circumstances of the Miners' Strike and a combination of comprehensive quantitative text analysis and panel survey data, I assess the coverage of this major industrial conflict and its effect on citizens' attitudes. Results indicate that individual ownership is associated with more negative and hostile coverage of the strike compared to trust-owned outlets and public service broadcasters. Importantly I find that exposure to coverage from outlets under different ownership structures affects citizens' attitudes but public service broadcasters' news coverage can offset the effects of negative coverage from private owners.

Introduction and Motivation

While effects of media coverage on attitudes have been demonstrated experimentally, concerns remain as to the generalisability of these findings to the real world. Even if news coverage has effects when exposure is controlled, real-world effects of news content may be limited by the attention that both media outlets and citizens themselves give to a certain topic (e.g. Price and Zaller, 1993; Kinder, 2007). Pairing observational data with experimental findings provides an avenue to validate these effects. It is critical though to develop a research design capable of circumventing problems of varying levels of exposure and self-selection. It is therefore particularly fruitful to identify news stories of such salience that assumptions about exposure, attention, and the penetrative strength of differential coverage are well supported.

With regard to media coverage of labour unions, the best example cases are significant industrial relations disputes and strikes (e.g. Witt and Wilson, 1999; Simon and Xenos, 2000). I select a key, highly salient union-employer battle, the 1984-85 UK Coal Miners' Strike, for which detailed panel public opinion data is available to test for effects of differentially toned media coverage. Considered to be the largest and most divisive British industrial battle since the Second World War (e.g. Adeney and Lloyd, 1986; Hencke and Beckett, 2009), the scale

and highly controversial nature of the Miners' Strike and the news coverage it generated clearly supports assumptions of broad-based exposure over the duration. The long-term significance of the divisiveness of the strike and its outcomes and the substantial scholarly arguments regarding the role of the media and public opinion in deciding the strike (e.g. Towers, 1985; Khabaz, 2006) further support examination of such a high-stakes, high-salience socio-political event.

The key research questions can be stated as follows. First, did variation in ownership structures affect the pattern of coverage of the strike across media outlets and second, did consumption of differentially toned media coverage from these outlets alter citizens' attitudes to trade unions during and after the strike? This chapter makes clear contributions by examining both the mechanism of owner effects in producing differential content, and the way in which consumption of this differential content affects citizens' attitudes. This is achieved by combining analysis of the effects of media coverage with content analysis of the media coverage itself that is relatively unusual in the media literature.

I examine first, via a content analysis, the tone of news coverage during this strike episode across available newspaper outlets that vary in their ownership structures. I then compare this with the tone of coverage provided by the Public Service Broadcaster (PSB) in the British 'dual' media market. Afterwards, I test for an effect of these trends in coverage across media outlets on public attitudes towards labour unions using panel survey data from before, during, and after the strike to test how and to what extent media effects manifest, persist and dissipate.

Results indicate that the tone of the coverage of the strike varied significantly across major British news outlets broadly in line with expectations based on the ownership structures of the outlets. Significant effects of differential media consumption on attitudes to unions are detected during the strike controlling for prior beliefs and other explanatory factors with these effects only fully dissipating somewhat following the resolution of the dispute. The evidence therefore suggests a relationship between media ownership and coverage of major strike events and an associated effect on those consuming the coverage, all else equal.

Literature Review: Survey-Based Studies of Media Effects

Despite the fact that the mass media are the primary means by which people receive information about politics and economics (Graber, 2014) and the intuitive expectation of media effects on attitudes that follow from this, there is a broad array of competing evidence regarding whether and to what extent the media matter. Much of the debate stems from the difficulties in making causal inferences about the effects of media on public attitudes and the substantial experimental literature in political communication is aimed at addressing these classic endogeneity concerns (e.g. Iyengar et al., 1982; Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1997; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Norris and Sanders, 2003). These studies, with their associated advantages, have consistently and convincingly identified media effects on public attitudes and behaviour in contrast to earlier work that had suggested little or no effect. While these between-subjects randomised designs clearly offer significant advantages in overcoming issues of endogeneity, their biggest limitation lies in generalising from an artificial experimental scenario where exposure is controlled by the researcher and the treatment(s) presented may often be artificially constructed and present overly strong media stimuli (e.g. Kinder and Palfrey, 1993; Gaines, Kuklinski and Quirk, 2007). These experimental artefacts may therefore potentially exaggerate and inflate the nature and scope of the effects present.

Media effects scholarship has concentrated on survey data with reported media exposure measures as the most commonly employed means of estimating media effects (Bennett, 1994; Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; Druckman, 2005; Barabas and Jerit, 2009). These studies offer the advantage of identifying whether citizens are exposed to news media at all and if so, which media they tend to consume, and are thus liable to be influenced and persuaded by. Panel surveys offer additional advantages in examining change in attitudes over time, the relative importance of media effects on attitudes compared with a variety of other political and social influences and the persistence of media effects as the salience of news events and topics waxes and wanes over time. The impacts of media exposure demonstrated using such panel studies span the spectrum from issue-specific political knowledge effects (Barabas and Jerit, 2009), framing effects based on news reporting styles (De Vreese, 2005) to partisan voting persuasion (Ladd and Lenz, 2009).

The Owner Influence Mechanism: Owner-effects on Content and Content-effects on Consumers

A central issue confronting many of these sorts of studies is that they tend to rely on self-reported exposure that is rarely paired with direct content analysis of the specific media that the respondents have been exposed to. As Graber argues, "Most researchers fail to ascertain, let alone content analyse, the media information that, they assume, their subjects encountered" (Graber, 2004, p. 516). In many cases, the questions employed to measure media consumption may centre on whether a respondent consumed news media at all or the most common form of media consumed i.e. newspaper, television, online news etc. These studies, suffering from measurement error (e.g. Bartels, 1993; Prior, 2006) tend to unsurprisingly produce null or minimal effects (e.g. Eveland, 2004; Craig, Kane and Gainous, 2005). Similarly, a strand of the literature that does address the differing nature of media content typically provides only an overview of content to inform broad assumptions about the nature of effects rather than directly linking content analysis to effects on attitudinal change (e.g. Druckman, 2005; Morris, 2005). Research pairing media content analysis with reported exposure and attitudinal measures is largely limited to the US with very few studies of content and effects in differing media and political environments.³⁴ This limited US literature does however tend to suggest that differentially toned or slanted coverage does in fact affect citizens' behaviour and beliefs (e.g. Druckman and Parkin, 2005; Linos and Twist, 2016). This chapter contributes to the literature by focusing on an alternative case country, the United Kingdom, with a contrasting and vigorous media landscape.³⁵

Combining examinations of actual media content and its effects on those who report having consumed it is particularly important when theorising and testing the importance of media ownership. The mechanism of ownership effects runs from owner control of, and influence over journalistic and editorial employees who produce news coverage of issues and events that citizens then rely upon to

³⁴ For a rare examination of paired content analysis and survey-based media effects outside the United States, see Schemer, 2012.

³⁵ The limited research in the UK tends to infer from broad editorial position and partisanship of news outlets when examining effects on attitudes (e.g. Norris et al., 1999; Newton and Brynin, 2001; Carey and Burton 2004, Ladd and Lenz, 2009). Even if these editorial position heuristics are largely accurate, they overlook the actual stimuli consumers are exposed to and assume away any actual separation between news reporting and editorial position or perception of separation by consumers. Unlike Curran and Seaton, they also do not separate affiliation from orientation.

weight their social and political views. There is limited literature that attempts to examine this mechanism of owner effects in the round. The scholarly research on media bias largely seeks to explain the degree and direction of partisan media bias based upon the differential use of partisan sources for expert citation or patterns of specific liberal and/or conservative politician rhetoric in news reporting (e.g. Groseclose and Milyo, 2005; Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006, 2010; Bennett et al., 2007; D'Alessio and Allen, 2000).

There are two main problems with this approach in inferring the presence or absence of ownership influence on media content more broadly. Firstly, scholarly research tends to concentrate overwhelmingly on traditional partisan bias which, given the findings on selective exposure and the role of media partisanship in news selection (e.g. Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2010), is the least likely area venue for owner influence on content to translate into causal media influence on attitudes. Instead, owner influence is most likely to occur where the interests of the owner(s) are strong relative to the reader (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010) and relatedly the topic area is an unlikely basis for consumers' media selection. Curran and Seaton (1997) argue that owner(s) may change political affiliation as the electoral landscape changes but the political orientation of their outlets regarding other issues and actors often remains constant. As argued elsewhere in this project and demonstrated in a natural experiment, the coverage of labour unions in liberal market economies is a much more likely case for owner interference and ultimately owner-driven media effects. This is all the more important in a high-stakes public relations battle like the Miners' Strike where public support is often considered to be the key to victory for both sides. Secondly, where consumer partisanship is examined, it is largely employed as an independent variable alongside ownership influence to explain news slant. This research therefore does not tell us much about the dynamics of opinion change as a result of ownership influence over news content where such influence does in fact occur – in issue areas where owners do influence coverage and slant, this may in turn affect pre-existing consumer preferences and partisanship as this coverage reinforces or challenges the audience's beliefs.

Theory and Hypotheses

As noted above, influence over the coverage of labour unions is likely to be more desirable to the owners of media organisations than for other issues which may

be more immediately salient to consumers and may play a role in consumers' media consumption preferences with resultant impacts on media organisations' bottom lines. Owners' business interests, both in the media sector itself but also in other markets, provide incentives for interference in the coverage of issues and actors that their outlets produce. This can provide financial benefits either directly through influence over the policy-making process or indirectly by shaping public opinion to set the parameters of public debate and/or altering the conditions under which political contestation takes place. This is most likely in issue areas with somewhat lesser salience where the public is particularly reliant on the media for information in developing an understanding of issues and the roles of particular actors. In the case of organised labour³⁶, negative coverage by their outlets can aid media owners' business interests by influencing both public opinion and policy so that unions' organisational capacity, political support, legal underpinning, and bargaining strength are reduced. The weakening of unions improves the ability of media owners to take control of other commercial entities, seek favourable policy change, and depress wage costs in the media sector and elsewhere. As discussed below, there are likely to be especially strong preferences for interference in the context of such an encompassing industrial relations dispute as the 84-85 Miners' Strike that was even contemporaneously expected to have long-lasting and far-reaching consequences for the relative strength of the labour union movement.

In the case of the Miners' Strike, the scale and significance of the dispute provided a particularly meaningful opportunity for media owners to influence political events and public opinion through their outlets' coverage at a critical juncture in British industrial relations history (Hencke and Beckett, 2009). The opportunity to influence the conduct and outcome of the strike through negative coverage of the miners and/or the use of particular frames and narratives in the news reporting of strike events represents a clear example of when media owners can achieve sizeable non-financial utility benefits from influence over their outlets.

Despite the structural incentives for control over content, the ability of media owners to access the personal amenity potential media ownership offers and impose the desired slant or 'lines' onto journalistic and editorial staff is

³⁶ At least in liberal market economies where the relationship between ownership and organised labour is largely conflictual.

significantly affected by a media organisation's ownership structure. As noted in earlier chapters, journalists and editors prefer freedom to produce stories with a tone/frame that results from underlying individual or socialised preferences or the events as they occur (Donsbach, 2004, Shoemaker and Reese, 2011). The journalists' freedom produces coverage which follows from the divergent preferences of independent journalists/editors or news professionalism norms. In addition, in a variety of political, social or economic conflict scenarios, decisions about whether and how to balance coverage are key decisions for media organisations and their staff. In this sense, journalistic norms of objectivity and fairness are important in providing balance to the narratives of the conflict (e.g. Hopmann, van Aelst and Legante, 2012). In the case of strike coverage, Harmon and Lee (2010) make the important argument that these events present special challenges to news organisations and opportunities to observe the clash between media owners/publishers and their staff directly. Specifically they point out that owners and publishers have common classwide interests with employers and have an interest in the broader weakening of organised unionism but that this can clash with reporters who are themselves workers, are often union members themselves, and may have sympathy for worker grievances (Harmon and Lee, 2010: 2, 8). Strike coverage (especially of high salience strikes) could then theoretically look somewhat different where ownership influence is weaker or absent and journalists have greater autonomy in the content they produce. There may still be certain patterns to this coverage as journalists often share common educational and socio-economic backgrounds that similarly influence their beliefs but this is unlikely to be overly systematic or to represent a forceful form of active and intentional direction in their work. As discussed, ownership allows for interference of a much more systematic nature either directly through intervention or through hiring and firing which produces a slant, framing, and tone of coverage that is embedded rather than random. Strikes are then an opportunity to observe the pressures of owner influence pushing against and potentially overriding journalistic norms.

As demonstrated empirically in chapter two, firms under concentrated private ownership display more negative coverage of trade unions than firms display under diverse ownership due to their heightened ability and incentive to control staff and their content outputs. In corporate publically traded firms, the diversity of shareholders reduces the political basis for editor selection and creates the

conditions for greater editor independence while this diversity similarly limits the ability of individual shareholders to influence staff on a day-to-day basis during news production. Private owners can however exert greater overt control or create the conditions for covert control as staff exercise rational anticipation of owner preferences.³⁷ Finally, the amenity potential of commercial media ownership is severely restricted where ownership is diverse and the incentive to control content is therefore reduced.

Privately-owned media firms therefore tend to produce coverage that is particularly negative and employs frames and narratives in news reporting which concentrates on the militancy of unions, their 'militaristic organisation', depicts their leaders as extreme or as 'union barons' and generally portrays unions as disruptive and disproportionately powerful. We would therefore expect that coverage of the 1984-85 miners' strike among privately owned media outlets to concentrate on these themes and framing devices and thus to be especially negative.

Hypothesis 1.1: Coverage of the Miners' Strike will be most negative among privately owned media outlets.

As demonstrated in experimental work in chapter three, consumers hold differing views on issues such as labour unions and afford these views varying weights but when exposed to media reporting and frames that highlight particular aspects of unions; this alters their overall evaluation of unions. This leads to Hypothesis 1.2.

Hypothesis 1.2: Individuals who consume coverage of the Miners' Strike from media outlets with concentrated ownership will express more negative attitudes towards unions, all else equal.

Alternative Ownership (1): The Guardian as a Trust-owned Newspaper

During the 1984-85 Miners' Strike and today, the British media landscape is a particularly interesting arena to examine the differential effects of ownership on coverage and the effects of this coverage on attitudes because of the substantial presence of alternative ownership models in the media environment (Aalberg, van Aelst and Curran, 2010; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Soroka et al., 2013; Ellis, 2014). Firstly, the powerful British press includes one of the few substantial

³⁷ These patterns of influence are explored in detail in the next chapter.

examples of an alternative non-commercial, non-state media entity still in operation, *The Guardian*³⁸ (Ellis, 2014). Gifted by a former owner and editor, C.P. Scott, *The Guardian* is run by the not-for-profit Scott Trust³⁹ and guarantees editorial independence and protection from interference or potential takeover by commercial entities. Both its structure and ethos as an independent newspaper are established in its constitution (Ellis, 2014) and journalists take editorial decisions collectively. The constitution prohibits partisan affiliation⁴⁰ or financial or non-financial benefits for Trust members. Taken together, the ethos and structure of *The Guardian* (as with other not-for-profit Trust owners) produces news production and presentation patterns which are likely to differ significantly from commercial outlets and especially from privately-owned outlets which are subject to the greatest likelihood of owner interference. With the provision of greater independence to journalists and editorial staff, coverage of unions and the Miners' Strike specifically by trust-owned outlets are likely to follow established norms of journalistic freedom (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Zaller, 1999; Ellis, 2014). This will likely produce much greater variety in the framing and narrative of news reporting work by the outlet and should not provide a systematic negativity in the news content⁴¹.

In reality, *The Guardian*, operating under trust ownership, has traditionally been left-leaning compared with much of the rest of the British national press – this orientation is in line with the expectations about the effects of differential ownership structures. This ideological orientation is driven both by the independence afforded to journalists within the organisation but also by the potential self-selection of journalistic staff, whose left-leaning views draw them towards positions at *The Guardian*. These are examples of twin 'observable' and 'non-observable' ownership effects respectively and while the respective mechanisms remain difficult to disentangle in the analysis here, both causal

³⁸ Additional notable examples are The Irish Times (see Chapter 5) and the St Petersburg Times (United States).

³⁹ Now known as The Scott Trust Limited but operating in the same manner as previously.

⁴⁰ For election endorsements, each Guardian (and Observer) staff member may contribute to a debate after which a vote is taken on how or whether to endorse.

⁴¹ An alternative explanation is that the Scott Trust and Guardian's constitution provision regarding the commitment to 'editorial independence' and 'the spirit of liberal values' explains patterns in journalistic and editorial coverage. The vagueness of the 'liberal values' provision and structural independence of journalists makes this explanation less compelling.

mechanisms and resultant effects are consistent with the broad theoretical premise.⁴²

In the context of the Miners' Strike, this ideological orientation is likely to result in less negative coverage than their privately owned, right-leaning competitors.

Hypothesis 2.1: Coverage of the Miners' Strike will be relatively less negative in the Guardian than privately owned competitors.

Consumption of this form of coverage by its audience will then produce relatively more positive views regarding the strike, the miners, and the goals of unions more broadly controlling for previous views.⁴³

Hypothesis 2.2: Individuals who consume coverage of the Miners' Strike from trust-owned, not-for-profit outlets will express more positive attitudes towards unions, holding other factors constant.

Alternative Ownership (2): Public Service Broadcasters (PSB) and the BBC

There is substantial variation between the preferences of commercial media owners' organisations and state-funded Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs). The primary case usually posited for the need for public service broadcasters is that these organisations are protected from the market incentives that condition the output of commercial news media organisations. They therefore provide more regular and substantive news (e.g. Soroka, 2012) and (at least nominally) more balanced and objective news, although there is variance here (e.g. Hanretty, 2010). Relatedly though, the structure of public service broadcasters and especially those funded entirely through public funds and with impartiality safeguards provides strong supports for editorial and journalistic independence and a tendency to objectively 'follow the facts.'

There is little basis for the conflictual preferences of commercial media towards unions to be found in PSBs which are likely to reflect professional objectivity or facilitate journalists' and editors' independence (e.g. Zaller, 1999). Journalistic independence or a requirement to 'objectively inform' are easier to instil in PSBs than commercial organisations due to the presence of a regulatory framework

⁴² I examine these competing causal factors in Trust-owned organisations in more detail in the next chapter.

⁴³ Obviously, there may be factors that explain Guardian readership and support for unions. To address this issue, I control for additional partisanship factors and support for unions from previous panel waves.

for the organisation at inception, the absence of a profit motive and enhanced job security. Due to the presence of institutional supports for journalistic independence, public broadcast media will produce less negative news coverage of unions.

The BBC is both the largest public broadcaster in the world and the most influential with a set of public service and independence norms and provisions that have strongly 'congealed' within the institution over eighty years (Hanretty, 2010). There are of course well-known concerns about the potential for governmental interference in public service broadcasters and either overt or covert influence over the coverage the PSB produces depending on the strength of de jure regulatory frameworks as preventative mechanisms to guarantee independence. These frameworks include the power of governments to sanction PSBs and their boards, the frequency of government appointments and the length of time for which funding streams from government are protected. The degree to which these frameworks have been effective in protecting the BBC has been long-debated, with the Miners' Strike providing a critical case study in which there was such significant criticism and allegations of bias in the BBC's coverage that it prompted an internal report headed up by the Assistant Director General (Protheroe, 1985). The core criticisms levelled at the BBC came from the National Union of Mineworkers which was critical of the BBC's concentration on the divisions in the mining union, the disputed degree of violence among pickets, and degree of provocation and proportionality of response by the police and latterly, the focus on the 'drift back to work.' In addition former Daily Mirror industrial editor Geoffrey Goodman in 2009 while chair of the editorial board of British Journalism Review, alleged that instructions were provided from "the highest levels of government" for the BBC to focus on miners' violence. Goodman insisted he had an "impeccable source". However in correspondence with the author here, Nicholas Jones, a BBC Radio labour and industrial correspondent at the time of the strike cast doubts on the idea that direct instructions were given. Yet, he did believe that over time the BBC's coverage did come to fall in line with the NCB and government agenda.⁴⁴

The charges of bias levelled at the BBC by the NUM in particular and addressed in the 1985 post-strike internal report cannot therefore be dismissed out of

⁴⁴ Correspondence with Nicholas Jones.

hand. There is limited scope for systematic negativity to the tone of coverage in comparison to the privately owned outlets as the methods and capacity for interference are not present in PSBs. Limited top-down influence does not mean that coverage of the strike will not be negative; simply that it will remain relatively less so than for privately owned outlets. The most likely avenue for interference and slant in BBC coverage of the strike comes in the form of government influence that Geoffrey Goodman alleged or from patterns of self-censorship that suit the government's position. The institutionalised independence of its journalists described and demonstrated by scholars examining the Corporation (e.g. Hanretty, 2009; Soroka, 2013) are expected to have substantially if not entirely protected the BBC in this regard. This expectation is largely supported by the testimony of Nicholas Jones who concentrates attention on the practices and routines of production and presentation within the BBC as more important than instruction or self-censorship (Jones, 2009 and correspondence).

Hypothesis 3.1: BBC Coverage of the Miners' Strike will be relatively less negative than among commercial media outlets.

Consumption of BBC coverage of the Miners' Strike is likely to produce both additive and moderating effects. As an alternative medium for news consumption contrasting with the newspaper outlets above, BBC coverage is often consumed separately and in addition to press coverage. While press coverage is particularly important due to the significantly greater depth of news that it provides as well as its influence over the news agenda, consumers will often supplement this consumption to varying degrees with aural or visual media. The BBC has also long provided one of the largest amounts of news and political information of any public broadcast outlet dating back a number of decades offering substantial additional news to those exposed to its coverage (Esser, de Vreese, Strömbäck, van Aelst et al., 2012). While the expectation is that the BBC as an independent PSB will produce more diverse and ultimately less negative framing and narratives in their reporting of the events during the strike, many citizens consume this coverage contemporaneously with coverage from privately owned news outlets where the expectation is that coverage will be significantly more negative. Consumption of BBC coverage alongside press coverage will therefore have a moderating effect on attitudes to unions and the Strike for two reasons. Firstly, framing theory illustrates that media coverage

affects attitudes by altering the weights assigned to competing views that individuals hold. While consuming negative coverage from newspaper outlets may alter the weighting of views so that respondents become more negative in their attitudes, this is offset by relatively more positive BBC television and radio news coverage. Secondly, consumption of significant commercial and PSB coverage contemporaneously will result in greater citizen awareness of conflicting editorial positions between public and commercial media and the divergent incentives of the respective media sectors. Those citizens who receive a large or majority share of their news about the Strike from the BBC will be more resistant to negative press coverage. This is consistent with findings from the strand of experimental literature examining the effects of competitive framing in which exposure to contrasting content and frames can, under certain conditions, lead to moderation or cancelling out of framing effects (e.g. Druckman et al., 2010; Hansen, 2007).⁴⁵

Hypothesis 3.2: Individuals who consume coverage of the Miners' Strike from the BBC will express more positive attitudes towards unions, all else equal.

*Hypothesis 3.3: Individuals who obtain a relatively large proportion of their news about the Strike from the BBC will express relatively more positive attitudes towards unions as BBC consumption moderates the effects of privately owned news outlet consumption.*⁴⁶

Dynamic Opinion Change and Media Framing

The vast majority of experimental literature examining media framing and other effects on citizens' attitudes tends to rely on one-time designs in which attitudes are measured at a single point in time following exposure to media stimuli. In these studies and elsewhere, the effects of the frame are dependent on content-specific attributes such as the strength of the frame and its degree of persuasiveness as well as individual-level attributes such as party identification and other demographic factors (e.g. Chong and Druckman, 2007; Berinsky, 2007). While effects are detected regularly in these single-shot designs holding these factors constant, the few studies that retest attitudes later illustrate a

⁴⁵ These findings are however based largely on one-time exposure designs in which attitudes are either surveyed once or followed up on later without additional exposure to frames. In contrast, this study involves repeated exposure to media frames and content in the real world where it is likely that media effects are cumulative and reinforcing – see below.

⁴⁶ Probing this effect is difficult due to very small cell sizes when interaction terms are included. Because of this, I include additional models with interaction terms in the appendix but summarise the findings below.

tendency of framing effects to decay over time (e.g. Druckman and Nelson, 2003; Chong and Druckman, 2010). As individuals do not hold particularly strong attitudes for most political issues, especially those of lesser salience that are not centrally contested in electoral politics, they tend to draw on recent and accessible information to construct opinions when evaluating an issue or actor (Zaller, 1992; Kinder, 1998; Druckman and Lupia, 2000; Chong and Druckman, 2010). Media effects decay over time as recent information on a topic becomes less easily accessible to citizens. When, as during the UK Miners' Strike, there is consistent, repeated exposure to similar narratives, frames and tone in media coverage over a certain period, the decay of media effects may be less straightforward.

In this case of repeated exposure, it is expected that consuming systematic and consistently framed and toned media content over the course of the strike period will affect citizens' attitudes as they draw on the constantly updated information available from the media outlet they are exposed to. Opinion should change in the relevant direction when the reported pre-strike attitudes are controlled for both during and immediately after the strike. Chances of further opinion change diminish the further from the strike period the attitudes are examined as the accessibility of the information and framing for individuals diminishes. We expect little in the way of effect persistence a year to two years after the strike ends. It is important however to note that this does not render any observed media effects inconsequential. To the extent to which media coverage shapes public opinion during the strike, there is a media influence on the development of the strike and the eventual outcome of the strike. If media organisations and their owners can only influence the strike through their coverage while it is ongoing, they can still leverage public opinion to produce outcomes in line with their preferences.

Hypothesis 4: The effects of media content consumption on individuals' attitudes to unions will be greatest during the strike period (March 84-March 85) relative to their pre-strike attitudes.

Research Design

The Miners' Strike 1984-85: Background and Case Selection

There are a number of factors that make the 1984-85 UK Miners' Strike particularly useful as a case study of media ownership, coverage, and public

opinion change. As noted above, the strike is generally known as “the bitterest industrial dispute in British history” (Harvey et al., 2014). Historians view it as “arguably the defining episode of the final quarter of the twentieth century in Britain” (Phillips, 2012). It was the most significant strike in terms of length and overall work days lost since at least the General Strike of 1926 with 142,000 mineworkers involved. The strike represented a critical juncture in British industrial relations and economic institutional development as it pitted the strongest arm of the trade union movement in Britain, the National Union of Mineworkers led by Arthur Scargill, against both the National Coal Board led by Ian MacGregor and the Thatcher government. Critically, the government’s economic liberalisation agenda largely depended on weakening the unions of which the miners were the most powerful and well-organised (Adeney and Lloyd, 1985; van der Velden, 2007; Moore, 2016). In line with these expectations, the ‘demonstration effect’ of the miners’ defeat resulted in a significant reduction in strikes in the late 1980s and trade union power was much diminished thereafter (van der Velden, 2007). The strike and the miners’ defeat had long-standing effects on the mining areas in the North of England and Wales for decades afterwards as the pit closure programme that the strike centred on was enacted.

The Heath government had previously fallen after similar strikes in 1972 and 1974 in which public opinion (and the press to some extent) had been largely supportive of the miners (Gallup, 1972; Khabaz, 2006; King, 2001) and the Conservative government was careful in planning the circumstances under which it would engage in conflict with the NUM again. Before announcing the plan to close 20 working pits that would provoke the predictable response, substantial coal supplies were built up, a central planning committee was established to deal with the conduct of the strike, committed supporters were placed into key positions, and mobile, well-resourced police units were established to deal with potential flying pickets (Phillips, 2012). Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher saw this battle with the miners as of such significance that she labelled the miners ‘the enemy within’ where the Argentinian dictator General Galtieri was ‘the enemy without.’ Arthur Scargill in response argued that this was the first step towards a closure programme of over 70 pits and mobilised the miners in key regions.⁴⁷ There were clear divisions in the NUM

⁴⁷ Released cabinet papers in 2014 show that indeed Ian MacGregor wished to close 75 pits over a three-year period (Higham, 2014).

because of the absence of a national strike ballot with Scargill instead arguing that strike action was to be authorised on a regional basis. With the strike beginning in earnest in some areas on the 5 March 1984, by 12 March 1984 he was calling for full national strike action from all areas regardless of the absence of a ballot. The strike was to last for 358 days with large-scale picketing in many areas, major clashes between strikers and police including the infamous Battle of Orgreave in summer 1984, court disputes regarding the legality of the strike and the establishment of a breakaway union in Nottinghamshire. There were varying degrees of support from the Labour party and other unions for the strike. The removal in 1980 of welfare payments to the dependents of those on strike resulted in significant suffering in mining communities with many strikers and their families becoming reliant on fundraising through community collections and support from outside groups. Ultimately, a failure of pickets to close down key operating centres and a significant fall in public support for the strike led to a certain degree of drift back to work among former strikers and ultimately the formal end of the strike, with the defeat of the NUM in early March 1985.

As this brief synopsis of events illustrates, the scale and nature of the strike makes it particularly suitable to support assumptions of public exposure to information about the strike from the media and the role of this information in informing attitudes to the activities of labour unions. While the media are important in the conduct of many industrial conflicts, the critical and all-consuming nature of this dispute as well as its unprecedented length makes it an ideal case to test how public opinion is shaped over the course of a clash of this sort. The use of this historical case study also mitigates against some of the dangers of self-selection in media consumption as coverage of such a salient story is distributed across media outlets with sampled regular media consumers all being exposed to strike coverage on a consistent basis over the period in question as demonstrated below.⁴⁸

The synopsis above illustrates the broad spectrum of issues at play in the dispute as well as the effects of the strike on communities who sought and obtained outside support to remain resilient throughout the strike. This offered the potential for a number of alternate frames and narratives for the media to

⁴⁸ The greatest potential likelihood of an uneven degree of strike coverage is between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. This is discussed in more detail in the results section below.

explore during the strike. As in a variety of other forms of political, social or economic conflict scenarios, decisions about whether and how to balance coverage are key decisions for media organisations and their staff. In this sense, owner influence that tilts coverage will serve to override journalistic norms of balance and objectivity. Variations in framing and tone in news coverage of the strike reflect choices about which narratives and frames to concentrate on and what words, images and overall angle to use in covering the strike (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1997). These choices present a key avenue for influence from owners on news production and presentation.

Data

The first section of the study deals with the content analysis of media data collected from the archives of relevant UK media outlets available from 1984-85. Having examined various archival databases, five major national newspapers were used with articles collected from the start of the strike in early March 1984 through to the end of December 1985 in order to capture not just the major events of the strike but follow-up stories from the aftermath of the strike for supplementary analysis. The five newspapers used are the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *The Times*, and *The Guardian*. These newspapers were selected based on a number of factors. Firstly, they exhibit variation in ownership structures with the Mail, Express and Mirror under private individual ownership for most of the strike period and *The Guardian* under trust ownership as noted above.⁴⁹ *The Times* presents an interesting case as while Rupert Murdoch had recently purchased it outright, it had an odd control structure in which under the terms of the deal a number of Independent National Directors sat on the board to protect editorial independence. The degree to which these structures had any meaningful effect has been questioned (e.g. Evans, 1994; House of Lords, 2008) but may have had some impact in protecting journalistic freedom at least until the Wapping dispute in 1986-87 severely weakened the NUJ and strengthened Murdoch's hand. Second, they include three tabloid newspapers and two broadsheets reflecting the major newspaper models in the UK market. Third, these are the most-read newspapers in the samples for which archives from the time are accessible. The overall

⁴⁹ Robert Maxwell purchased the Mirror in a well-flagged deal in the early months of the strike from the diversely owned corporate giant IPC/Reed International.

circulation figures for UK newspapers are displayed in Table 4.1 below (sampled newspapers in bold).

Qualities	Average Daily Sales ('000)	Controlling Owner
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	1,235	Baron Hartwell
The Guardian	472	Trust (Scott Trust)
The Times	457	News International/Rupert Murdoch
<i>Financial Times</i>	218	Pearson PLC
Populars		
Daily Express	2,002	Trafalgar House/Lord Matthews
<i>Daily Star</i>	1,633	Trafalgar House/Lord Matthews
<i>The Sun</i>	4,084	News International/Rupert Murdoch
Daily Mirror	3,494	(1) Reed International (2) Robert Maxwell ⁵⁰
Daily Mail	1,864	Lord Rothermere

Table 4.1: UK Newspapers by Circulation 1984. Data from Monopolies and Mergers Commission Newspaper Industry Report 1985.

The articles were collected from a combination of sources. The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express* articles were obtained in imaged pdf format from UK Press Online and then processed using optical character recognition (OCR) software from ABBYY FineReader with later manual cleaning.⁵¹ *Daily Mail* articles were collected from the Gale Cengage NewsVault in imaged pdf form and subject to similar OCR processing and formatting. For *The Times*, articles were collected from a combination of The Times Historical Archive and LexisNexis due to download restrictions and period switches in licencing agreements. Finally, *The Guardian* articles were collected from ProQuest and LexisNexis to account for changes in archive format over the two years.⁵² In all cases, the same basic search term methodology was used with articles including the terms "miners" or "strike" or

⁵⁰ Takeover in July 1984.

⁵¹ OCR uses pattern recognition to identify patterns within the image file that look like characters and covert to text. With clearly written text, scholars can often achieve accuracy rates of above 90%, which is enough to understand the content of the text and to use automated content analysis. Even with errors, the error is unlikely to be correlated with quantities of interest. (Lucas et al., 2015)

⁵² Ideally, we would use a single archival format. However, both *The Times* and *The Guardian* archival licencing agreements changed the 1984-85 period.

both returned. Only news articles were collected for two reasons. First, this is the section of the newspaper most consumers are exposed to. Second, the scale of the strike meant that references and analogies were employed in television reviews and sports reports that were clearly not substantively related to coverage of the strike and unlikely to be filtered through the same newsgathering and news production processes. Beyond the search methodology, the articles were read and reviewed and those that were not related to the strike or fell outside of recognisable news sections were removed. Even if these search terms do not capture the entire population of articles, there appears little reason to believe that any gaps in the articles sampled are systematically related to the effects under consideration here. Overall, 3685 newspaper articles were collected covering the period March 1984-December 1985 with 829 articles from after the strike had ended in March 1985. These additional stories come mainly from the two broadsheet newspapers who did greater follow-up examinations of the strike's aftermath and the resolution of associated issues.

For the public service broadcaster, the BBC, transcripts of the main television news broadcast were collected from the BBC Written Archives. As BBC transcripts are only originally available in microfilm format and are not searchable, the researcher read all of the transcripts and identified all those related directly to the strike. Copies of the relevant transcripts were created in imaged pdf forms that were again subject to OCR procedures and manual formatting. The main evening television news broadcast was selected as the base transcript as it represents the greatest opportunity for exposure for the greatest number of citizens.⁵³ It is also a reasonable proxy for all other BBC news television and radio broadcasts on a given day.⁵⁴ Each separate story is treated as an article while individual reports categorised as one story for broadcast are treated as such.

⁵³ This was broadcast at 9pm on weekdays during the period under examination

⁵⁴ Much of the text is re-used or edited for length from or for other news broadcasts during the day.

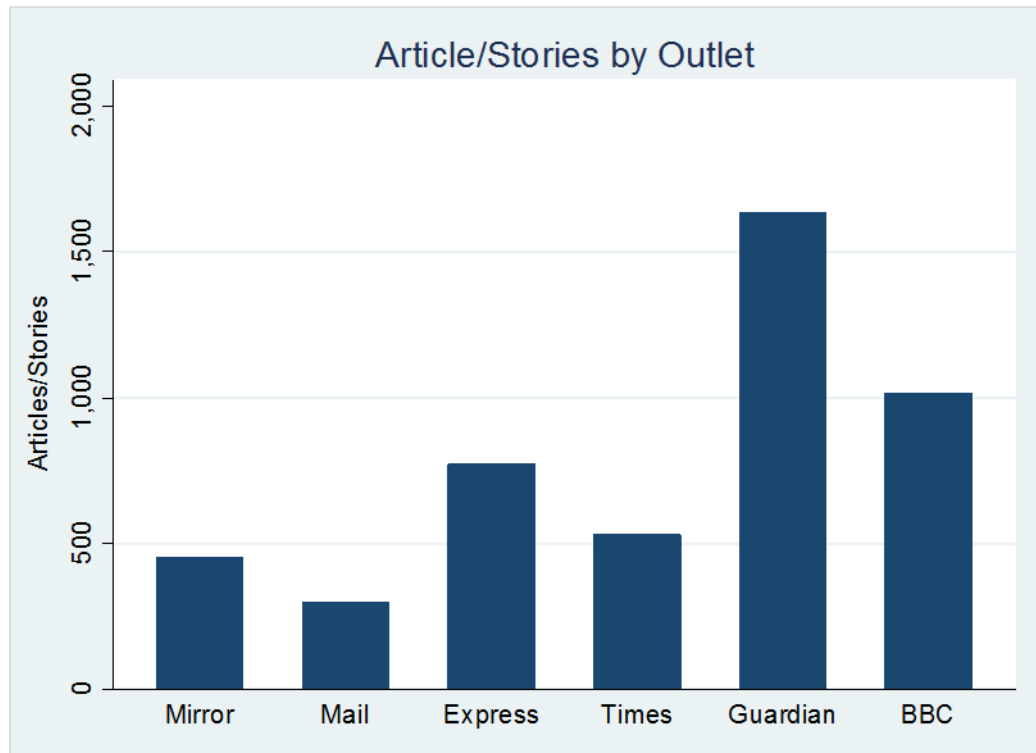


Figure 4.1: *Miners' Strike Articles/Stories by Outlet.*

Measuring Tone and Identifying Topics

As with other work in this project, this chapter examines tone as a major constituent of the frames media operatives and organisations apply to unions and in this case, a major strike event involving a leading trade union. In line with other literature, tone may be conceptualised as the relative positivity or negativity of news stories produced by a media outlet (e.g. Dunaway, 2013) and is a strong quantitative approximation of the language and phrasing used in the narratives and frames employed by news organisations. Tone is a product of both the proximal events being reported on as well as a systematic component – relative positivity in the tone of coverage indicates the systematic story selection and news presentation effects beyond the proximal events which may be 'negative events' in absolute terms. Again, following other work in Chapter 2, the tone of the stories was analysed using Soroka's Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary (LSD) and accompanying Lexicoder software (Daku, Soroka, and Young, 2011). While a variety of sentiment dictionaries are available, using a sentiment dictionary developed for general news content to analyse coverage of unions specifically is of course not ideal. The LSD was developed specifically for the purpose of examining the realm of economic news in which labour unions may be considered broadly positioned (Young and

Soroka, 2012a, Young and Soroka, 2012b). The Lexicoder approach is employed here in order to aid in comparative study with other work on similar topics both in this project and elsewhere and due to the reliability advantages it conveys. It has been successfully employed in examining the tone of coverage of a variety of issues including news coverage of employee leave policies (Daku, 2015), class rhetoric in presidential campaigning (Rhodes and Johnson, 2015) and the sentiment of print coverage of individual presidential candidates (Murthy and Petto, 2014). Following pre-processing procedures and a similar process to address negation language, Lexicoder employs a relatively simple, bag-of-words approach which computes from the dictionary list the number of 'positive' and 'negative' words per article and then measures net tone using the following easy-to-understand formula:

$$net\ tone = \frac{\sum positive\ words - \sum negative\ words}{\sum words} \times 100$$

The word total here includes all words in the article (positive, negative, and without tone). The measure thus captures both the direction and magnitude of tone, controlling for article size. As values tend to be relatively small due to the proportional nature of the measure, net scores are multiplied by 100 to create a percentage tone score (Soroka, Stecula, and Wlezien, 2015, p.462).

To supplement the analysis of tone and to investigate and establish the major topics that make up the coverage of the Miners' Strike in the five UK newspapers and BBC broadcasts, I employ unsupervised text analysis, specifically structural topic modelling (STM) procedures (Roberts et al., 2013; Roberts, Stewart and Tingley, 2014). These procedures estimate topics from documents based on the probabilistic likelihood that a document is made up of topics and certain terms make up a topic. Thus, each word has a probability of belonging to a topic and topics are estimated based on certain commonly occurring words. As these models are unsupervised, they do not require individual classification that presents a particular problem in a single-coder scenario. In this case, I employ these models in an illustrative fashion and as a supplement to the other analysis.

Survey Data and Media Effects on Attitudes

Following the media content analysis, the chapter employs data from two panel surveys to identify potential effects of consumption of particular news coverage on individuals' attitudes in line with the theory. I employ data from the British

Social Attitudes (BSA) survey that measured attitudes to unions and media consumption on a regular basis in annual waves from 1983 through to 1986 while complementing this analysis with data from the British Election Panel Survey (BEPS) that surveyed individuals in three waves in 1983, 1986 and 1987. Each of these surveys has advantages and disadvantages for this over-time analysis. The BSA measures attitudes more regularly and closer to the strike period and displays more consistency in the questions asked and measurement of attitudes but has a smaller sample size creating problems particularly when examining the effects of consumption of individual newspapers. While the BEPS has larger samples, it does not survey participants as regularly creating the potential for recall issues and decay in coverage effects.

The surveys measure whether a respondent regularly reads a national newspaper and if so, which newspaper they consume (or consumed during a recent election campaign) which allows for examinations of differences between readers of each newspaper and non-readers as a base category as well as the relative effects of differential newspaper consumption between readers of different newspapers. The main medium of a respondent's main news consumption is also examined which allows for a comparison between those who rely mainly on newspaper coverage, those who rely on broadcast news and those who consume all equally. Both panel surveys importantly include questions on the degree of agreement that "Trade unions have too much power" or "too much influence" as well as asking respondents what their perception is of the "level of union influence in Britain". The British Election Study also includes a question regarding whether respondents agree that there is the need for strict laws to regulate trade unions, similar to the question used in the previous chapter's experimental studies. The surveys also ask a question regarding whether "workers need strong (trade) unions" although this is not always consistently asked in every wave and as demonstrated elsewhere is the most strongly-worded of union-related survey questions which often leads to minimal effects when examined. For this reason, the analysis below concentrates on the questions regarding the power and influence of trade unions and the strict laws question in the British Election Panel Study.

Both surveys also include detailed measures of political attributes that may affect the individual's attitudes to unions such as union membership and voting behaviour.

Results: Media Coverage

Media Coverage: Topics

I first examine the topics that the British press and public broadcaster concentrated on in their coverage of the strike in order to illustrate which frames and narratives were dominant. When employing STM procedures to discern topics, there are few fixed rules for designating the optimal K (number of topics), and instead a process of trial-and-error using broad heuristics is typically employed. Roberts et al. (2013) and Roberts, Stewart and Tingley (2014) recommend for content with a specific theme and a relatively small corpus that 3-10 topics is a good starting point. Using a ten-topic specification and word stemming, major topics and the highest probability and frequency words that make up those topics across the full coverage corpus are displayed in Table 4.2.⁵⁵ The Highest Probability words column displays the words with the highest probability of appearing in the vocabulary of a given topic while 'FREQ' is an alternative scoring method for topics that weights words by their overall frequency and exclusivity to each topic (Roberts et al., 2014; Lucas et al., 2015). The topic titles attached are based on a combination of examining these word profiles, the functionality for returning the specific articles most related to the topics, and qualitative validation by reading the individual articles from the corpus that are matched with the topics that the STM processes produce.

Even in this overview with somewhat overlapping topics, the general patterns of coverage across the British news media aligns with contemporaneous and retrospective assessments of the major elements of the strike. The media focused on divisions within the NUM and the disagreement over the requirements for a full national strike ballot to make the strike legal and binding on all NUM members. This relates to the decision by a group of Nottinghamshire miners to breakaway and establish their own union, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, which was extremely contentious at the time and arguably hurt the public's assessment of the national union's outlook. The political element of the strike was covered in detail, in particular the Thatcher government's resolve to defeat the strike and the internal divisions that the strike produced in Labour

⁵⁵ After conducting a series of runs using alternate model specifications, there is little meaningful change in the makeup of topics using anything between 8-15 topics. There is likely some overlap in topics within the corpus. This figure is intended as illustrative.

with the hard left criticising leader Neil Kinnock for not doing enough to support the miners while the soft left leadership sought to distance themselves.

The press devoted significant attention to the major personalities and in particular the divisive leader of the mineworkers Arthur Scargill who was heavily criticised in the media for his leadership and tactics during the period. The central conflict in the strike regarding the closure of pits by the NCB was unsurprisingly a major focus of coverage but so was the cost of the strike to consumers including suggestions by government officials that energy bills would have to be increased at the end of the strike in a one-off hike to meet the sizeable cost.

Finally, there were three other major substantive frames or narratives in the strike coverage focusing on the conduct and outcome of the strike. First, there is the coverage of the day-to-day developments and clashes on the picket lines between pickets and police with details on the level of violence and arrests made. Second, the repeated efforts to resolve the dispute through negotiations with a focus on the role of the NCB chairman Iain MacGregor and finally the so-called 'drift back to work' of miners towards the latter end of the strike. The focus on this latter topic formed a major strand of analysis in the BBC internal report on coverage at the time as the NCB pushed this frame by leaking their figures to the media. The NUM heavily disputed the prevalence of this "drift" and believed it affected the outcome by making defeat for the union seem inevitable, as their own members appeared to have deserted the strike (Protheroe, 1985). Of course, the major topics covered in the news do not necessarily inform us about how these topics are covered and the tonal choices made when presenting these stories. These topics do however illustrate the various potential approaches that each news outlet could take when discussing the events of the strike with consequences for how consumers would come to assess the role of unions in such a dispute.

Topic	Highest Probability Words	FREX
"Legal action against NUM – funds and Nottinghamshire area breakaway"	union, nation, minework, court, yesterday, area, high,	union, minework, execut, vote, high, rule, ballot, judg, legal, branch
"Charges and legal prosecutions against miners"	disput, face, miner, yesterday, tri, charg, come	charg, prosecut, tactic, becom, assembl, trial, offenc
"Labour, Kinnock, Government involvement and Parliamentary issues"	govern, parti, yesterday, minist, labour, minist, , kinnock	labour, mrs, thatcher, parti, minist, neil, kinnock
"Key actors in strike – Scargill and NUM"	scargil, leader, arthur, union, meet, support, num	scargil, arthur, tuc, general, deleg, congress, heathfield
"Steelworks supplies – shipments, attempts to blockade"	south, wale, steel, miner, coal, british, yesterday	steel, station, suppli, plant, rail, steelwork, lorri
"Cost of strike – increased electricity bills"	year, power, million, industri, per, cent, cost	cost, per, cent, station, show, electr, accord, price
"Pit closures and strike issues – overtime, Scottish pits"	pit, miner, strike, scottish, made, major, close	strike, closur, close, scottish, overtim, accept, already, christma
"National Coal Board, leader, talks and negotiations"	coal, board, pit, talk, nation, talk, macgregor, chairman	talk, macgregor, ian, negoti, board, chairman, nacod
"Picket line clashes/arrests"	picket, polic, miner, line, yesterday, yorkshir, home, chief	picket, polic, outsid, home, arrest, constabl, policemen
"Drift back to work"	work, miner, men, yesterday, pit, back, return, collier	work, return, shift, men, safeti, bilston, glen, barnsley

Table 4.2: Ten major topics in media coverage of the Miners' Strike derived from Structural Topic Modelling processes and labelled based on qualitative validation.

Media Coverage: Tone

Based on the dictionary scores for toned news content, we observe the major patterns of tone per article or broadcast report in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 below measured as net positivity with lower scores indicating greater percentage negativity. Figure 4.2 presents the average tone for just the period in which the strike was ongoing while Figure 4.3 also includes the post-strike aftermath and follow-up stories by the news outlets apart from the BBC, which only includes strike period data.

The overall tone, as we can see, is negative across all outlets (although much less so for *The Guardian*) which is largely unsurprising given the tenor, scale and divisiveness of this episode of encompassing industrial conflict. There is however interesting variation in tone across news outlets as the outlets cover and frame similar topics (like those above) differently, stress certain narratives with varying tones more relative to other topics or a combination of both of these factors.

The three tabloids, one 'red top' and two 'mid-markets' are the most negative in the tone of their coverage. The most surprising of these is perhaps the *Daily Mirror*, which has traditionally supported the Labour party, and various left wing causes but is essentially as negative in its coverage as the *Daily Mail*. Importantly though and fitting the theoretical expectations above, the *Mirror* was taken over early on in the strike by Robert Maxwell who bought the paper from its previous corporate owners, Reed International in a well-flagged deal. Maxwell presents a classic case of the interfering proprietor who, according to his own journalists at the time, took over as editor as well as owner. He edited filed reports and cut other reports entirely while instituting his own 'line' on the strike. This line did not match the instincts of his staff and was far more hostile to the miners in general and Scargill in particular (e.g. Hencke and Beckett, 2014; Patterson, 2014; Adeney and Lloyd, 1985; Hollingsworth, 1986; Goodman, 1987). This is an interesting example of an owner's preference clashing with those of journalists and its audience on a non-electoral issue as while the *Mirror* was very negative in its articles on the Miners' Strike, it remained supportive of Labour under Maxwell's ownership (Tunney, 2007). While partisanship did not change and was not a venue for owner influence, meaningful interference did take place in coverage of a key issue like the Miners' Strike. This matches accounts of Maxwell's general conduct as owner of the *Mirror* (e.g. Greenslade, 2003, pp. 396-397) and the swift change in the paper's tone and approach is perhaps explained by the almost unparalleled interference that Maxwell engaged in (House of Lords Committee on Communications, Questions 1715 – 1719, 23 January 2008). Maxwell explicitly admitted his tendency to interfere saying, "I certainly have a major say in the political line of the paper" (Curran and Seaton, 1997, p. 72). Again, owner influence and resultant effects on story selection and story presentation need not be accompanied by changes in partisanship or partisan language. Journalists' and

editors' newsgathering and news production can though be affected to the extent that the tone of coverage becomes systematically different.

The *Daily Express*, controlled by the highly interventionist Lord Matthews⁵⁶ at the time, was the most negative in its coverage matching qualitative assessments of the content. The *Daily Mail*, controlled then by the Viscount Rothermere through Associated Newspapers⁵⁷, was similarly negative in line with the theoretical expectations of Hypothesis 1.1 above. The BBC, *The Times*, and especially *The Guardian* are more positive in the tone of their reporting on the strike. For the BBC and *The Guardian*, this matches the theoretical expectations that journalists and editorial staff at public service broadcasters and not-for-profit trust outlets are able to achieve substantially greater independence in their newsgathering, news production and news presentation processes which in this case produced relatively more positively toned news reporting.

The Times, in contrast, appears not to conform to expectations as after 1981 it was under the ownership of Rupert Murdoch. The paper has also been well known for its traditional centre-right orientation. There are a number of potential explanations for this. First, the tone of reporting in broadsheet newspapers is generally not as extreme as in tabloid newspapers and within the broadsheet stable, *The Times* is more negative in tone than *The Guardian* at statistically significant levels. Second, the takeover of *The Times* was relatively recent and the editorial protections introduced as outlined above may still have been reasonably effective at reducing Murdoch's interference. As Curran and Seaton (2003) outline, the institutional protections introduced during the takeover prolonged the process, by which Murdoch could replace pre-Murdoch era section heads and editors within *The Times'* group. The effects of Murdoch's ownership were thus felt more readily towards the end of the decade as many of these staff editors were phased out or chose to move on. Finally, *The Times'*

⁵⁶ While officially Chief Executive rather than sole proprietor of Fleet Holdings, Lord Matthews was by far and away the dominant shareholder and controlling player at the Express (New York Times, 1985). This is similar to News Corp today. He summarised his policy on editorial independence in line with traditional press barons as "By and large the editor will have complete freedom as long as they agree with the policy I have laid down" (Curran and Seaton, 2003; Williams, 2009).

⁵⁷ While Rothermere traditionally demonstrated restraint in directly interfering with the editorial side of the paper, the appointment of editors who are sympathetic or compliant is a key means of indirect owner control (see Rafter, 2012; Conboy, 2011). The selection of editors "who share or match their proprietor's values" (Brady, 2005) is likely particularly important at the *Mail* which is characterised by very authoritarian editorship. See also Chapter 5 of this thesis.

industrial editor and chief reporter on the strike, Paul Routledge, was known for his quite sympathetic views towards the miners, suspicions of the Thatcher government's motives and very strong contacts among the NUM (Hencke and Beckett, 2009). As Routledge was prepared to leave *The Times*, this limited the leverage of ownership over him. Because of this exit threat and the institutional safeguards in place, Routledge's reporting and contacts may well have moved *The Times* coverage overall in a relatively more positive direction than would otherwise have been the case. Routledge (2009) said that he was sent to Singapore soon after the strike "principally as a means of getting [him] out of [his] job as Labour Editor which [he] had held for fifteen years." This was because "[he] was regarded as too close to the unions and certainly too close to the miners." While a demotion in all but name, it did not sufficiently contravene the institutional guards against interference in journalistic freedom introduced in 1981, as a sacking would have (Aitken, 1999; Routledge, 2009).⁵⁸

In Figure 4.4, we observe the movement in average article tone over time using mean monthly tone scores by outlet. It is noteworthy that *The Guardian* consistently has the most positively toned coverage in relative terms with only limited fluctuations in contrast to other outlets. Similarly, the tone of *The Times'* coverage, while subject to greater fluctuations than *The Guardian*, remains relatively positive in its coverage compared to the other newspaper outlets. The three tabloid outlets, the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror*, are generally more negative in their coverage throughout the strike with the *Express* providing the most negative coverage for long stretches especially during the summer of 1984 that saw particularly high levels of active picketing. Only the *Mail* provides coverage that is slightly more positive in January and February of 1985 towards the conclusion of the strike.

The trends in the tone of the *Mirror's* coverage is particularly interesting given the takeover by Robert Maxwell occurs in July 1984 just over four months after the strike began. Previous research has suggested that Maxwell sought very quickly to move the paper away from its relatively autonomous operations pre-Maxwell (Curran and Seaton, 2003). While there are oft-cited instances of interference by Maxwell in the paper's coverage of the strike (e.g. Goodman,

⁵⁸ The turnover and removal of staff, through movement to undesirable posts and other means, was a tactic used by Rupert Murdoch at *The Times* and by other proprietors to change the culture and ethos of the organisation (see Doig in Bromley and O'Malley, 1997, p.200-201; see also Chapter 5). This can delay but not ultimately prevent indirect owner influence over their outlets from taking hold.

1987) and the tone of its coverage is consistently more negative than that of the other left-leaning paper in the sample, *The Guardian*, the evidence for a systematic 'Maxwell effect' is quite mixed. The monthly tone is often more negative than that of the very right-leaning *Mail* at various points after the Maxwell takeover and the most positive month of *Mirror* coverage occurs before the Maxwell takeover. However, there is substantial variability in the *Mirror's* tone through the autumn and winter of 1984. It is difficult therefore to determine conclusively whether there was a systematic Maxwell effect on coverage. Overall, the clear takeaway from the examination of each outlet's tone over time is that newspapers under private ownership were quite consistent in providing the most negatively toned coverage throughout the strike. *The Guardian*, the only trust-owned newspaper, consistently provided relatively more positive coverage.

We can see the differences in tone (measured as net positivity) by news outlet and ownership in more detail in the basic regression model in Table 4.3. In the first model covering the entire period from the outset of the strike through to the end of 1985 including follow-up stories, the *Daily Express* serves as the base category and the tone scores of the other outlets are compared to the *Express* which is the most negative outlet. As outlined, the *Express's* tone score is not statistically distinguishable from the *Mirror's* with the *Mail* slightly more positive and the two broadsheets and the BBC substantively much more positive and statistically significant at the 99% level. The second model limits the observations to the strike months only (March 84-March 85) but the results are very similar. In this case however, the *Mail's* tone is not statistically distinguishable from the *Express* at conventional levels. It is worth noting here that it is not the intention to examine all the factors that may explain net tone in this model and instead simply to highlight the effects of news outlet and media ownership. Overall, the effects match those hypothesised following from the theory above.

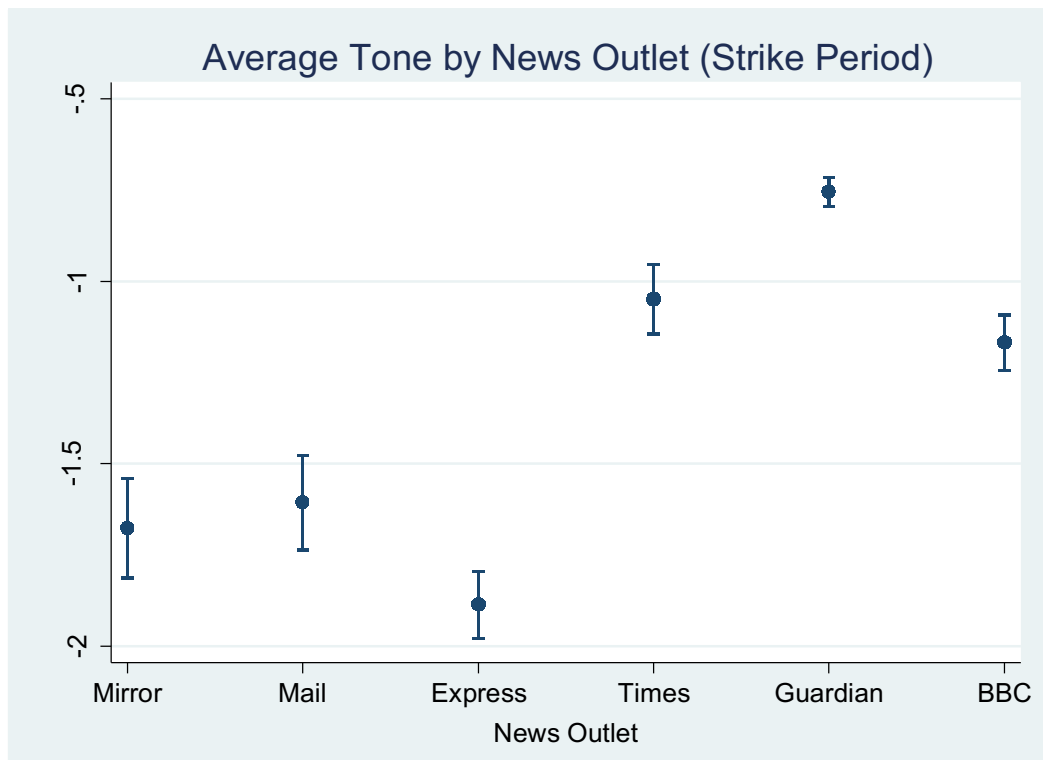


Figure 4.2: Mean Tone (Net Positivity) of Articles/Reports for the period of the Miners' Strike March 1984-March 1985. Lower values indicate greater negativity. Confidence intervals represent standard errors.

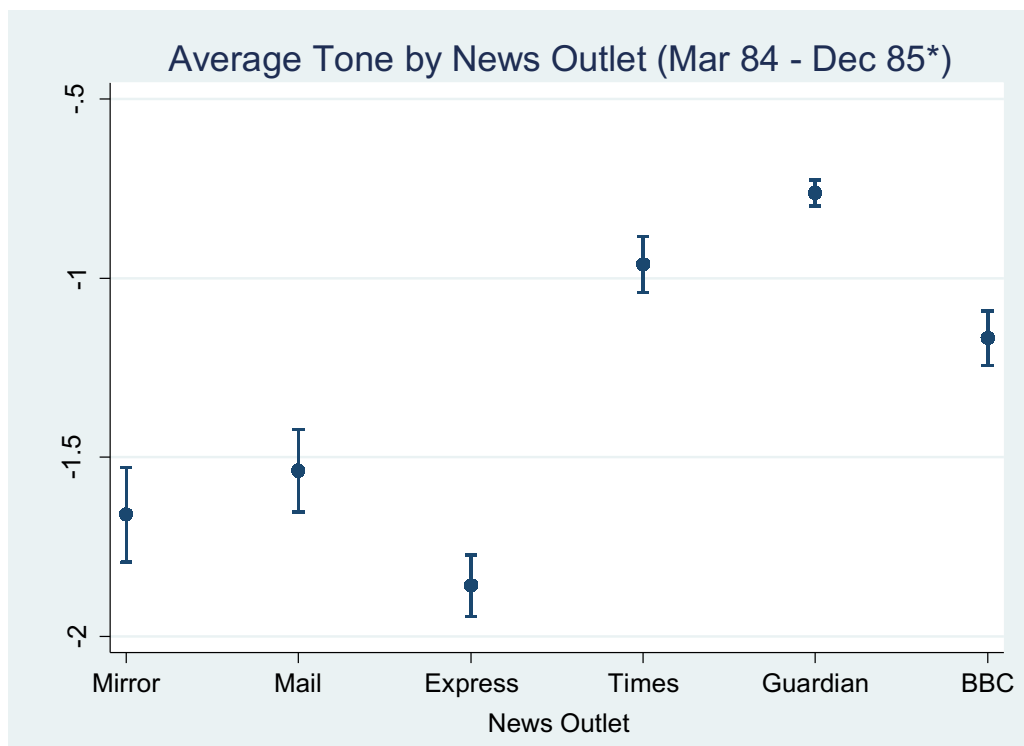


Figure 4.3: Mean Tone (Net Positivity) of Articles/Reports from beginning of strike in March 1984 to end of December 1985 capturing aftermath of strike and follow-up reports. BBC data is only for strike period. Confidence intervals represent standard errors.

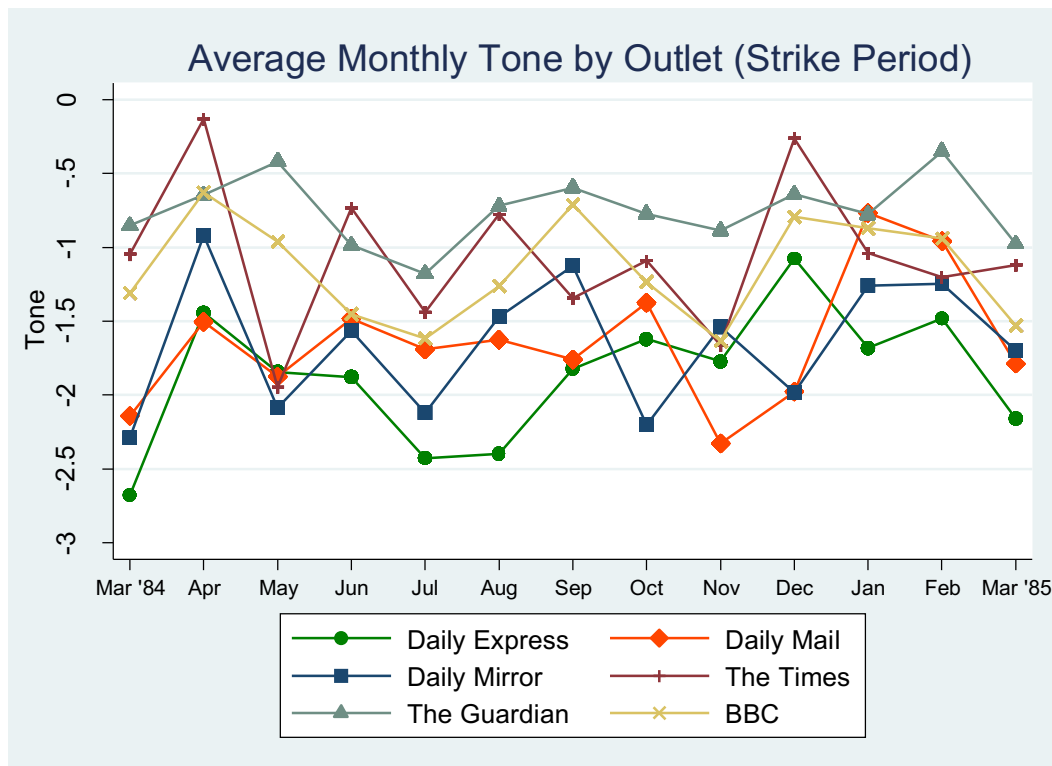


Figure 4.4: Mean Monthly Tone (Net Positivity) of Articles/Reports by Newspaper Outlet over full months of the Strike Period (Mar '84-Mar'85).

	(1) Mar '84-Dec '85	(2) Strike Period Only
Mirror	0.198 (0.158)	0.209 (0.130)
Mail	0.321** (0.145)	0.281* (0.161)
Times	0.896*** (0.117)	0.838*** (0.139)
Guardian	1.096*** (0.0939)	1.131*** (0.0992)
BBC	0.690*** (0.115)	0.718*** (0.104)
Constant	-1.859*** (0.0864)	-1.886*** (0.0802)
Observations	4,702	4,058
R-squared	0.038	0.039

Table 4.3: OLS Regression Model. Effects of Differences in News Outlet and Ownership on Tone (Net Positivity). Express as Base Category. Robust Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Media Effects (1): British Social Attitudes Survey

Having established that the tone of coverage of the strike varied across the major British news outlets broadly in line with the theory presented, we now move to examine through the panel survey data whether differential coverage moved citizens' attitudes to unions. I begin by examining the question asking whether trade unions have too much power from the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey and I employ a measure of reported newspaper readership from the 1984 round for the majority of the analysis and the measure of the dependent variable from 1985.⁵⁹ Regular consumption of a newspaper requires the respondent to have read the newspaper three times in the last week. This is a useful measure to test for the effects of repeated exposure to the tone of the outlet's coverage of the strike. As the dependent variable is measured using a three-point scale in most instances⁶⁰, I employ ordinal logit models in a conditional change design.⁶¹ It is straightforward to assume that attitudes to unions are correlated with media consumption in general. I control for previous stated attitudes to unions from 1984⁶² to measure changes in attitudes among individuals based on the information provided from the substantial coverage of the strike. In studies of attitude formation and change, it is usually assumed that attitudes are stable unless there is a causal effect of an outside shock (Menard, 2008). As prior attitudes determine current attitudes in this way, there is further motivation for the inclusion of a lagged measure of the dependent variable as this proxies the 'steady-state' of an individual's attitude.⁶³ The first step in the analysis is to compare regular readers of each newspaper to those who report that they do not read a newspaper in order to examine the relative impact of a particular newspaper's toned coverage. For this reason, dummies are used indicating the newspaper a respondent regularly read.⁶⁴ The results of

⁵⁹ Respondents were surveyed after the strike had ended in late spring/early summer 1985.

⁶⁰ This changes from a three-point to five-point scale in later waves. Results are based on combined three-point scales throughout. I conducted proportional odds tests that indicate that an ordinal model is appropriate.

⁶¹ There is a debate as to whether conditional change models with a measure of Y on the left-hand side and Y_{t-1} on the right-hand side or unconditional change models with change-scores ($Y_2 - Y_1$) as the dependent variable are appropriate. In reality, the conditions that advantage unconditional change models are restrictive and unlikely to be found in observational research (Menard, 2008: 510).

⁶² Respondents were surveyed in February and March 1984 while the strike had either not even begun or was in its very early stages. They would have consumed very little media coverage at this time.

⁶³ Conditional change models are employed here for these substantive theoretical reasons as well as their greater reliability and appropriateness for observational research (Menard, 2002, 2008).

⁶⁴ An alternative would be to ascribe a tone score to each respondent corresponding to the mean tone score of the newspaper they reported reading. However, the relative impact of toned strike coverage

a representative set of ordinal models are displayed below in Table 4.4.⁶⁵ This also includes newspapers not examined in the content analysis for comparison purposes.

It is first important to note that sample sizes for certain newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Times* are unfortunately quite low and this is likely to affect the results. However bearing that in mind and holding prior views constant, differential newspaper consumption does matter for the most negatively toned newspaper coverage in the sample, the *Daily Express*. It is negatively signed and statistically significant in all models including when controlling for key additional explanatory variables such as voting preference and union membership. Holding all other factors constant, consumption of the *Daily Express'* coverage during the strike will result in a 39% greater likelihood of believing that unions have too much power in Britain compared to someone who does not read a newspaper. This suggests that the strength of the tone and frame matters and that changing underlying beliefs is difficult unless the content is striking enough to penetrate. This corresponds with much of the experimental media effects literature (e.g. Chong and Druckman, 2007). Consumption of *The Times'* coverage is also significant but this sample is very small and caution is therefore required when examining this result.

The findings for control variables are largely as expected. There are large and significant effects of having voted for Labour or the Liberals at the last election while not being a union member increases the likelihood that a respondent will believe that unions have too much power controlling for previous attitudes in 1983. The effect of Express coverage consumption is, as expected, time-sensitive. While the effect holds here in 1985, it does not in additional analysis in 1986 (controlling for 1985 views) as the effects of exposure decay and the salience of union coverage diminishes (see Table 8 in Appendix 4.1).

To illustrate the substantive effects of exposure to differential coverage in a more readily interpretable manner, Figures 4.5 and 4.6 present predicted probabilities plots comparing newspaper non-readers with those who consumed *Express* coverage. Figure 4.5 demonstrates the effect of moving from no

consumption could not be compared with non-readers in this scenario and the total number of observations would therefore fall considerably.

⁶⁵ Additional demographic variables such as gender and age do not affect the substantive results here if alternatively included in the models. Goodness of fit estimated for non-weighted models for computational reasons.

newspaper coverage consumption to consuming *Express* negatively toned content for a Conservative voter holding prior views and other control variables constant. The effects are as we would expect; while Conservative non-readers tend to agree generally that unions have too much power, there is an increased probability of expressing this view for those who were exposed to the *Daily Express*' particularly negative coverage of the Miners' Strike. There are similar effects in Figure 4.6 comparing the likelihood of expressing the attitude that trade unions have too much power for a non-voting, non-union member who did not consume any newspaper coverage with an *Express* reader. Again, those non-unionised workers exposed to the news coverage produced by the *Express* have a higher probability of stating that unions are too powerful compared to those who did not read a newspaper.

Finally, we examine the effects of consuming a varied news diet with BBC news coverage of the strike alongside newspaper coverage. Table 4.5 compares the effects of consuming a 'varied news diet', i.e. contemporaneous consumption of news from newspapers and television or radio news, against those who got their news from newspapers alone⁶⁶. While the base result is suggestive rather than statistically significant, we see that once control variables are included those who consume a greater proportion of news coverage from non-press sources were more likely to express views of unions that are more positive and significantly lesser likelihood of believing unions had too much power. As outlined above, the coverage provided by the public broadcaster was relatively less negative than the coverage provided by all of the privately owned outlets. Also as framing theory argues consumption of conflicting coverage of this nature should result in greater citizen awareness of conflicting editorial positions and divergent interests of public and private news outlets. The negative effects of *Express* consumption also persist in this model, as do the intuitive effects of previous voting behaviour and union membership. Figure 4.7 illustrates the marginal effects of consumption of varied news diet holding all other variables at mean values. We see that moving from consumption of newspaper content only to a varied news diet including television or radio news is associated with

⁶⁶ The variable in the BSA dataset does not differentiate public broadcast and commercial sources of radio and television news. However, the combined BBC TV channels together held the largest audience share at the time while BBC dominance of the national radio market was near total. We can therefore assume that those who consumed substantial radio and TV news coverage received a large proportion of this from the BBC.

a reduced likelihood of indicating a belief that “unions have too much power” and a greater probability of seeing union power in Britain as “about right.” There is evidence then that varied news consumption does in fact have a conditioning effect blunting the impact of newspaper coverage that in most cases tends to be negative especially in the higher-circulation papers.

An alternative method of probing this effect involves interacting individual newspaper readership and a dummy for a varied news diet. However, significant caution is required when examining these results as the cell sizes for many newspapers become extremely small when the interaction term is added and the standard errors become particularly large. I therefore report these additional interactive results in Table 9 in the appendix (4.1).

To summarise these additional results, we see quite substantial mediation effects for those who consistently read the *Daily Express* and its relatively negative coverage but who also contemporaneously consumed substantial news from television and radio that we expect to be relatively more positive. For these respondents, the overall effect produced significantly lesser likelihood of believing unions had too much power and thus more positive attitudes to unions. As outlined above, consumption of conflicting coverage of this nature results in greater citizen awareness of conflicting editorial positions and divergent interests of public and private news outlets. This effect is robust to the inclusion of additional explanatory factors. There is a similar effect in evidence for *The Guardian*, which in these models is actually associated with more negative views on unions when consumed by itself, but more positive views when consumed contemporaneously with other news sources. However, this effect ceases to be significant at conventional levels when additional controls are included. Again, there is a substantial caveat here as the readership of the *Guardian* in the sample is small especially when adding interactions. Finally, consumption of *The Star* along with television and radio news makes a respondent less likely to believe unions have too much power while readership of *The Star* as the sole source of news coverage has a negative effect on attitudes to unions.

	Base	Base+ Voting	Base + Controls
Union Power 84	2.340*** (0.282)	2.085*** (0.313)	2.061*** (0.322)
Express	-1.080** (0.490)	-1.120** (0.520)	-1.159** (0.528)
Mail	-0.625 (0.419)	-0.418 (0.468)	-0.365 (0.493)
Mirror	0.142 (0.376)	-0.337 (0.418)	-0.283 (0.418)
Star	-0.232 (0.687)	-0.470 (0.656)	-0.440 (0.688)
Sun	0.234 (0.382)	0.267 (0.417)	0.255 (0.425)
Telegraph	-0.319 (0.572)	-0.0882 (0.627)	-0.106 (0.640)
Guardian	-0.117 (0.743)	-0.896 (0.706)	-0.953 (0.669)
Times	-18.71*** (0.972)	-16.13*** (1.090)	-17.38*** (1.131)
Conservative		-0.0351 (0.446)	0.111 (0.461)
Labour		1.517*** (0.468)	1.611*** (0.463)
Liberal		1.286** (0.509)	1.310** (0.526)
SDP		-0.0856 (0.487)	-0.158 (0.526)
Alliance		-0.000625 (0.729)	-0.123 (0.837)
Other		22.84*** (1.011)	24.65*** (1.008)
Not a union member			-0.528* (0.306)
Constant cut1	3.666*** (0.482)	3.684*** (0.635)	3.376*** (0.722)
Constant cut2	6.490*** (0.668)	6.778*** (0.850)	6.490*** (0.931)
Observations	323	323	321
Pseudo R2	0.29	0.33	0.34

Table 4.4: BSA Ordinal Logistic Models. Trade Unions have too much power (1= Too Much, 2=About Right, 3=Too Little). Standard errors in parentheses*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

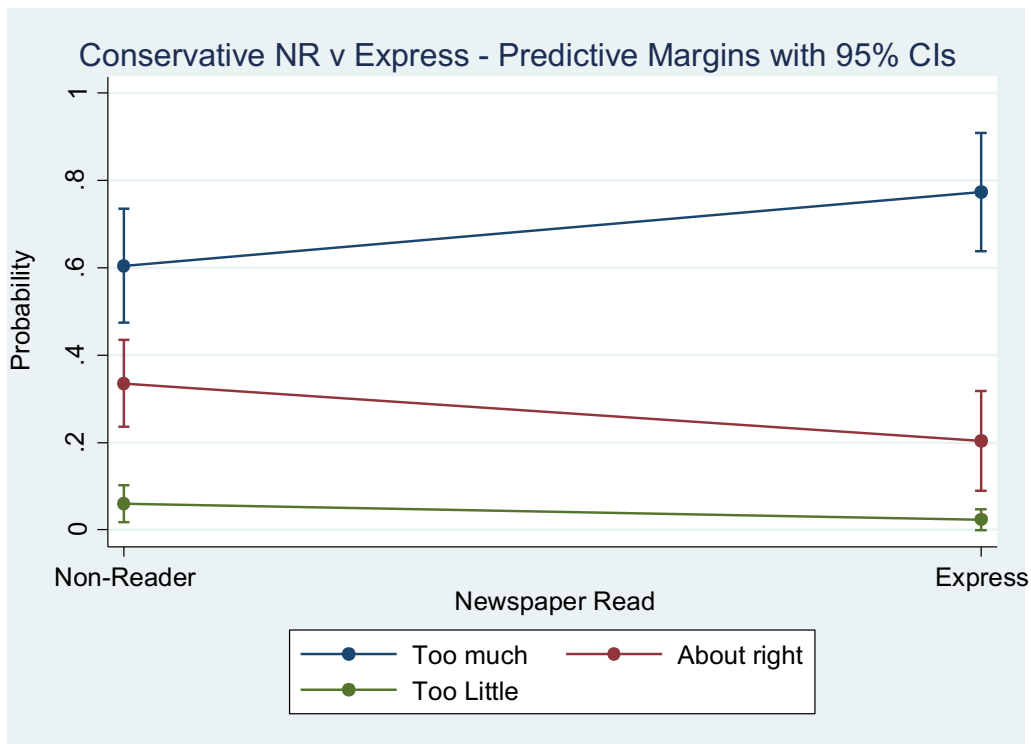


Figure 4.5: Predicted Probabilities Plot for "Trade Unions have too much power" BSA Model for Conservative Non-Reader and Express Reader holding all other variables constant.

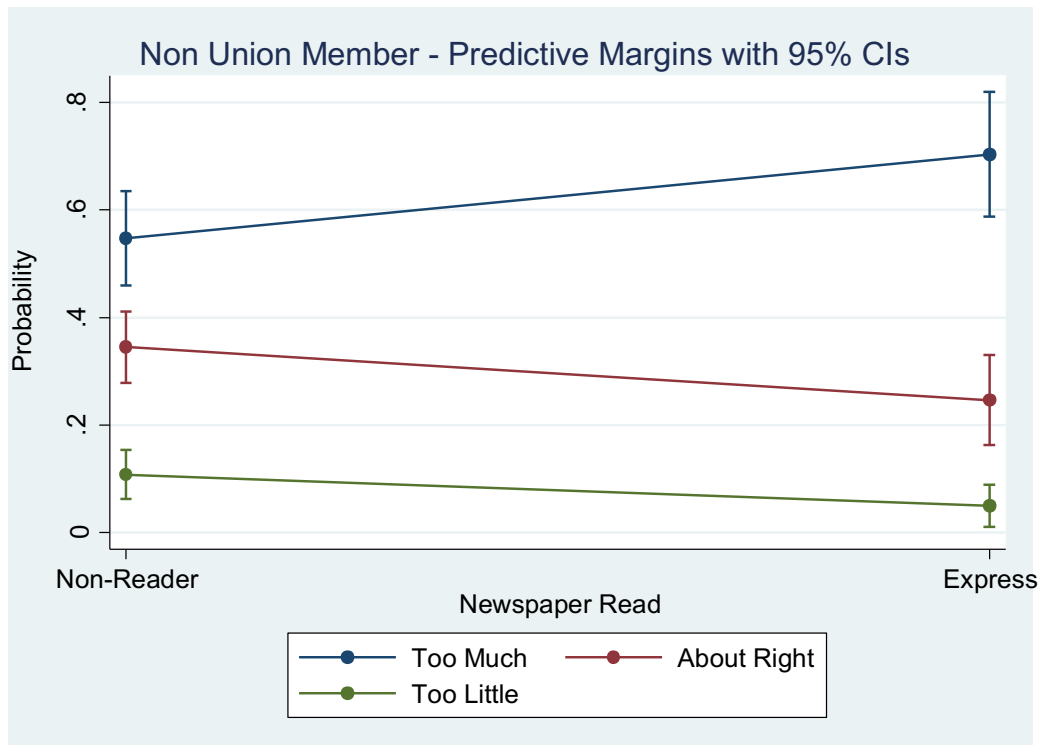


Figure 4.6: Predicted Probabilities Plot for "Trade Unions have too much power" BSA Model for Non-Union Member Non-Reader and Express Reader. Voting Behaviour set to 'Non-voter.'

	(1) Base	(2) Base + Voting	(3) Base + Controls
Union Power ⁸⁴	2.569*** (0.298)	2.346*** (0.334)	2.355*** (0.341)
Varied News Diet	0.655* (0.371)	0.784** (0.385)	0.847** (0.392)
Express	-1.045** (0.496)	-1.104** (0.517)	-1.091** (0.520)
Mail	-0.456 (0.439)	-0.213 (0.495)	-0.154 (0.510)
Mirror	0.316 (0.376)	-0.106 (0.408)	-0.0517 (0.415)
Star	-0.0669 (0.661)	-0.307 (0.652)	-0.234 (0.665)
Sun	0.223 (0.411)	0.287 (0.457)	0.290 (0.461)
Telegraph	0.0281 (0.587)	0.306 (0.583)	0.284 (0.601)
Guardian	0.0354 (0.809)	-0.684 (0.747)	-0.734 (0.693)
Conservative		-0.122 (0.461)	0.0624 (0.472)
Labour		1.438*** (0.475)	1.560*** (0.469)
Liberal		1.307** (0.566)	1.367** (0.585)
SDP		-0.176 (0.512)	-0.163 (0.542)
Alliance		-0.199 (0.898)	-0.279 (1.001)
Other		17.20*** (1.110)	16.60*** (1.158)
Not a union member			-0.533* (0.297)
Constant cut1	4.623*** (0.687)	4.774*** (0.848)	4.606*** (0.896)
Constant cut2	7.591*** (0.869)	8.038*** (1.050)	7.904*** (1.099)
Observations	318	318	315
Pseudo R2	0.292	0.337	0.346

Table 4.5: Varied News Diet Ordinal Logistic Models. Trade Unions have too much power (1= Too Much, 2=About Right, 3=Too Little). Standard errors in parentheses*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

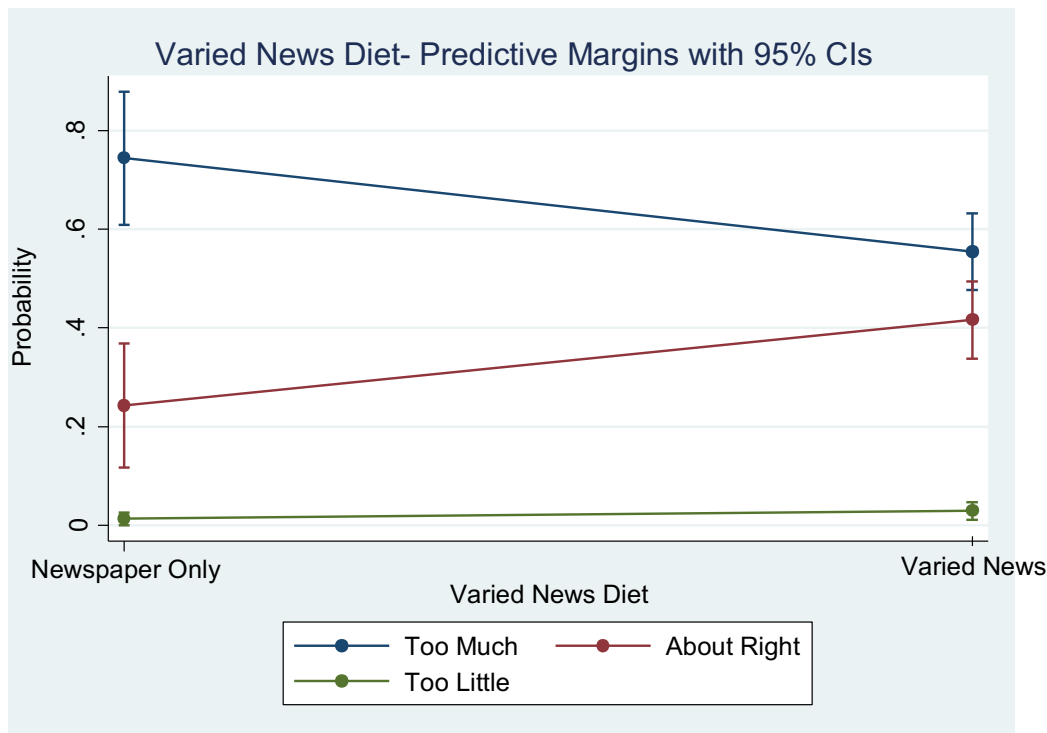


Figure 4.7: Predicted Probabilities Plot for "Trade Unions have too much power" BSA Model for Newspaper Consumer Only and Consumer of Varied News Diet holding all other control variables at mean values.

Media Effects (2): British Election Panel Study

In addition to the BSA results, we can also examine data from the British Election Panel Study (1983, 1986 and 1987) which asks similar questions but employs a larger sample increasing the number of participants (in most cases) consuming each newspaper's coverage. The drawback of the BEPS data is that there are larger gaps between the waves than for the BSA survey.

I use a measure of news outlet consumption from 1986 as this matches the question wording from the British Social Attitudes survey above. Specifically, regular readership of a newspaper requires the respondent to have read the newspaper three times in the last week as in the BSA study. Regular consumption of the newspaper is required for the cumulative effects of exposure to the content analysed above to hold. This question is not asked in 1983.⁶⁷ There may be concerns that in employing a backward-looking measure of newspaper readership that respondents may have altered their newspaper

⁶⁷ Instead, the respondent is asked if there is a newspaper from which they received news about the recent election campaign. There is no threshold for regular readership here and this measure does not capture the repeated exposure that the hypothesised effects of consumption relate to.

consumption in response to the coverage of the Miners' Strike provided by another newspaper that they read during the strike period. However, given the pattern of coverage across newspapers illustrated in the content analysis above, we see that all of the newspapers presented negative coverage in absolute terms. Therefore, dissatisfaction with coverage and resultant changes in consumption would most likely be among those who felt coverage of the strike was overly negative and who would then be expected to seek out an outlet that had presented coverage that is more positive. Relative to the other outlets, *The Guardian* provided the most positive coverage of the strike but only 32 respondents, or 4% of the valid sample, reported readership of *The Guardian* in 1986. There does not therefore appear to be significant evidence of newspaper switching in the meantime based on coverage of the strike.

In the BEPS case, we examine the effects on citizens' attitudes regarding whether unions have too much power in 1986 after the strike, controlling for the views they expressed prior to the strike in 1983. The results are presented in Table 4.6. Compared to non-readers of newspapers and controlling for prior attitudes, consumers of *Guardian* coverage display strong positive effects that match the pattern of toned coverage above. This is true in the models that also include controls that suggest that this is not simply a product of endogeneity. In the model including all controls, the effects are substantial with *Guardian* news consumers 3.3 times more likely to indicate that unions do not have too much power or that they actually have too little power. Along with prior views and not being a member of a union, *Guardian* readership is the only factor that is significant at conventional levels. The comparison with the BSA results shows that in each case it was only the news outlets at the extremes in terms of the tone of their coverage that moved consumers' views controlling for what they believed previously. This again conforms to expectations from the literature that the intensity of the slant in the coverage matters when observing media effects.

To illustrate the effects of consumption of *Guardian* coverage in a more easily interpretable fashion, Figures 4.8 and 4.9 present predicted probability plots comparing *Guardian* readers with those who did not consume any newspaper content setting prior beliefs at mean levels. Figure 4.8 considers the effects of consumption of *Guardian* Miners' Strike coverage for Labour voters compared to the non-reader baseline and illustrates the substantial increased likelihood of reporting that unions have 'too little power' when moving from non- newspaper

readers to consumers of *Guardian* coverage. Figure 4.9 goes a step further and examines the effect specifically for non-unionised Labour voters. For non-readers, views of whether unions have 'too much' or 'too little' power are statistically indistinguishable but consumption of *Guardian* news coverage is associated with significantly higher probabilities of expressing positive views towards unions and a belief that they are not, in fact, powerful enough in Britain.

The BEPS also includes a question regarding whether stricter laws should be introduced to control trade unions. This is coded as 1=Should, 2=Does not matter and 3=Should not. This offers an alternative measure by which to assess opinion change due to differential news coverage exposure. In this case, compared to those who did not consume news from a newspaper and controlling for prior beliefs in 1983, there are a number of effects of differential news consumption. The results of this analysis are outlined in Table 4.7. Again, *Guardian* readership is significant in most models and operates in the expected direction with consumption of coverage from the trust-owned outlet being associated with a greater likelihood of disagreeing that stricter laws are needed to regulate unions even when controlling for voting behaviour. This effect ceases to be significant at conventional levels when union membership is controlled for but retains its sign. Consumption of *The Times'* news coverage also exerts a statistically significant positive effect in all models, which matches the somewhat unexpected pattern of relatively positively toned coverage in the content analysis above. In addition, while it is not included in the content analysis due to archive availability issues, consumption of *The Sun's* news coverage produces a statistically significant negative effect in all models.

The Guardian effects for the strict laws question are again demonstrated in Figure 4.10 in a predicted probabilities plot comparing Labour-voting non-readers to *Guardian* readers holding prior beliefs at mean levels. We see that again the probability of expressing broadly negative views (that unions require strict regulation) and the probability of believing that such laws are unnecessary are statistically indistinguishable for Labour-voting non-readers. However, there is a clear effect of consumption of *Guardian* news coverage as in this case the probability of believing that such legislation is uncalled for is substantially higher (.82) than the probability of a *Guardian* content consumer believing that unions' activities should be strictly controlled (.58). This again matches the relative positivity of the coverage of the strike – the key union-related event of

the time- in the *Guardian* as measured in the text analysis above. There appears to be some reasonably strong support for the hypothesis that exposure to this relatively more positive coverage did in fact produce or reinforce more positive views of unions generally in its consumers, even for those who were already Labour voters. There are unfortunately no measures of additional news consumption in this edition of the BEPS beyond party political broadcasts. It is therefore possible given previous results that media consumption from public broadcast outlets may interact with print media consumption and affect the results here in a manner that cannot be measured directly.

	(1) Base Model	(2) Base + Voting	(3) Base + Controls
Union Power 83	1.101*** (0.105)	1.029*** (0.114)	0.998*** (0.116)
Express	0.159 (0.271)	0.275 (0.276)	0.214 (0.278)
Mail	0.0174 (0.279)	0.0470 (0.287)	-0.00919 (0.295)
Mirror	0.350 (0.233)	0.234 (0.242)	0.138 (0.249)
Star	-0.111 (0.406)	-0.208 (0.393)	-0.243 (0.401)
Sun	-0.447* (0.257)	-0.442 (0.271)	-0.501* (0.271)
Telegraph	-0.101 (0.300)	0.0310 (0.306)	0.0731 (0.307)
Guardian	1.051** (0.518)	1.248** (0.492)	1.207** (0.504)
Times	0.414 (0.516)	0.501 (0.539)	0.611 (0.568)
Conservative		-0.355 (0.231)	-0.389* (0.236)
Labour		0.385 (0.283)	0.297 (0.292)
Alliance		0.0380 (0.296)	-0.0775 (0.304)
Liberal		0.339 (0.345)	0.256 (0.356)
Social Democrat		-0.516 (0.612)	-0.555 (0.624)
SNP		-0.176 (0.672)	-0.255 (0.704)
Plaid Cymru		0.390 (1.412)	0.583 (1.448)
Not a union member (83)			-0.461*** (0.168)
Constant cut1	1.617*** (0.205)	1.447*** (0.278)	1.099*** (0.309)
Constant cut2	1.792*** (0.206)	1.625*** (0.277)	1.280*** (0.308)
Observations	789	772	766
Pseudo R2	0.126	0.141	0.146

Table 4.6: BEPS Ordinal Logistic Models. Trade unions have too much power (1=Too much, 2=Some, Not too much, 3=Too Little) Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

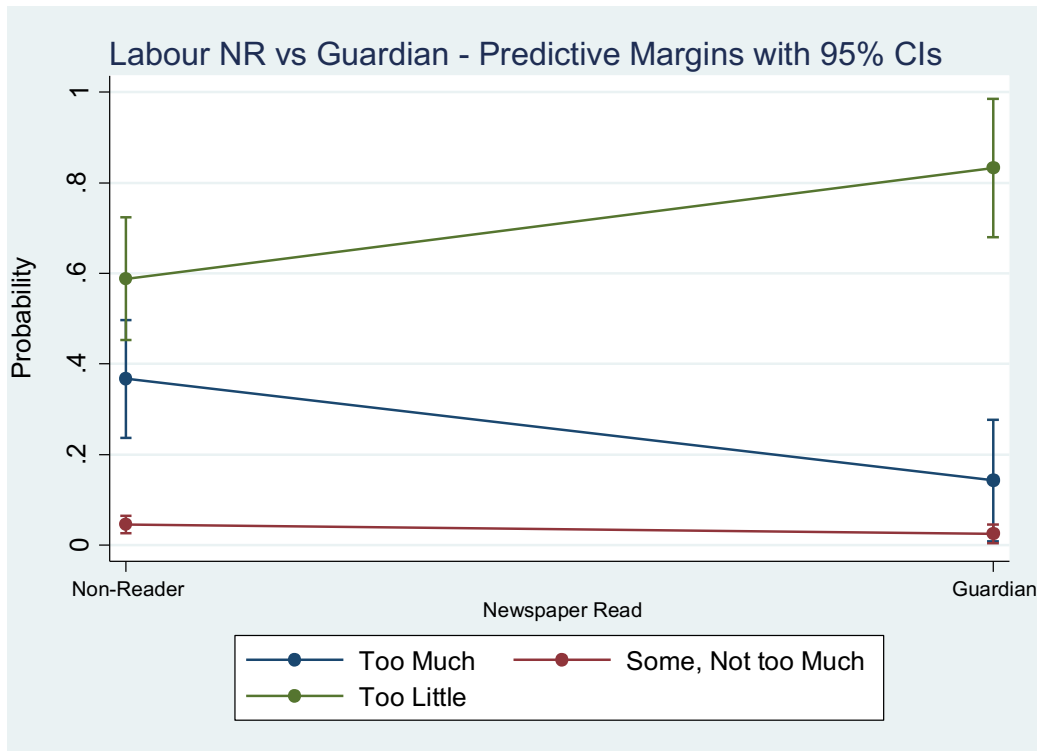


Figure 4.8: Predicted Probabilities Plot for "Trade Unions have too much power" BEPS Model for Labour Non-Reader and Guardian Reader holding all other variables constant.

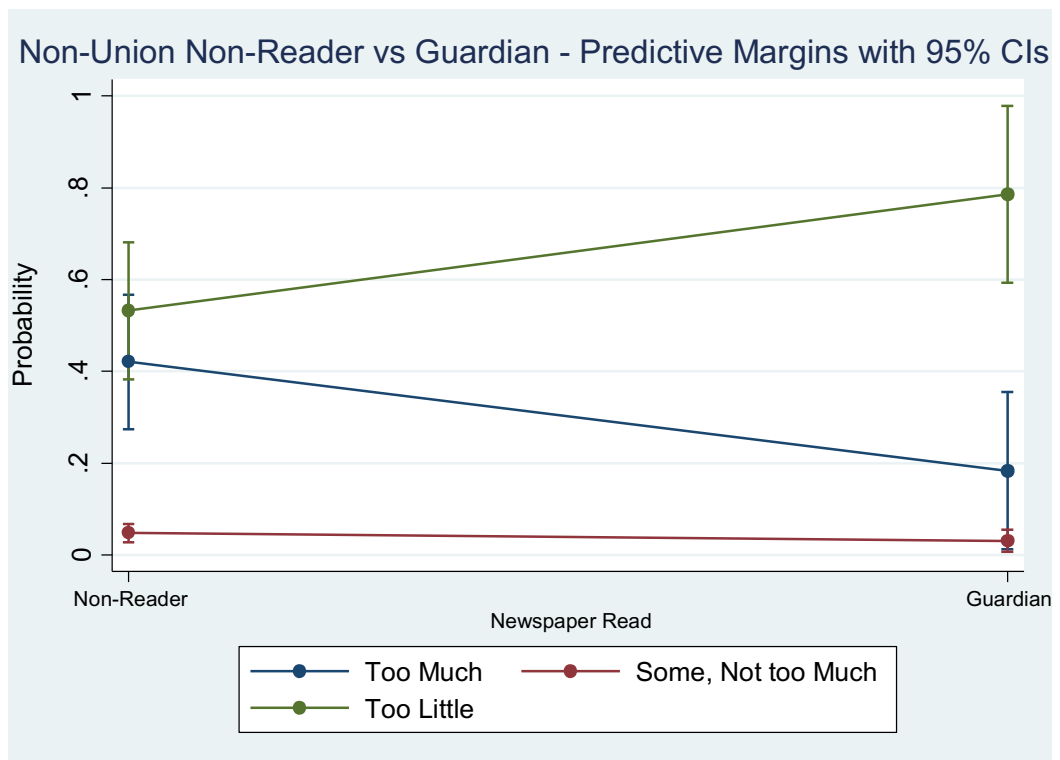


Figure 4.9: Predicted Probabilities Plot for "Trade Unions have too much power" BEPS Model for Labour-Voting Non-Union Member Non-Reader and Guardian Reader.

	(1) Base	(2) Base + Voting	(3) Base + Controls
Strict Laws in 83	1.117*** (0.0964)	1.010*** (0.104)	1.000*** (0.106)
Express	0.100 (0.299)	0.285 (0.306)	0.238 (0.308)
Mail	0.0604 (0.299)	0.106 (0.303)	0.0469 (0.315)
Mirror	0.0516 (0.238)	-0.0523 (0.250)	-0.200 (0.258)
Star	0.373 (0.447)	0.322 (0.458)	0.259 (0.452)
Sun	-0.641** (0.274)	-0.572** (0.281)	-0.684** (0.283)
Telegraph	0.440 (0.350)	0.616* (0.351)	0.686* (0.361)
Guardian	1.205** (0.545)	1.098** (0.545)	1.024* (0.555)
Times	1.664*** (0.537)	1.745*** (0.529)	1.690*** (0.520)
Conservative		-0.287 (0.242)	-0.318 (0.248)
Labour		0.449 (0.281)	0.359 (0.288)
Alliance		0.239 (0.310)	0.0854 (0.317)
Liberal		0.0748 (0.372)	-0.0240 (0.369)
Social Democrat		0.583 (0.491)	0.376 (0.529)
SNP		1.268 (0.911)	1.224 (1.016)
Plaid Cymru		-0.0635 (1.018)	0.262 (1.049)
Not a union member (83)			-0.657*** (0.177)
Constant cut1	1.997*** (0.214)	1.847*** (0.295)	1.418*** (0.323)
Constant cut2	2.158*** (0.216)	2.014*** (0.296)	1.590*** (0.324)
Observations	736	720	714
Pseudo R2	0.162	0.17	0.182

Table 4.7: BEPS Ordinal Logistic Models. Strict laws should be introduced to regulate trade unions (1=Should, 2=Does not matter, 3= Should not) Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

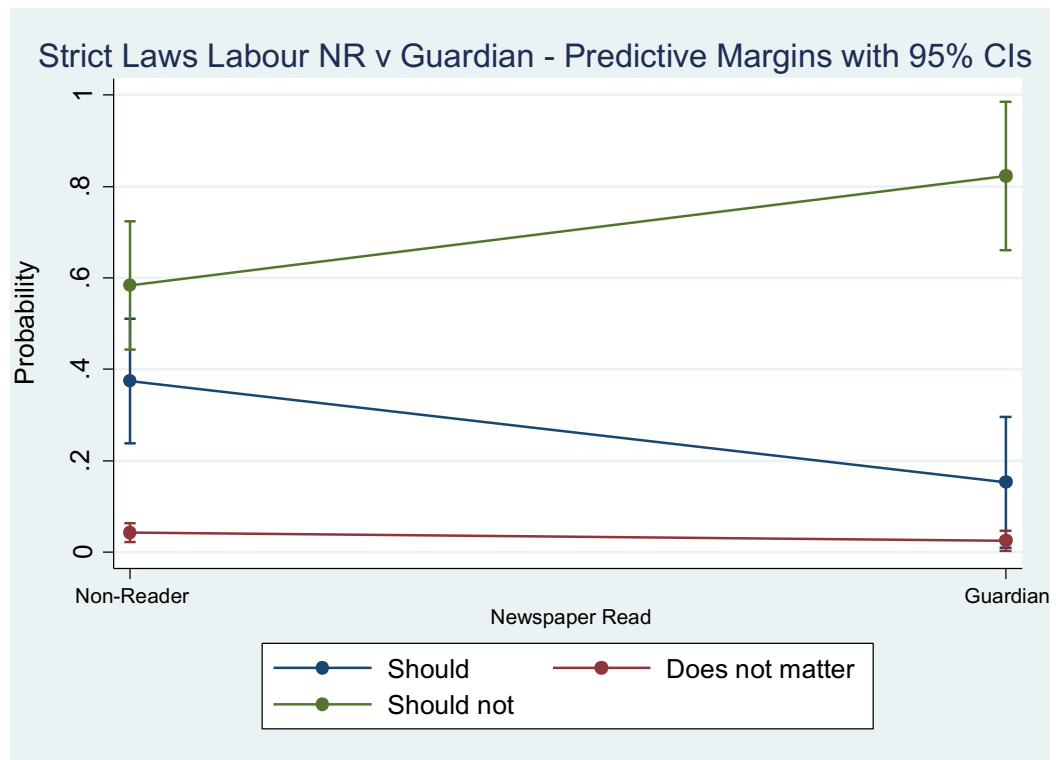


Figure 4.10: Predicted Probabilities Plot for "Strict Laws should be introduced to regulate Trade Unions" BEPS Model for Labour Non-Reader and Guardian Reader holding all other variables constant.

Conclusion

This chapter leverages the special high salience circumstances of the 1984-85 UK Miners' Strike to examine evidence of a mechanism of effect between differential media coverage, the media organisations that produce it, and their owners and effects on the attitudes of citizens particularly for important issues that lie outside traditional partisan politics coverage. In this way, it presents a reasonably rare example of research pairing media effects analysis with analysis of the media content that is assumed to cause the effects. Using a newly collected dataset from various media archives and employing quantitative text analysis, the chapter provides content analysis of media coverage showing that different ownership structures do appear to explain, at least somewhat, differences in the tone of coverage of the strike across media outlets. Privately-owned media are generally more negative in their coverage than coverage from not-for-profit trusts or public broadcasters although the peculiar circumstances of the deal by which Rupert Murdoch obtained *The Times* means it presents as something of an outlier in its coverage.

The chapter demonstrated using repeated-measure survey data, that exposure to coverage from different news outlets can have effects on citizens' attitudes controlling for prior beliefs but these effects tend to be most potent when the outlet presents coverage at polar ends of the spectrum in terms of tone and framing. This is consistent with previous experimental and observational studies highlighting the importance of the relative strength and potency of frames in eliciting effects as well as the cumulative impact of coverage with a consistent tone, angle, or frame. These results remain quite robust to the inclusion of additional variables that influence attitudes to trade unions including voting behaviour and union membership. Finally, there is additional evidence that suggests that these effects decay the further citizens get from their exposure to the news stories. Once a story fades into the background, media effects may dissipate but may still be critical in influencing the battle for public opinion while events such as strikes are ongoing.

The findings suggest that while the media did not necessarily determine the outcome of the strike, consumption of differential coverage did have effects on how individuals saw unions and their role in the wider social economy. If, as many argue, the outcome of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike represents a critical juncture in British industrial relations then any influence from media outlets controlled (or not) by individual private owners on how citizens interpreted the strike and the broader role of organised labour is critical. As outlined in the introductory section, it is during periods of significant salience of labour issues that influence on public opinion is likely to be most important in determining policy or industrial relations outcomes and it is during these periods that information from media sources is most valuable to citizens.

Further research should extend examination of this mechanism of media producers, the coverage they supply, and its effects on citizens. Again, it is key to look at comparable, high salience events where owners are likely to have had preferences regarding how they wished public opinion to shape up and there is reason to expect most citizens will have been exposed to a certain amount of news coverage. This cases strengthen the theoretical justification for case selection for the analysis of media effects. Similarly, additional research could shed light on the patterns, methods through which media owners, or indeed other actors within media organisations, can shape the coverage these outlets

produce which experimental and observational research now suggests can influence how citizens who consume this content develop their beliefs.

Chapter 5: Does ownership bestow control? Investigating avenues of owner influence on media practitioners

Abstract

Media scholars and policymakers commonly express concerns about the effects of consolidated media ownership on the diversity of content available to consumers and the disproportionate influence of powerful individual media moguls is often a key focus of these debates. This chapter examines the methods and means by which owners exert control over media organisations. In particular, it assesses theoretical expectations that individuals and families exert much greater control as media power allows for political influence while private control better facilitates direct and indirect methods of control. Alternate models of ownership including publicly traded corporate ownership, trust ownership and public broadcaster models are much more difficult to maintain and exercise control over due to differential line management structures and the absence of the same potential to exercise exclusive political influence compared to privately owned outlets. Journalistic autonomy and diversity of opinion is more commonly associated with alternative ownership structures as opposed to individual or family ownership. This chapter leverages a series of semi-structured interviews with experienced editors and journalists from a variety of media outlets. Interview evidence suggests that media practitioners at private outlets face greater interference, politically informed editorial selection, powerful, directed editorial cultures, and limited autonomy. Publicly traded ownership and trust ownership allow for greater diversity of opinion and are typically identified as ‘reporters’ papers’ although journalistic freedom is still not unlimited. Public broadcasters are protected from government interference by regulatory mechanisms but their independence varies by funding security and is often tested during major political and social crises.

Introduction and Motivation

How exactly do media owners exert the hypothesised control over coverage within newsrooms? There have been a series of recent acquisitions of major news outlets by powerful individuals in Anglophone markets including Jeff Bezos’ buyout of *The Washington Post*, Sheldon Adelson’s purchase of the *Las Vegas Journal-Review*, Rupert Murdoch’s bid to take control of Sky UK and Denis O’Brien’s addition of 6 newspapers to the INM group in Ireland. In each case, questions have been raised about these owners’ potential control of their outlets’ content (e.g. Graham, 2013; Oliver, 2016; Ember and de la Merced, 2017; Sweney, 2017; Slattery, 2017).⁶⁸ Such concerns about the influence of media owners has also, for example, spawned two separate large-scale inquiries in the United Kingdom into the culture and ethics of the press, while in Ireland, there have recently been a flurry of reports published on the dangers of ownership

⁶⁸ This issue is once again in the news following reports that the Sinclair Broadcast Group are set to take over Tribune Media after changes in ownership regulations by the FCC. See ‘Sinclair Is Said to Be Near a Deal for Tribune Media’, *New York Times*, May 7 2017.

concentration. There have also been appeals for action from the National Union of Journalists in both countries.⁶⁹

If ownership bestows control in the manner outlined in previous chapters then variations in the structure of media ownership should be associated with different patterns of control over newsroom practices and differences in the limits owners and their organisations place on journalistic and editorial autonomy. Such autonomy and freedom from control are critical elements in determining the availability of fair, objective, and credible information to citizens to form political attitudes and make political decisions (e.g. Price, 1995, 2002). However, owners ultimately set, enforce, and maintain the policy, ethos, and culture of the media organisations journalists work within and there has therefore always been tension between the professional norm of autonomy and this substantial countervailing influence (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; p.173).

I argue throughout this project that the degree of owner influence over a media organisation, its journalistic staff, and the news content that it produces is dependent upon variation in the incentive and capacity of different types of owner to exert control. As Curran (2013) points out, press power in some groups is heavily centralised. The centralisation of power, in this project, follows from the centralisation of ownership.

Furthermore, individual or family private ownership of a media firm should be associated with greater capacity to control through editorial appointments, hiring and firing, direct newsroom intervention and the development of an embedded organisational culture. Similarly, private ownership offers incentives to access political power and exert political influence by stressing particular political views through the individual or family's own news outlet. Diverse ownership, in contrast, lacks the means or incentives to tilt coverage and focuses on producing profits and returns on investment. This requires delegation to editors as media managers and a willingness to afford the editor and the journalists the autonomy they need to produce news content that matches their conception of audience preferences or their professional values. Public media organisations are established with the goal of providing independent and public service news to citizens but governments that fund these organisations are often

⁶⁹ See 'Media ownership: power and influence in the hands of the few' National Union of Journalists UK 23 April 2014 and 'NUJ welcomes report on media ownership' National Union of Journalists Ireland, 24 October 2016.

accused of controlling journalists much like a traditional private proprietor. A fourth, if uncommon, form of ownership in news media are ownership of outlets by trusts explicitly to protect the editorial independence of the outlets they govern and offer space for journalistic freedom and 'public interest journalism' (Ellis, 2014). These different forms of ownership should then be associated with very different levels of owner interference and vary substantially in their organisational ethos and the autonomy they afford (Picard and van Weezel, 2008; Picard and Dal Zotto, 2015).

However, identifying influence over content in newsrooms is not straightforward as explicit direction and public reprimand are only occasionally applied. Owners play key roles in developing organisational policy, appointing editors that reflect their values and beliefs, hiring and firing staff within the company and promoting individuals to senior editorial roles, setting budgets and embedding an organisational culture. In many cases, these avenues of influence are not directly observable by the audiences consuming the organisation's content or by scholars examining ownership effects from a distance.

This chapter seeks to explore how and to what extent the ownership of media firms influences the journalists and editors working within them. I explore direct and indirect avenues of owner influence through a series of 20 semi-structured interviews and correspondence with experienced news journalists and editors from commercial outlets, trusts, and public broadcasters and examine the impact ownership and organisational structures and values have in how they produce and present the news. This chapter provides causal process observations (Mahoney, 2010) and an assessment of the degree to which hypothesised mechanisms discussed elsewhere in the project match the reality experienced by media practitioners themselves. While earlier chapters leverage the case of news coverage of labour unions, this chapter assesses editors' and journalists' experiences more broadly to expand the sample and provide a sense of the scope and nature of owner influence in news production. The mechanisms of control observed here apply to a variety of areas where owners seek to influence their outlets' content.

Results indicate that direct owner interference in news outlets is rare but far from unheard of while owners similarly seek to appoint editors and senior staff who share their beliefs and will institute their preferred policies within the news

organisation. Direct and indirect interference is much more common within privately owned firms where journalists and editors are quite aware of the preferences of the owner and often exercise caution and self-censorship when developing news coverage that may conflict with owner preferences even to the extent that overt direction is not often required. Journalists and editors at public broadcast or trust-owned outlets, in contrast, tend to perceive little or no restrictions on their autonomy beyond the broad principles enshrined in the charters. The evidence therefore suggests that the influence of owners over content manifests through a variety of means; some owners will issue direct instructions on occasion but are often content to appoint editors who will develop and maintain an organisational policy and culture the owner(s) desires. The greatest protection against owner interference comes from alternative institutional structures such as trusts, diffuse corporate control, or public ownership.

Literature Review: How and Why Ownership Matters

The relationship between media ownership and the content produced has been vigorously contested in theoretical literature and public discourse for decades (Doyle, 2002). Traditional critical theoretical accounts (e.g. Miliband, 1973) identify structural influences on journalists, including capitalistic ownership, as part of a set of interlocking factors which 'all work in the same conservative direction'. In contrast, liberal media scholars theorise that increased commercialisation of the media industry eroded media owners' power substantially and ultimately the consumer is now sovereign in determining media content. Liberal theorists and classic studies of journalistic practice stress the importance of journalists' autonomy whose professional orientation is closely tied to ideas of journalistic freedom and the ability to remain apart and objective in carrying out their reporting duties (e.g. Merrill, 1974; Gans, 1979; Plaisance and Deppa, 2009; Reich and Hanitzsch, 2013). Such autonomy is also a core component of journalists' reported satisfaction with their role and performance (see for example, Reinardy, 2009; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; McDevitt, 2003).

The traditional accounts face a number of difficulties. Firstly, both the critical school of media ownership and the liberal accounts present quite a 'thin' or rudimentary account of ownership control and company behaviour. These

accounts tend to overlook the substantial variation in the structures of ownership, the impact this has on the mechanisms of control and the differential incentives to seek influence beyond simple profit (e.g. Picard, 2002; Napoli, 1997; Picard and van Weezel, 2008). Second, certain empirical literature which stresses the importance of audience preferences (e.g. Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010) tends not to examine the variation in the relative importance of owner and audience influences from one news issue to another. These studies also focus predominantly on partisan bias or electoral endorsements where owner influence and slant may well be less likely (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p.167).⁷⁰ This literature also cannot capture internal organisational factors which can lead to patterns of self-censorship or conformity to a perceived set of organisational values or policies which affects what is covered and how it. Third, there is substantial evidence that media owners in Anglophone states have used their outlets to promote personal interests and values. In the US, Bagdikian (2000, 2004) accounts for a variety of owner influences in the largest US media firms while Gilens and Hertzmann (2000) examine slant in the coverage of a major policy debate within the news content of outlets whose owners stood to gain from a particular decision. In the UK, Curran and Seaton (2003) outline interference by individual media owners in support of their political and commercial interests in a variety of news outlets including the *Express*, *Sun*, *Times* and *Mirror* at the expense of journalistic autonomy and objectivity. In Ireland, there have been much-publicised cases of perceived owner influence over political endorsements and coverage of political scandals (e.g. Horgan, 2001; Flynn and Preston, 2016).

Owners do in fact play a role and influence journalists but observing the patterns of owner influence has proven difficult. Episodes of direct interference are occasional and often related through journalists and editors' memoirs upon retiring or through testimony when these issues are under investigation (e.g. Evans, 1984; House of Lords, 2008). While these accounts offer explicit insights into owner interference, many cases of overt interference go unreported especially where journalists continue to work in the industry or are reluctant to report these cases in a public setting. Indirect owner influence is, of course, by

⁷⁰ This is not to say that owner-driven partisan bias does not exist. As Shoemaker and Reese point out though, letting ownership affect partisan editorial slant would make the outlet a target for criticism. This contention is based primarily on the US market. In the UK, a relationship between partisanship and ownership as well as a partisanship of the press more generally is much more widely accepted.

its very nature more difficult to observe and much more pervasive. Owners sit at the top of the organisational pyramid and therefore represent the ultimate organisation-level influence over editors, journalists and their output (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, 2013). Their organisational role allows them in theory to set formal policy, hire, fire and promote staff (Doyle, 2002), establish an organisational culture and ethos and importantly appoint editors who share their worldview (Neil, 2008). The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications summarised the owner's role in editorial selection:

"If an owner of a newspaper appoints an editor that he trusts to act in his own image then there is no real need for that owner to become involved in particular stories or editorial lines. If he chooses to he can take a step back, safe in the knowledge that his policies will be followed" (House of Lords, 2008, p. 35).

The question then becomes to what extent journalists identify these processes in their experiences in the newsroom and whether and when editors anticipate owners' preferences in the manner outlined. As noted in Chapter Two, there is also strong evidence to suggest that journalists' own views are more left-leaning or liberal than where they ideologically place the organisations they work for suggesting staff can identify the preferences of their owners (Patterson and Donsbach, 1996). To the extent that journalistic autonomy is compromised by organisational influences and ownership, staff should seek to accord with the relatively more right-leaning views and policies their owners generally prefer. This study also offers a deeper exploration of how this process works in practice.

Relatedly, the contribution by Breed (1955) identifies a series of socialising forces in newsrooms. The socialisation results in the maintenance and enforcement of the owner's policy and ethos (often through the editor) without the need for repeated overt instruction or reprimand. Compliance and conformity to the organisational 'line' is achieved through fear of sanction and authority from the editor and line management and institutionalising hierarchical control. There is also 'soft' amendment of copy to fit preferred values and angles. Through this iterative process, the journalist observes and then absorbs superiors and owners' preferences over time (Breed, 1955; Elbot, 1992; Weaver et al., 2007; Shoemaker and Reese, 2013). Breed's classic study and much of the subsequent literature it spawned is focused on the United States although a number of the major insights have been examined in cross-

national survey studies (e.g. Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011). The evidence that is available from the European Liberal states suggests that owner interference is relatively more common than in the US and more than four out of ten journalists in the British press reported "improper interference" from above (Donsbach, 1995; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). To be clear, these survey questions do not tease out fully the differences between direct and indirect avenues of influence. Thus, an in-depth, fine-grained examination of these processes offers the advantage of probing these methods of inducing compliance and critically, to what extent they differ by ownership structure in line with the hypothesised patterns discussed elsewhere in this project.

Finally, in more recent times there have been claims that owner influence has been on the wane as the media market has fragmented and media audiences have been empowered by their greater choice and avenues for influence over the content they receive (e.g. Chung, 2007; Gillmor, 2004). However, while owners are not the only important perceived influence over journalists, owners have increased their influence more than any other group in recent times (Strömbäck and Karlsson, 2011). Strömbäck and Karlsson's findings show that 75 per cent of the journalists surveyed in their study say that the influence of owners has risen in the last ten years (p.650). However, it is difficult to identify the nature of this new ownership interference. Owner influence over editorial budgets may have increased with resultant effects on news prioritisation. Additionally, a decline in journalists' job security and alternative employment may make them more likely to sacrifice greater autonomy when this clashes with their employer's wishes. Strömbäck and Karlsson concentrate on Swedish journalists' experiences, which, despite a certain degree of convergence, may differ somewhat from those working in liberal media markets where economic pressures and indeed cultures of owner control may be more pronounced.

Liberal markets present a complex case for autonomy and ownership. Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that the protection of journalistic autonomy in the Anglo-American sphere tends to occur informally within-organisations rather than through the kind of formal structures often found in the Democratic Corporatist states in particular. Similarly, Hallin and Mancini contended that autonomy varied substantially across the Liberal model and was somewhat more limited in Britain than the US. This is likely related to the greater individual control of press outlets in the British market. This chapter examines patterns of owner

control especially in Britain and Ireland. Both of these countries are regarded as having particularly concentrated ownership in their print sectors (Noam, 2016). They also have clear deviant cases where major media outlets have alternative trust or public ownership structures. Leveraging these outlier cases, we can probe further the centralisation of power as a causal explanation for different levels of owner interference (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). By exploring the patterns of direct and indirect influences within the liberal Anglophone model, this study can further explore how and why journalists and editors perceive owner influences to have grown, perhaps at the expense of their own autonomy.

Theory: How Owner Influence Varies by Ownership Structure

The production of news content is substantially influenced by organisational-level factors. Ownership is the most important of these as this is where the ultimate organisational power lies (e.g. Hirsch, 1977; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Napoli, 1997; Bagdikian, 2000; Reich and Hanitzsch, 2013). As argued throughout this project though, the relationship between ownership and control between the different structures of ownership varies sizeably. Variation in owner control leads to differing expectations regarding the methods by which owner influence is realised and the extent to which journalists and editors' behaviour and outputs are conditioned by owner control.

(1) Private Ownership

Private ownership is characterised by low separation between ownership and control (Picard and van Weezel, 2008). Private proprietors, typically individuals or family groups, have more direct and excludable access to the 'amenity potential' available from media ownership and are willing to deviate from full profit maximisation in order to access this (Demsetz and Lehn, 1985). In the words of former British editor and media academic Roy Greenslade, private owners own media outlets for propaganda and prestige as well as profits (House of Lords, 2008). As Page (1996) outlines, there are a variety of issues and examples in which owners involvement in content decisions has no systematic relationship to maximising readership and maximising profits but relates to owners' broader economic interests or ideological beliefs. There is also a much greater ability to impose and/or inculcate these views and values for private owners. Traditional systematic direct interference in editorial policy and news content should occur much more frequently under individual or family ownership

than other forms of ownership. Direct monitoring techniques such as phone calls to editors, regular newsroom visits, and direct contact with reporters all require a presence, management role, and exclusivity of control that is the preserve of private firms. The diversity of shareholders and their institutional makeup as well as factors of distance and multiple competing preferences prevent such day-to-day monitoring within diversely owned organisations.

Given the costs associated with consistent direct interference, the more practical methods for owners to address the principal-agent problem in a media firm involves selecting editorial staff through hiring and promotion practices. The selection ensures senior editors who manage the organisation's journalistic staff and content production share the same values and ethos of the owner and will enable owners' political and economic interests without the need for regular instruction (Napoli, 1997). These editors then seek out journalists that match this worldview while monitoring and reprimanding certain staff members when and where they deviate from the organisations' policy. This produces tendencies towards a strongly hierarchical organisational structure in which autonomy is limited. Content is influenced by overt and covert monitoring by editors with knowledge of, or anticipating, owners' interests and desires. Involvement in the selection of senior editors and monitoring of adherence to the values for which they were selected is much more closely associated with individual or family owners than other forms of ownership. Rational anticipation of the owner(s) preferred coverage by editors and journalists within the organisation is more likely under private ownership where staff can identify the owners' beliefs and interests based on interactions or statements of intent.

Journalistic staff and editors working in privately owned firms will then report more cases of direct owner interference, be relatively more likely to identify owner and editor preferences and strong links between these and organisational policy. This will be reinforced through relatively more hierarchical structures of control and techniques to induce a fit to a particular organisational ethos. Through these direct and indirect methods of control, journalistic autonomy will be relatively limited.

(2) Publicly Traded Ownership

By this, we mean diversely held publicly traded companies as in Chapter 2 where there is no controlling shareholder. Certain privately controlled outlets are PLCs

but are controlled by individual or families due to the use of dual-stock systems.⁷¹ As argued throughout this thesis, publicly traded or diverse corporate ownership lacks both the incentive and capacity to control a media firms' content as a private owner can and ownership and control are relatively separate. A corporate media firm aims to maximise the audience and sales as these are the primary means of increasing the rate of return. Per Roy Greenslade's evidence to the House of Lords Committee, "generally a public limited company will own it [the media outlet] for profit" (House of Lords, 2008; p. 36). As explained previously, shareholders with diverse holdings and little desire to manage the media outlet's content delegate authority and control to editors. The need to delegate removes the incentive to appoint an editor based on the degree to which she approximates the interests and preferences of an individual owner. This results in increased autonomy on the part of the editor whose primary responsibility is to produce profits for shareholders. This incentivises further delegation of authority and resultant autonomy for individual reporters within a diminished organisational hierarchy. Survey evidence from the US in particular illustrates publicly traded organisations with diverse ownership are associated with positive effects on journalists' perceived autonomy (e.g. Demers, 1993, 1999) Similarly, Dunaway (2008, 2013) finds that corporate ownership is less likely to be associated with staff anticipation of owners' political preferences.

The experiences of journalists and editors working in media outlets controlled by publicly traded companies will be substantially different from privately held outlets. With regard to autonomy and the influence of organisational policies and values, journalists and editors should report greater freedom and devolution of authority in these firms so that the production of news content is influenced primarily by audience preferences and professional norms (Zaller, 1999). These institutions have less hierarchical structures given the limited need to monitor behaviour. Forms of direct and indirect interference in practice should also be restricted. Identification and anticipation of owners' interests and preferences is expected to end beyond the paper's overall economic fortunes and should not

⁷¹ In these cases, class B voting stocks are held separately to ordinary class A stocks.

cross over into content concerns beyond an awareness of the readers' preferences.⁷²

(3) Trust/Not-for-Profit Ownership

The ownership of newspapers by non-profit trusts is unusual but this structure is important theoretically, as it presents very different implications for issues of ownership, control, and journalistic autonomy. Non-profit trusts are theoretically associated with strong separation between ownership and control of the firm and its content, although research into how these outlets operate in practice is quite limited (Picard and van Weezel, 2008).⁷³ The so-called 'holy trinity' of trust-owned outlets, *The Guardian* (UK), *The Irish Times* (Ireland), and *The St Petersburg Times* (USA), were all ultimately placed in trust ownership for the expressed purpose of ensuring editorial independence and protecting the news production process from interference or even takeover (Ellis, 2014). Trust-owned outlets are prohibited from partisan affiliation and are instead guided by principles, typically of an abstract nature, which dedicate the outlets to coverage of a variety of issues and perspectives as well as an ideal of 'public service journalism' (House of Lords, 2008; Ellis, 2014). The trusts are overseen by boards whose members are typically made up of prominent community figures, academics, or representatives of a variety of public and private institutions. Consequently, the trust model is often advocated as the exemplary structure for ensuring editorial independence and a commitment to diversity and substance.⁷⁴

The incentive to control journalists and editors is largely absent in this model while the structure of the trusts ensures that anticipation of owner preferences over content is highly unlikely and of no benefit to editorial staff. Editors and journalists should act relatively freely in producing the news. Moreover, trust ownership should be associated with lesser degrees of hierarchical management

⁷² This is not to suggest that journalists and editors will not feel any pressures within corporate media firms. The argument is simply that pressures to produce content that matches an organisational ethos and perceived owner preference will not be major considerations.

⁷³ The concentration here is on 'genuine' non-profit trusts rather than certain outlets that are run as profit-driven enterprises for supposed non-profit entities. The major established examples of true non-profit ownership include *The Guardian* (UK), *The Irish Times* (Ireland), and *The St Petersburg Times* (USA) (Ellis, 2014).

⁷⁴ The model, specifically *The Guardian*, was lauded for these reasons in the 2008 House of Lords Communications Report but the conclusion of the committee was that "it is unlikely that another newspaper will ever choose to recreate the Scott Trust model" (2008, p.64).

control. Journalists and editors' experiences are expected to be characterised by very low levels of direct or indirect interference with story selection/presentation and an adherence to traditional professional values of journalism.

There remain questions regarding whether senior editors are still appointed based on their fit with the view and values of the outlet. For example, Andrew Neil argued at the House of Lords Select Committee that "The Scott Trust is not going to pick a radical right Tory to edit *The Guardian*" as much as any traditional proprietor was likely to select an editor that differed from their preferences and interests. Similarly, outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The Irish Times* have trust charters, which either explicitly or implicitly, requires that the papers should remain true to these abstract principles. These include "the liberal values of *The Guardian*" in the case of the Scott Trust or "the promotion of understanding of other nations and peoples" in the case of The Irish Times Trust.⁷⁵ There is some potential then for the independence and autonomy established to conflict with the need to adhere to broad conceptions of the trust's mission even if there remains limited scope for monitoring or enforcement of these ideas. Given the lack of research into how trust ownership of media actually influences journalists and editors, these issues are worthy of investigation.

(4) Public Service Broadcasters

Unlike press outlets, public service broadcasters (PSBs) are structured in such a manner as to directly require an organisational ethos that is devoted to traditional journalistic principles through the regulatory frameworks in place to govern them.⁷⁶ Most public broadcasters face a diminished commercial imperative as the organisations are run on a not-for-profit basis with the explicit intention of addressing potential market failures to provide consistent, substantive and impartial news coverage (e.g. Soroka et al., 2013).⁷⁷ In theory,

⁷⁵ See 'The Scott Trust: values and history' available at <https://www.theguardian.com/the-scott-trust/2015/jul/26/the-scott-trust> and 'Principles of The Irish Times' available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/about-us/the-irish-times-trust>.

⁷⁶ There are, of course, commercial broadcasters that represent an additional ownership structure. They are not examined in detail here. On one hand, they could be expected to bear similarities to the patterns for the commercial press. Alternately, Curran and Seaton (1997) argue that this analogy does not fit perfectly and that commercial broadcasters tend to operate in a manner closer to publicly traded newspaper outlets. Examining the types of ownership here and their effects can be seen as a comparison of 'ideal types.'

⁷⁷ There is variation in the degree to which public broadcasters' operations are supported by advertising revenues or solely funded through the state or licence fee.

the requirements to 'inform objectively' and the prohibition against political affiliations or agendas included in the charters of public broadcast organisations provides a substantive grounds for journalistic autonomy. At the same time, the impartiality criterion limits the potential for control from above, in this case from government. Public broadcasters typically function in a manner akin to public bureaucracies in which the organisational ethos centres on the professionalisation of conduct and production with associated detachment and autonomy of journalists albeit within well-defined boundaries laid down by the state (see Curran, 2002; Curran and Seaton, 2003; Soroka et al., 2013). The institutional protections for journalists' independence within public broadcast organisations are therefore associated with an easily identifiable structured 'line management' typical of public organisations. The result is devolution of responsibility to journalists and a clear division of labour in news production but also systematic monitoring schemes to ensure the objectivity and impartiality the PSB's charter requires. Many press outlets have fewer layers of organisational control and are more hierarchical organisations especially in private outlets where the editor (on behalf of the owner) is the major and main authoritative voice.

The major potential for overlap between ownership and control at PSBs comes from government whose roles and responsibilities generally include decisions over funding such as changes in the licence fee, the appointment of the controlling Authority, Board or Trust⁷⁸, and Director-general and sanctioning the broadcaster for failing to live up to its chartered requirements. The state may also have the power to impose legislative requirements for balance or, exceptionally, institute limitations on broadcast coverage of certain issues.⁷⁹ Direct instruction and informal pressures from government outside of these major regulatory and legislative avenues play a decisive role in constraining public broadcast journalists' freedom.⁸⁰ Despite these potential means for government interference, the previous literature expects that the embedded and congealed norms within public broadcast institutions are generally effective at protecting journalists' autonomy and that PSBs are quite independent of state

⁷⁸ The terminology differs by public broadcaster but the role is very similar.

⁷⁹ Major examples include the 1988 amendment to the UK Broadcasting Act and the use of Section 31 of the Broadcasting Authority Act (1960) in Ireland. In both of these cases, the intention was to prohibit or limit broadcasts by individuals or groups engaged in or supporting violence in pursuit of political ends.

⁸⁰ See for example the competing views on government pressure on the BBC during the Miners' strike from Geoffrey Goodman, Alan Protheroe, and Nicholas Jones in Chapter 4.

interests (Reich and Hanitzsch, 2013; House of Lords, 2008). This is particularly likely to be the case where the public service model and the culture of independence has been in place for many decades and where citizens' support (and funding) is conditional on a continuing lack of government interference in the broadcaster's operations.

Journalists and editorial staff working in public broadcasters are therefore relatively more likely to report substantial journalistic autonomy. Public broadcasters' staff should experience an organisational adherence to professional journalistic principles as these are embedded in the institution. Journalists indeed report greater degrees of monitoring and pervasive management structures however to ensure balance, impartiality and public service requirements are met. Direct or indirect interference from government is likely to be rare and subject to substantial resistance given the protections in place. There is greater scope for influence over coverage of particular topics in public service broadcasters when major sources of leverage i.e., appointments and funding, are subject to government consideration and decision.

Research Design

I examine the theorised expectations regarding owner interference and influence, organisational structure and ethos, and the effects on journalists' freedom and autonomy using semi-structured qualitative interviews with experienced journalists and editors from major news organisations. As noted above, the nature of the relationship between ownership, control, and organisational behaviour is such that direct identification of the means and methods of control is difficult to achieve using observational data alone. This is particularly the case where editors and other staff anticipate owners' preferences rather than respond to overt instructions. Similarly, 'soft' iterative forms of amendment can be used to produce compliance. The chapter's in-depth, qualitative approach complements and extends the results obtained from observational, textual, and experimental data in previous chapters.

The interviewees were drawn from organisations that vary in their ownership structure. These include two public service broadcasters, two major not-for-profit trust-owned outlets and a number of private media organisations including News UK, DMG Media, Trinity Mirror, Independent News and Media, Sunrise Media, Communicorp, Thomas Crosbie Holdings, APN News and Media among

others. As participants often have experience in multiple media organisations and outlets, the interviews amount to approximately fifty-two individual experiences of major news outlets. Interviewees were also stratified by position in the organisation's hierarchy, i.e., editors, editorial management, section editors, sub-editors, frontline journalists, as the relationship between ownership and control will differ substantially at these various levels with resultant impacts on the sense of journalistic freedom. In particular, given the editor is directly responsible to the owner this relationship will involve more direct instruction, interaction or conscious anticipation of owner preferences. In contrast, the organisational ethos and iterative amendment, reprimand and socialisation processes will be of more importance means by which ownership structures will affect reporters and those producing copy more regularly. Of course, interviewees in senior positions also drew on their experience as reporters, sub-editors, and junior editors. In this way, any individual interviewee can provide insights into a number of outlets, ownership structures, and managerial roles⁸¹.

Interviewees include both retired journalists and editors but also working staff who can offer insights into how owners exert influence and shape media organisations in changing media markets. Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality as the interviews required direct references to, and criticism of peers and direct attribution would identify interviewees. Even for retired journalists, the ability to speak with the desired candour would be compromised if the individuals and their organisations could be directly identified. In certain cases, interviewees also requested that the interviews were not to be recorded because of the potential for identification. To provide this level of confidentiality, I developed detailed notes and executive summaries of the discussions during and immediately after the meetings. The results below combine direct quotation where this does not identify participants with summary results based on extensive evaluation and interpretation of recordings and notes where appropriate. A certain degree of snowballing was also involved in order to motivate respondents to participate (Goldstein, 2002).⁸² Interviews were conducted in 2017 and typically lasted for approximately one hour although on a number of occasions, the discussions lasted ninety minutes to two hours given

⁸¹ In relevant instances, these can increase the observations per outlet per interviewee.

⁸² This resulted, along with logistical issues, to many interviewees being Irish-based. This does not present a major problem as many British media organisations also operate in Ireland and journalists often work for both British and Irish-based media organisations during their career.

the level of depth the interviewees were willing to provide. In all but three cases, interviews were conducted face-to-face. All interviewees were highly experienced ranging from a minimum of ten years as a staff journalist in a national news organisation up to forty years as a staff journalist, editor, or managing editor in certain cases.

All interviews were structured thematically to address the theorised links between ownership, organisational structural control and policy, hierarchy and journalistic autonomy. There was examination of the methods, direct and indirect, by which editorial policy was developed, monitored, and enforced. The following section relates the descriptions, assessments, and experiences of the interviewees of these issues and mechanisms. Table 5.1 summarises the ownership models and the corresponding outlets from the sample.

Type	Description	Predicted Level of Interference and Structure	Examples from Sample	Individual-Organisation Observations
Private Ownership	Individual or Family with Controlling Ownership Share	<i>High owner influence, ownership role in editorial staff selection, strongly hierarchical organisational governance</i>	<i>Irish Independent, Sunday Independent, Sunday Times, The Irish Sun, Irish Daily Mail, Irish Examiner, Sunday Business Post, Evening Herald, Communicorp/ NewsTalk, Vice News, Financial Times</i>	<i>27 (Four editors, Twenty-three journalists and editorial staff)</i>
Diversely Held Ownership	Corporate ownership with multiple non-controlling shareholders	<i>Low owner influence, managerial delegation, relatively 'flat' governance</i>	<i>Daily Mirror, Irish Daily Mirror, CNN International</i>	<i>3 (One editor, two journalists)</i>
Trust Ownership	No shareholders, Trust holding, oversight Board of Governors	<i>Little or no owner influence, very strong editorial delegation, very 'flat' organisational governance</i>	<i>The Guardian, The Irish Times</i>	<i>12 (One editor, Eleven journalists and editorial staff)</i>
Public Broadcaster (State Ownership)	State-funded, regulated	<i>Limited owner (government) influence, bureaucratic management structure, highly structured governance and prescribed autonomy</i>	<i>BBC, RTÉ</i>	<i>10 (Two Managing Editors and Eight reporting staff)</i>

Table 5.1: Ownership Types, Predicted patterns of owner control, and Organisational Observations.

Results

Role of Ownership, Control, and Organisational Ethos

In many ways, the interviews confirmed the importance of owner influence in conditioning news practitioners' behaviour and the methods that owners employ to ensure their outlets' content is congruent with their views. Journalists and editors identified close links between ownership and the editorial ethos of news

outlets that they had worked for. Many interviewees outlined that staff are constantly aware of their owners or ownership model. As a long-time Irish national newspaper editor put it, “ownership, ethos, and editorial values are evidentially linked” (Interviewee 7). However, it was very clear from the interviews that this varied substantially depending on how ownership was structured.

Private Ownership: Direct and Indirect Influence

The identification of owner interference by interviewees was overwhelmingly limited to privately owned outlets. The strategies used by private owners to produce compliance varied somewhat from one individual owner to another.

The Murdoch Outlets

Some of the most direct owner interference in content were, perhaps unsurprisingly, experienced by those working at News UK titles owned by Rupert Murdoch. There were examples provided by interviewees specifically with regard to the coverage of European Treaty referendums in the Republic of Ireland. In the case of the Irish Lisbon referendum coverage at *The Sun*, there was direct top-down instruction that the paper was to take a strict ‘No’ stance. The instructions moved sub-editors to alter coverage in order to ensure that the paper’s tone and slant was sufficiently negative. The slanting of the coverage of the Lisbon treaty involved directly ‘subbing’ the language used in stories presentation to make the stories more “linguistically negative” through the use of “scary language”. The strategy was to use “scare tactics and especially stress how much will be lost financially.”⁸³ The use of sub-editors to adjust the relative negativity of the language used and the tone of coverage match the patterns in the observational data in earlier chapters. This also matches the very direct methods used by Murdoch at his tabloid outlets and his various open admissions of direct interference. The interviewee expressed the view that these instructions would often clash with staff’s own political views but that career considerations and future prospects would lead staff to carry out these diktats “on autopilot”. At other Murdoch-owned outlets, similar strategies were used. Interviewees from the *Sunday Times* outlined that coverage supportive of the ‘Yes’ side in the Lisbon referendum that journalists pitched was directly

⁸³ Interviewee 8 – Interview conducted 28/4/2017.

prohibited following contact between the editor of the newspaper, the London office and Murdoch. In the case of columnists or analysis features, this resulted in a refusal to publish positive pieces with direct instructions issued from the very top of the editorial management following discussions with London and Murdoch. For political reporting, interviewee 11 from the *Sunday Times* said it led to a tendency to “toe the line” and self-censor to avoid providing any reports that might be seen as positive coverage of the Treaty.⁸⁴

Direct intervention by Murdoch in the Lisbon referendum in Ireland was only part of a broader pattern however. Editorial selection continues to be a key means by which Murdoch as a private owner maintains control without costly consistent interference. Interviewees outlined that an organisational culture was established at the *Sunday Times* through the editor in which left-wing views were discouraged and a strong sense was conveyed to individual writers that their views did not match those of the outlet. An interviewee indicated that ultimately, this resulted in him leaving the paper.⁸⁵ Even though he did not believe his views could be characterised as particularly left wing, he felt that even these views did not fit in with the editor’s wishes. This matches the account of former *Sunday Times*’ editor Andrew Neil who said that the *Sunday Times* in contrast to *The Sun* communicates and establishes the Murdoch position and viewpoint through the editor (Neil, 1996). This particular viewpoint is characterised as “a combination of right-wing Republicanism from America and undiluted Thatcherism from Britain” (Neil, 1996, p.164). It is therefore unsurprising that broadly an editor seeking to accord with this worldview would discourage left-wing views. Even at *The Sun*, direct interventions from Murdoch were typically intermittent. Interview evidence illustrates that a conservative editorial policy was often imposed without the need for Murdoch’s intervention even when this policy contrasted strongly with the preferences of the journalistic cohort. Interviewee 8 used the example of the coverage of social issues that was subject to strong senior editorial intervention that moved the slant of coverage in a much more conservative direction than would otherwise have been the case if the journalists in question had been left to report independently. The editor would direct story selection for reporters on these issues and often subsequently alter the ‘line’ of these stories.

⁸⁴ Conducted 12/5/2017.

⁸⁵ Interviewee 12 – conducted 3/5/2017.

Independent News and Media – The O’Reilly Era

The Murdoch approach is often considered uniquely open in its exercise of media power (e.g. McKnight, 2010). However, the interview material suggests that a combination of direct and indirect interference occurs at many privately owned outlets outside of the Murdoch Empire even where owners have insisted editorial independence is well protected. For example, a recurrent theme in interviews was that the owners of Independent News and Media (INM) used a variety of means to exercise control over various outlets within the organisation. Under a previous regime, direct instructions would often come from emissaries rather than the owner himself. A former editor of one of INM’s national newspapers⁸⁶ recalled that owner-appointed board members issued instructions that the outlet was to provide ‘hatchet job’ coverage on a shareholder who was competing with the owner for advantageous policy decisions and latterly for control of the media organisation itself.⁸⁷ Similarly, board members would, in discussions of upcoming strands of coverage in one of the Sunday newspapers, express the view that “O’Reilly won’t like that.” Given the fact that both parties were aware of the relationship between these board members and the owner, these comments constituted a form of subtle instruction.⁸⁸

On certain issues where the owner had strong political preferences such as the coverage of conflict in Northern Ireland and the political representatives of the parties to the conflict, direct instructions were issued to editors during particularly contentious episodes or when the editor was originally appointed. A number of interviewees, even those far from the conflict zone, noted their experience of this. Views on the Northern Ireland conflict and political developments in turn became a key component of staff selection, editorial policy and organisational culture although the interpretation of owner preferences was somewhat broad as direct contact with the owner was not always forthcoming.

In the 1997 and 2007 Republic of Ireland general elections, the owner’s business interests were perceived as influencing election coverage and political slant (e.g. Horgan, 2001; Cooper, 2015). In 1997, this resulted in a direct endorsement of

⁸⁶ Interviewee 4 – conducted 13/4/2017.

⁸⁷ Interviewee 4.

⁸⁸ Interviewee 4.

an alternative government and in the 2007 case; there was a substantive alteration to the tone of political coverage of the government and especially the Prime Minister's finances. In the 2007 case, the change in coverage followed a meeting between the owner and prominent members of the government. It is difficult from the interview material to ascribe sole responsibility for these changes in coverage to owner intervention and interviewees instead outlined that such a consideration may only have been partly responsible. Even without direct instruction though, interviewees with experience of INM during this period outlined that there was a consistent awareness of and deference to the former owner's business interests. An interviewee summarised the pattern of coverage – "there's an awful lot of self-censorship and anything to do with O'Reilly's business interests would have been treated with kid gloves".⁸⁹ Another interviewee said that although direct owner interference was rare, the business section would face more pressures from the owners' representatives, euphemistically known as the "fourth floor".⁹⁰

In line with previous literature on ownership and methods of control, interview evidence illustrates that adherence with the worldview of INM's owners was ensured through the use of staff selection and instilling an ethos of compliance through the organisation. A very experienced interviewee who had held a number of senior editorial roles across INM outlets spoke of the maintenance of an organisation-wide ethos that induced compliance. This culture was described as extremely hierarchical and authoritarian. Power was held entirely by certain senior editors who "all styled themselves on the Kelvin MacKenzie school of editor."⁹¹ The INM outlets' newsrooms (which are primarily housed in the same building) were described as "a bullying, toxic environment" in which senior editors ruled through dictatorial and adversarial practices leading to compliance of reporters and other staff on lower rungs of the organisational ladder to quickly identify and accord with the desired policy. Coercion and direct confrontation were common and this amounted to a "Masters of the Universe" approach with strong patriarchal and traditionalist tendencies. This account matches very closely a 2014 National Union of Journalists anonymous survey highlighting common bullying practices at INM and which noted the presence of an "oppressive management culture" (Lyons, 2014; O'Connell, 2014). The Kelvin

⁸⁹ Interviewee 12.

⁹⁰ Interviewee 10 – conducted 3/5/2017.

⁹¹ Referring to the notoriously dictatorial, bellicose, and conservative former Sun editor.

MacKenzie analogy is useful here. As Curran and Seaton outline (1997, p.73), MacKenzie acted as Murdoch's alter ego by pushing his owner's views while dealing forcefully and coercively with staff. The interviewee suggested that the various editorial appointments at INM outlets were intended to fulfil the same role. Under these conditions, autonomy for journalists at INM was severely limited as deviation from the policy laid-down was likely to have substantial immediate or medium-term consequences. The interviewee was very clear that this culture was deeply embedded within INM to the extent that it persisted through various editorships. Editors and other senior staff were "hand-picked" so that they matched the values of the organisation and would sustain the company's culture.⁹²

According to the interview evidence, there were clear links between the creation and maintenance of this culture at INM and the type of content the journalistic staff produced. The senior staff and the organisations' outlook were "contemptuous of social issues such as homelessness" as well as minorities. For example, a senior editorial manager during an editorial conference on the following day's front-page story said, "black faces don't sell papers." There was an attempt in this case to ascribe racial or ethnic biases to readers and audiences when in fact; the interview evidence suggested this was instead a cover for the racial views of the editorial management. An interviewee contrasted this experience strongly with the culture in the newsroom of another trust-owned outlet. Relatedly, the interviewee outlined that senior staff selection and their domineering hold of the newsroom led to an adherence to a political agenda in INM in line with O'Reilly's views. In the view of one interviewee with a long history at INM, the awareness of an O'Reilly agenda on republicanism led to fear of and avoidance of anything that could be seen as radicalism. The interviewee identified the INM agenda as "conservative, pro-enterprise, pro-business" with anti-republicanism as an entry point but this had evolved into a broader policy of conservatism. This had an effect on hiring practices in which editorial managers would select those who would fit the organisational policy more easily which led to the exclusion of those of a more 'radical' or 'leftist' viewpoint. Interviewees contrasted this clearly and directly with the willingness of other outlets, notably trust-owned outlets, to tolerate diverse perspectives.

⁹² Interviewee 4.

Other interview evidence from an individual who had a prominent role at INM's largest outlet and the highest-selling newspaper in the country, the *Sunday Independent*, similarly confirmed that the paper's ethos was "fiercely anti-Republican, anti-public service, pro-private sector" and "quite similar to the Tea Party".⁹³ This agenda was maintained through staff selection and the distribution of the regular 'slots' in the paper but also particularly through meetings of senior editors who identified what the editorial slant would be for a given week and the topics to focus on. Staff pitches would then either be selected from those already sent in or instructions given to journalists on what to write about to fit the agenda and slant that had been decided. Importantly, the *Sunday Independent* was much less wedded to specific party political affiliations. The paper would switch to either major party if it served the outlet's "wider agenda". This again illustrates the difference between political endorsements and political orientation.

Interviewee 4 identified the tendency of editors at Independent News and Media to know what the owner wanted in this regard without having to be told. As senior editors had been appointed as they shared a worldview and exercised control very directly and coercively, compliance to a broader 'line' was a logical result. This matches the account of the relationship between ownership and control at INM outlined by former journalist and media academic Kevin Rafter. Rafter states, "With the right editor in situ, and an established editorial ethos in place, the need for over interference is reduced, and this outcome has most certainly been achieved by the various Independent owners" (2012, p.204). Interviewee 12 outlined the practice by which, alongside appointing ideologically congruent and compliant senior editors, the owner would also exercise a veto over department editors, specifically the business editor. This illustrates an owner can still employ more direct methods of intervention in staff selection where the owner's interests are particularly strong in addition to selecting ideologically congruent senior editors.

In the O'Reilly era at INM, there is some evidence to support Shoemaker and Reese's contention that 'absentee ownership' will be less inclined to adopt a vigorous editorial policy. Even under private ownership, outlets whose content cannot serve an owner's business interests or political preferences are less likely

⁹³ Interviewee 11.

to be subject to direct attempts to institute a policy line or slant. At a more distant outlet controlled by the INM organisation interviewee 6 characterised editorial input from INM as minimal. In his words, geographic location is important in shielding outlets from proprietors' interference – "we were out of sight, out of mind." In the interviewee's view, the major pressure applied by the organisation and its owner concerned the delivery of profits with associated imposition of budgetary constraints. The interviewee did point out however that the editor having previously sat on the Board of the newspaper under previous owners was removed from this position under INM. It is also worth considering that the process of editorial selection, seeking congruence of worldview and the maintenance of a broadly agreeable editorial position may still have been at work. The interviewee described the outlet's tone and policy as "economically conservative while socially progressive" and that "we believed in the market." Given the values and ethos outlined by interviewees closer to the owner's base at INM's Irish outlets, the owner may have been hands-off at this newspaper as it was "out of sight" but also there was no tension between the political positions of the outlet paper and that of the owner.

Denis O'Brien – A new interventionism

The takeover of INM by Denis O'Brien has heightened concerns about owner interference in the organisation even further. Interview evidence suggests that what Interviewee 12 characterised as a "much more hands-on approach particularly through the chairman who is O'Brien's right hand man" has augmented the more indirect influence of O'Reilly. The organisation has also been re-structured to concentrate control of policy across INM outlets at the group editor level. The individual editors at daily papers and this group editor were characterised as handpicked, compliant and a "safe choice" by interviewees. This matches the pattern of direct interference illustrated by the introduction of an editorial charter in 2013 across the INM organisation that raised substantial concerns about the control of content by INM journalists (e.g. Clifford, 2013).

Interviewee 12, who had experience working at the O'Brien-owned Newstalk commercial radio station, said that his/her understanding from staff is that there is similarly "that [a direct] kind of owner interference."⁹⁴ This account also

⁹⁴ The interviewee is not currently contracted by the station.

matches reports of Newstalk's staffs' general views of the role of O'Brien as owner (Cullen, 2011). However, another interviewee, 11, working for NewsTalk characterised this relationship between O'Brien and the outlet's content quite differently. He/she said that there had been no direct instructions given at any point including in the coverage of particular issues regarding Denis O'Brien or his business interests. However, he/she said there was consultation with senior editors around coverage of these issues in a manner that would be quite unusual compared to other topics. The interviewee did say that while direct instructions had never been issued and coverage of these issues had been accommodated, he/she said there was a cautiousness around these topics and a potential willingness to avoid covering them if it was possible.

O'Brien has also been associated with various high-profile cases of staff dismissal or resignations from these outlets due to interference and intervention. There have also been multiple legal actions taken by O'Brien against media outlets he does not control. Given the patterns of interference O'Brien has been associated with since taking over INM, journalists and editors are more likely than most to be aware of his views and anticipate his wishes. O'Brien is particularly active and vocal in his rejection of adverse Moriarty tribunal findings concerning him (e.g., Cullen, 2011) but he has also publicly expressed his broader views on the media specifically that "some journalists are anti-business and anti-enterprise" (O'Brien, 2009). It seems likely then that these views factor into their considerations when selecting stories and producing copy. Indeed, there are examples of this in the instructions given to journalists in Newstalk to produce positive economic coverage from Editor Garrett Harte and chief executive Frank Cronin. Cronin's memo stated, "The issues facing the country continue to be defined in mainly negative terms. It is imperative that while continuing to deal with issues with integrity, that we give due considerations to viewpoints which offer different lines than normal journalism follows." A former producer at NewsTalk told Paul Cullen "There was definitely a sense of 'yeah, let's be friendly to business, let's talk about social entrepreneurship and the like" (Cullen, 2011). Interviewee 11 identified a different causal chain at work in NewsTalk that tended to produce pro-business, pro-private sector and anti-public sector coverage. He/she said that senior management tended to hire prominent business people (all men) with a media profile to major slots in the station as they had social relationships with these

individuals and wanted “to hire people like themselves”. This interviewee said that the result may still be pro-business and broadly, right wing economic coverage but the mechanisms were “social rather than political” and “there was no direct instruction from Denis O’Brien.”

Interview evidence also suggested in the case of NewsTalk that Denis O’Brien owns the station despite its lack of profitability, as without him, the only radio news source would be RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann). The public service broadcaster would be perceived as likely to support the public sector more broadly. The idea expressed by the interviewee here is that there is a desire on O’Brien’s part to ensure, even at the risk of losses, that there is an outlet providing an alternative to this. This matches the proposition from earlier chapters and discussed elsewhere, for example in Picard and van Weezel (2008), Greenslade (2003) and Prat (2014) that private owners seek to own media outlets not simply for profit-making purposes but also to support a particular political point of view in the marketplace. There is mixed but suggestive evidence then regarding direct interference at INM and Communicorp. There is at the very least evidence of a process, conscious or otherwise, for the selection of compliant and congruent staff and some inculcation of Denis O’Brien’s preferences.

Private Owner Interference in Smaller Media Firms

At other privately held organisations, ownership influence varies as owners’ financial control of an outlet strengthens or weakens. One clear example comes from Interviewee 7 in his/her editorship of a major national Sunday newspaper.⁹⁵ A politically active, left-leaning journalist appointed the interviewee shortly following the establishment of the outlet and this relationship was quite hands-off as the interviewee felt that he had been appointed because he was broadly a good fit with the owner’s views.⁹⁶ However following substantial financial issues at the outlet due to the publisher and his co-owner’s other investments, there was a change in the co-ownership, and the Smurfit group became the controlling owner. The interviewee characterised the involvement of Smurfit as “very different and very interfering”. The new owners felt the newspaper’s coverage was “anti-business and should be more pro-

⁹⁵ Conducted 20/4/2017.

⁹⁶ This structure bore some similarities to an employee-owner model.

enterprise” and the interviewee identified that these concerns were communicated very clearly and repeatedly to him with requests to change editorial policy. Smurfit also sought to influence staff directly on this issue by making them aware of their views. However, the other investments by the co-owner (who had little or no interest in the newspaper’s content) meant that the paper soon ultimately folded. These existential pressures had allowed the editor to resist Smurfit’s intervention to some degree, as the editor’s long-term future in the role was already uncertain due to its financial situation.⁹⁷ This is a strong illustration of the importance of leverage of this sort over the ability of owners to control editors and journalists and the complex relationship between economic sustainability and owner influence.

Similarly, interviewees working at other outlets that have recently experienced a number of ownership changes and gone through receiverships, outlined these outlets as broadly non-interventionist and willing to grant autonomy in the issues they covered and their perspectives. Interviewee 12 said that *The Irish Examiner* offered the most freedom of any outlet he had worked for to select stories and angles as he desired, without interference. *The Examiner*, and specifically the recently departed editor, was seen as very encouraging of investigative work and exploration of topics the interviewee was interested in in detail but was hands-off in allowing the interviewee to cover this independently. *The Examiner’s* long-term owners’, the family firm Thomas Crosbie Holdings was placed in receivership in 2012 and the family sought to re-organise ownership through a new entity, Landmark Holdings that in turn quickly faced substantial financial pressures.

At the *Sunday Business Post*, interviewees attested to the freedom the editor has and is willing to grant in turn to journalistic staff. The organisational structure and ethos was characterised in the interview as highly collaborative and horizontal compared to other organisations the interviewee had worked for with private ownership structures. The *Business Post* has been held until recently by Thomas Crosbie Holdings but has been through three ownership changes since 2012 with a number of additional potential purchases currently mooted. It is currently owned under a somewhat peculiar arrangement in which

⁹⁷ The interviewee had also been guaranteed a senior editorial position at another outlet before taking up the editorship of the outlet discussed here. This further cushioned any potential career impact.

the paper is owned by private equity but control of this financial house in turn lies primarily with a particular family.

Interviewee 18, a senior editor and experienced reporter at the *Business Post*, said that there generally was a sense of editorial independence at the paper under this new ownership but that there had been two occasions where owners had raised issues although the editor had resisted these interventions. The interviewee meets the chair once a week. The meetings, however, are retrospective. The meetings review the week's paper rather than previewing the next paper. The interviewee suggested that sitting on the board the role is primarily 'expectations management', that is, the editorial staffs set out how the paper has been developing and how the board should expect the paper's content to evolve based on recent trends. Discussions focused only on the 'big picture' rather than specifics of content. The interviewee maintained there was no general editorial influence but clearly a venue for such influence exists and it is subject to an individual editor's resistance. If the owners did want to change the editor's decision or the editor were to take a position that the owners disagreed with, they could be removed. The issue then is whether the paper's ethos is in line with the owners. The paper's editorial position is characterised as generally 'pro-business' but seeking balance between a smaller state and effective government intervention. However, this pro-business ethos actually involves a watchdog role and critique of bad business practice. The paper can be quite critical of business interests relative to other outlets through its adoption of this informal ombudsman role. This was also a testament to the paper's long-running tradition of presenting a diversity of viewpoints. The variety of perspectives was central to the *Business Post*'s mission and therefore very divergent views are allowed in the paper. The interviewee believed that the SBP was much more independent of particular interests than "any other broadsheet newspaper except the *Irish Times*".

The *Sunday Business Post*'s difficult financial circumstances and the threat of insolvency have clearly played into the relationship between owners and editor. The editor was primarily appointed to bring the paper's sales and revenues back into line and the editor's role focused on economic management first rather than being a politically driven appointment. There is though little sense that there is any meaningful clash between the editor's views and those of the owners.

Private Ownership and Social Control in the Modern Newsroom

More generally, interviewees working in private outlets spoke of implicit and informal methods of ensuring journalists kept to a specific 'line.' Interviewee 12 said that there is no need for explicit instruction in the tone or angle of stories or indeed the particular story selection. This is picked up iteratively through trial-and-error as journalists identify how much prominence their stories have been given. The interviewee and another experienced sub-editor, Interviewee 8, said that journalists are aware of the extent to which the tone of the articles has been changed or the angle altered by sub-editors or editorial management. The journalists will then adapt to this over time and incorporate this without the need for explicit instruction or reprimand. The pattern of iterative adjustment to the policy of the outlet has been noted in studies of control in journalism dating back to Breed (1955). Interviewees pointed to a variety of implicit means of producing a slant to coverage without direct instruction.

The examples used included subtle patterns of story selection such as the selection of a number of stories regarding fatal foetal abnormality. An outlet and its editorial staff will accept or suggest pitches from journalists that concentrate on cases where the mother is told the child would not survive and then the child does survive. This provides a particular framing of the issue without this ever being directly stated. Similarly, interviewee 12 (who has substantial experience covering criminal justice issues) identified the Mail's coverage of criminal justice issues that concentrates its reporting on the experiences of the victim. This then tends to provide a particular framing to how such issues should be considered by the reader. The degree to which an outlet provides prominence to these types of stories or the amount of sub-editing they are subjected to before publication conditions journalists' future behaviour without the need for instruction. In the case of the *Irish Daily Mail*, interview evidence suggested that adjustments to stories formed part of a process by which the editor, conscious of its mother organisation the British *Daily Mail* and its ethos, ensured the Irish version did not deviate too far from the British Mail's agenda. However, the editor also knew that the Irish consumer audience might not accept an identical style. The editing and sub-editing processes were used to bridge this divide by directing staff to make certain adjustments. An interviewed sub-editor at the paper used the example of the coverage of an Irish transgender person's successful transition that was considered too positive and celebratory for the British *Mail* and its ethos

therefore there was an instruction to amend this copy so as not to draw the ire of the London headquarters.

Changes in the media world condition the relationship of journalists and editors to owner interference and influence. While interviewees were clear that journalistic autonomy is as the evidence suggests quite a deeply held value, at the same time the interviews revealed the pressures and incentives to compromise with owner directives or organisational policies because of the increased scarcity of alternative employment options. In a sense, outlets in the UK and Ireland are particularly interesting cases to consider the pliability of journalistic staff in the financially precarious media industry. News media ownership in these islands is relatively consolidated among a small number of owners. The opportunity to move to a different outlet because of owner interference is therefore much more limited. The broader problems threatening the industry means that journalists and editors are more likely than ever to compromise on the value of autonomy to protect their salaried position. Having worked at a number of major outlets and experienced ownership and organisational pressures, interviewee 12 stressed that this pattern of further submission to owner pressures, some of which he described as “a new departure”, was likely to continue.

Other interviewees also spoke of the importance of structural security in determining the degree to which a journalist can resist owner influence or instruction from those in senior editorial positions wishing to push an agenda. For journalists in non-staff positions and without a consistent slot in the outlet, the interviewee said that pitches are made and decisions are taken by senior staff as to which pitches will fit the editorial slant or focus of the outlet’s coverage. If journalists do not pitch stories that match the editorial agenda, they will not receive a slot and go unpaid for that edition. A journalist with substantial experience in pitching to predominantly web-based media outlets⁹⁸ particularly highlighted the need for pitches to fit with an agenda and set of issues that would conform with the outlets’ political outlet or generate substantial traffic or indeed achieve both of these aims. Similarly, it was pointed out that this process may occasionally work in reverse where a non-staff journalist will be contacted and instructed on the type of story desired to fit the

⁹⁸ Interviewee 19 –correspondence.

agenda on a particular news topic and if the individual wishes to be published and paid, they must accept the instruction. This structural incentive makes non-staff writers more pliable. The financial pressures on the media industry mean that this form of insecurity is growing and this process may be affecting more and more journalists. Staff journalists have somewhat greater scope to resist these pressures at least on occasion because they have a consistent slot in the paper that must be filled.⁹⁹

(2) Publicly Traded Ownership: Audience-driven agendas

Unlike the United States where ownership by publicly traded companies had been on the increase over the last number of decades until reverting to higher levels of private ownership again relatively recently (Noam, 2009; Garrahan, 2017), diverse corporate ownership remains less common in other liberal media markets. The United Kingdom and Ireland in particular have national newspaper markets in which private ownership of major newspapers continues to be the norm with the only exceptions being the *Daily Mirror* (diverse corporate ownership), *The Guardian* and *The Irish Times* (both trust-owned). The observed effects on content for a case study topic are examined in Chapter 2 focusing on a major US metropolitan newspaper. Outside of the US, the *Daily Mirror* is a key case to investigate the relationship between PLC ownership and the control of content. According to Andrew Neil, proprietorial influence is “less with The Mirror because The Mirror is a public company and there is no Murdoch-type figure and there is no ideologically driven person in the management of The Mirror” (Neil to House of Lords, 2008; Q1675). Curran and Seaton (1997, p.72) also attest that prior to the takeover by Maxwell in 1984, the *Mirror* through the 1970s and 1980s operated “relatively autonomously” while owned by the corporate giant Reed International. Additional evidence from the late Geoffrey Goodman, former industrial editor, attested to a pre-Maxwell system of collective decision-making and “a more democratic situation, which led to informed discussion and debate,” while Paul Foot also outlined that journalistic autonomy was reasonably well-protected at this time attributing this to the lack of a single proprietor (Tunney, 2007, p. 85).

Following Maxwell’s sale post-1992, Curran and Seaton also attest that once held by Trinity Mirror with no controlling shareholder, it reverted to the pre-

⁹⁹Of course, they may be staff journalists precisely because they fit the agenda of the outlet.

Maxwell autonomous style. Trinity Mirror is noteworthy in this regard as the dismissal or appointment of an editor is a decision taken by the entire board rather than an individual owner (House of Lords, 2008). No single individual can therefore solely command the editor's loyalty and given the diversity of shareholders in Trinity Mirror, rational anticipation by the editor of owners' policy preferences is far less likely to occur.

We see little evidence of direct owner interference at Trinity Mirror outlets. A very experienced Mirror senior editor and long-time reporter outlined that in his/her experience in both the British and Irish incarnations of the Mirror, Trinity Mirror did not issue instructions or direction on editorial policy or the paper's agenda.¹⁰⁰ He/she said that Trinity Mirror gave a "free hand" in editing the newspaper and online operation as long as editors "behaved in a responsible manner." There was a contrast, he said, in how the Mirror's left-wing ethos and editorial stance in Britain and Ireland was constructed when compared to News International outlets or the Mail. These other outlets tended to rely on owner direction in the case of News International and partisan, right wing and autocratic editors in the case of the Mail. Instead, in Trinity Mirror papers, central editorial decision-makers would not dictate decisions or there was no communication from shareholders or management. The interviewee instead made editorial decisions based on consultation with other staff during conference.

There was a sense though of what were called "guiding principles" of the Mirror that made it more left-leaning by tradition than other outlets with more of a tendency to seek to represent "the working class" but this was not an ethos consciously cultivated by owners or management. Instead, the interviewee argued that this was a reflection of its readers and their expectations. He/she contrasted this demand-driven ethos directly with other outlets where he/she said editors and proprietors would play more of a role in inculcating this agenda and political orientation. The lack of a top-down agenda also led to less of a culture of "spinning stories". The interviewee here pointed to coverage by certain outlets (mainly the Mail) of refugee and immigration issues that he/she believed were based on a direct intent to go out and find a certain type of story

¹⁰⁰ Interviewee 20 – conducted 13/5/2017.

to portray immigrants and refugees negatively.¹⁰¹ This centralised story selection approach was absent at the Mirror. The interviewee said their strategy in contrast was simply to cover and report all stories as they came onto the radar rather than seeking out topics or frames.

As a diversely held firm, Trinity Mirror outlets are particularly focused on delivering profits and readership shares and there is a strong sense of the demands of the audience base. The paper's affiliation and positions on austerity, the minimum wage, and employment rights were linked by interviewees to a sense of what the readers wanted. This response to audience preferences has taken a number of forms. Traditionally it was more instinctive and based on conversations and conferencing between staff on their sense of what social experience was telling them but has recently become much more data-driven focusing on demographic information on the socio-economic status of the consumers and audience feedback through the paper's social media presence and website. The paper and website's majority C2DE working class audience (approx. 62%) and 52/48 female majority readership were central determinants of the paper's story agenda and orientation on issues, while discussion on the paper's social media platforms was monitored to give a qualitative sense of where the paper's audience was moving. This analytics audience-driven focus stands apart from what the interviewee said was a more top-down culture experienced at other outlets. However, it is also clearly compatible with the central need to produce audience satisfaction and growth in a firm focused on shareholder value. While there are potential drawbacks from a normative or quality standpoint from this form of consistent responsiveness to consumers, this approach means the paper is less likely to be driven by owners' or editors' agendas.

(3) Trust Ownership: Freedom and 'Counter-programming'

There are substantial differences between the levels of interference reported by interviewees working at privately held outlets compared to not-for-profit, trust-owned outlets. Interviewee 7, former editor of one of the trust-owned outlets, was extremely clear in identifying the trust ownership of the paper and its principles as informing all major decisions at the paper. With regard to the

¹⁰¹ This matches the story selection and framing techniques at the *Irish Daily Mail* described by Interviewee 12 above.

development of policy within the paper, the interviewee outlined that any editorial policy was drawn from “less the editor than the principles.” The trust document that provides a charter for the organisation was identified as crucial to both strategic and tactical editorial decisions at the newspaper. In this context, the interviewee outlined that in his experience, “ownership, ethos, and editorial values are evidentially linked.” This was contrasted with the editor’s previous experience editing a privately owned publication.

Interviewee 7 provided a number of examples of how the trust’s principles influenced the paper’s priorities. First, there was a focus on representation of minority interests and issues of social deprivation even though these would not have been considered major drivers of circulation or consumption. This matches the comparative experience of interviewee 4, having worked at the trust outlet and INM, suggested that there was strong resistance to coverage of those issues at INM but the ethos of *The Irish Times* was very clear in this regard. The former editor attributed this directly to the principles of the trust. Similarly, the interviewee said that the trust and the board responsible for the running of the trust were supportive with regard to issues of resource allocation when the editor felt that the paper needed to expand sections of its coverage. For instance, there was substantial expansion of foreign coverage under the interviewee’s editorship. The interviewee went to the board chair for coverage of Central and Eastern Europe around the end of the Cold War and outlined the reasoning and likely costs of the venture but received immediate support and funding to go ahead. The interviewee based this straightforward support of a very costly enterprise on the fact that it was in line with the mission of the trust broadly interpreted – “there was absolute priority to the editor”. He/she characterised the relationship between the editor as representative of the editorial side of the paper and trust as positive, consistent and non-interfering- “there was no falling out in sixteen years and board suggestions were issues of taste not principle”.

Another interviewee who was a long-time reporter and senior editor at *The Irish Times* provided a similar account of the role of trust ownership in conditioning the paper’s behaviour.¹⁰² He said the principles or ethos of the *Irish Times* comes from the trust and though “the trust document is not invoked every day, it would

¹⁰² Interviewee 2 – conducted 8/3/2017.

be uppermost or in the back of the mind of the editor on a regular basis.” He characterised these principles as “commitment, balance, and set of unashamedly liberal values”. Similarly, his experience was that “editor’s autonomy from the proprietor is a very strong value in journalism generally but especially strong in that paper at that time.” At the paper, there was a strong “tradition of editorial independence” and contrasted this with other outlets – “the power structures and owners are much more pronounced.” One of the paper’s most experienced political reporters said specifically that, having worked for other major outlets, the *Irish Times* was “the most comfortable place to work” and that “the core part of the ethos is you feel you can trust the decisions are being made for the right reasons and the determination is to be fair and truthful.”

At *The Guardian*, there is a similar separation of ownership and control. The experienced former editor of the newspaper, Alan Rusbridger, told the House of Lords that the paper’s organisational structure is unusual because of “the absence of any kind of higher authority—there is no board or proprietor or publisher who can tell me what to say” (House of Lords, 2008, Q208.). In sharp contrast to privately owned outlets, Rusbridger outlined that trust ownership means, “your relationship is purely on a horizontal level with your colleagues”. Rusbridger also outlined the manner in which the Scott Trust informs the ethos of the paper on a day-to-day basis:

“It is sometimes those two words “as heretofore”. As an editor, you have to understand the traditions of the paper and reinterpret them for the present age. Yes, the whole thing is informed by the Trust membership and the Trust purpose but adapted to things including market conditions” (House of Lords, 2008, Q244).

While trusts guarantee a lack of ownership interference at these outlets, they clearly provide a broad ethos for the outlets to operate within. To the extent that the principles of the trust informs coverage, this tends to manifest, in the view of a former editor, as reaching out to cover important social issues such as poverty, exclusion and minorities that would not otherwise get covered. An experienced *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* correspondent said one of the major differences between the paper was that *The Irish Times* recruited various individuals to its newsroom (some of whom were more writers than journalists)

who had strong social justice principles, would debate topics extensively in the newsroom and would seek to “change the world” through the paper’s coverage.¹⁰³ He said the *Irish Times* staff had a tendency to be “more altruistic” and discuss how things ought to be but this tended to dull their “news sense” to the point that stories would be ignored even if they had typical fiery, sellable news value.

The experience of interviewees from both *The Guardian* and *The Irish Times* though was that this ethos did not represent a serious imposition and that journalistic freedom was very strong at both organisations. A long-time correspondent at *The Guardian* attested to strong autonomy at the outlet and pointed to the paper’s willingness to accommodate alternate perspectives and “tonal correctives” on quite a regular basis.¹⁰⁴ The interviewee pointed to a desire on his/her part to produce countervailing coverage or perspectives that were rarely examined. He/she noted a willingness at *The Guardian* to accommodate what he/she called “counter-programming” of the sort that could clash very directly with the interviewee’s own worldview, the liberal values of the paper and the tendencies of the majority of its readers. Examples include an interview feature with an individual with a major role in the logging industry who would be “a typical villain” for the paper but when the feature was produced, the final piece ended up being “his perspective and reasoning” and the editors accepted this in a straightforward fashion. In another case, news coverage concentrating on the competencies of an international left-wing leader resulted in substantial debate between more opinion-focused and news-focused sections of the paper but the reporting was published as written without amendment. Editors may suggest angles but resistance to these ‘nudges’ was always tolerated and there would be no consequences to this. The interview broadly suggested that there was a culture of dialogue between reporters, line editors and senior editors and those individuals at lower levels of the organisational tree were free to dissent from the ideological line that senior editors might articulate. In the individual’s experience, there were no examples he/she could recall of copy being changed due to senior editors or management. However, the interviewee said that the decisive test would be whether the paper would facilitate a very conservative voice in news reporting and how the paper

¹⁰³ Interviewee 10.

¹⁰⁴ Interviewee 5 – conducted 17/4/2017.

would respond to a radical deviation from its ethos by such a staff member. Individuals were clearly drawn to the outlet by their own congruence with its views and it is difficult to disentangle this dynamic fully.

At both outlets, there has been a strong culture of autonomy for individual journalists and opportunities for staff in less senior positions to express their views and debate the outlet's direction and decision-making. A former editor of the *Irish Times* described how journalists were encouraged to contribute to conferences that reviewed both topics covered and the editorial policy of the paper when dealing with the topics of the day. In particular, he/she outlined the key role of the open Tuesday morning review conference – many if not all journalists would attend (all were free to attend) and there was vigorous debate regarding what was covered, the angles employed and the paper's overall editorial values. Contributions came from those at all levels of the organisation. A number of interviews confirmed the vigour of many of these discussions while another individual familiar with the *Irish Times* and INM said that there were many more meetings and conferences at the Irish Times and issues and the way to cover stories would be debated for long periods.¹⁰⁵ The editor described this process as "one of the most valuable aspects of the job" and central to how he/she would formulate editorial policy on key issues including directly influencing the paper's lead editorials – commonly considered 'the voice of the paper.' This process indicates the willingness of the editorial management and the outlet to deliberate and a freedom of journalists throughout the paper to voice their views. At *The Guardian*, a similar process takes place. A critical example is the process of deciding election endorsements as is common in the British press. Unlike all other outlets, each *Guardian* (and *Observer*) staff member may contribute to a debate after which a vote is taken on how or whether to endorse a party or parties at a forthcoming election. Both outlets are therefore characterised by the type of relatively horizontal organisational structure and vigorous, deliberative approach to news decisions.

As an example of the trust structure instilling a democratic role and freedom for staff journalists and editors within the organisation, one long-serving *Irish Times* interviewee said that these values only crystallise within an organisation if they are "fought for from below".¹⁰⁶ Shortly after the establishment of the trust, the

¹⁰⁵ Interviewee 10.

¹⁰⁶ Interviewee 2.

staff organised a review of the paper focusing on the values they wished to inculcate. This was described as “almost a workers’ control exercise” which “management took very seriously”. One major outcome of this process was that the editor was replaced. The interviewee argued that this process also established an internal legitimacy to the editorship of the Irish Times who represents the editorial side of the paper (and its journalistic staff) on the board. A consequence of this process was the introduction of what the former editor, interviewee 7, called the ‘negative sieve’ in editorial selection. This meant that while the Board of the Trust ultimately appointed the editor, the journalistic staff could veto any potential candidate. At *The Guardian*, a similar process in which the NUJ chapel interviews the prospective candidates and the entire staff of journalists then votes, through the NUJ for their preferred editor as part of an electoral college (Brown, 1995; Guardian, 2015). The Scott Trust has appointed the endorsed candidates of the journalists during both appointment processes in recent times. This process is unique to trust-owned outlets and editorial appointments are therefore based on consent rather than any individual owner’s preference or worldview.

Similarly, interviews showed trust outlets as granting substantial autonomy to the reporter or writer on an everyday basis through an extremely light touch editing approach. One interviewee said that with regard to journalistic freedom, *The Irish Times* was “very autonomous, famously so”.¹⁰⁷ One long-time reporter¹⁰⁸ with high profile and often controversy-courting correspondent beats identified the paper as giving very large degrees of freedom to reporters with “no feeling of constraint editorially” and this applied both to the coverage of conflict in Northern Ireland and with regard to other issues in the Southern newsroom.¹⁰⁹ He/she said, “Never in 20 years did I think, is this hairy in terms of who owns the Irish Times? I never thought about the owners or the trust.” There was little in the way of monitoring of the copy produced and the interviewee described the *Irish Times* as “very much a reporter’s paper” with no attempts to interfere with story selection or the angles to coverage. A number of other interviewees also recalled that editorial intervention at the Irish Times was minimal and in contrast to other outlets, reporters’ copy would be very

¹⁰⁷ Interviewee 2.

¹⁰⁸ Interviewee 3 – conducted 27/3/2017.

¹⁰⁹ Interview evidence suggests that this particular topic was associated with strong editorial lines and direct interventions at other outlets.

minimally subbed and altering copy in any substantive way is very rare. One of these interviewees, an experienced sub-editor¹¹⁰, said that the lack of alterations made in the *Irish Times* is highly unusual in his/her experience. Experienced political and social correspondents separately pointed out that reporters were allowed to file much longer pieces that seek to provide deeper analysis and context for an issue. In the case of an interviewee who had come from INM, he/she said that while copy at INM would be “finessed” to a point that the “angle could be oversold”, this would never happen at the *Irish Times*. One interviewee characterised this pattern of minimal intervention as positive in allowing the journalist a near-overwhelming independence compared to any of the other outlets he/she had worked for but its drawback was at times, there was little dialogue with editors at all.

It is clear then that in terms of the ethos, internal hierarchical structure, and everyday editorial practices these not-for-profit trust-owned outlets operate very differently than privately owned outlets. In particular, the model tends to produce substantial journalistic autonomy and while these outlets exist within rubrics based around broadly liberal principles, the room for interpretation of these principles means that journalists are not confined to one particular editorial line and in certain cases; there are active attempts to allow for and encourage alternative voices and perspectives. There are potential limits however. Firstly, an interviewee identified that the ‘acid test’ of independence would come if staff produced coverage that consistently strongly contrasted with the liberal ethos but self-selection generally reduces the potential for such incongruence.¹¹¹ Second, some interviewees felt that there were other negative consequences to the independence and non-interventionist editorial culture of these outlets. In certain instances, the ‘idealism’, ‘altruism’, and social goals of the outlet could produce more internal deliberation and debate between journalists that could dull traditional news senses. Finally for others, the ‘hands-off’ editorial policies meant journalists felt a distance from the organisation at times and lacked a sense of identifiable editorial direction.

(4) Public Service Broadcasters – Bureaucratic Delegation but Political Pressure

¹¹⁰ Interviewee 8.

¹¹¹ Interviewee 5.

Direct and indirect interference in the work of journalists and editors at public service broadcasters was much more limited than the patterns observed in interview evidence from those working for privately owned outlets. However in contrast to trust-owned organisations, government influence at PSBs tended to vary over time as organisational cultures changed and/or governments took more active monitoring roles with respect to certain coverage especially in relation to times of significant social conflict.

Interviewee 17, a senior managing editor at RTÉ and with substantial previous experience at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), argued that in his/her experience in media organisations there is a consistent awareness among staff as to who the controlling owners are.¹¹² In the case of public broadcast outlets, he/she said that there was an awareness at RTÉ that the public owns the organisation and that it must therefore serve the public. This link between public ownership and a public service ethos was very consciously stressed and practically communicated by the top tier of management during a particular period in the last decade. Given that RTÉ was under substantial economic pressures at the time, there was an internal and external focus on the need to adhere to public service provisions and to become more accountable and transparent to match expectations of a public institution. Due to a funding gap, the commercial side of the organisation had become more powerful in the preceding period as RTÉ had faced sustainability issues that had reached a near-existential level. This represented a form of critical juncture in which the organisation re-oriented itself conducting nationwide 'listening exercises' and re-affirming its role and status as a public service.

Similarly to RTE, the interviewee stressed that at the BBC the idea that the public was the owner and this required the organisation to serve the public rather than any individuals or particular political agenda or interests was very central to planning, decisions, and organisational ethos. In the case of the BBC though, this was already deeply embedded and did not need any additional conscious effort. The interviewee spoke of an ethos that referred consistently back to the idea that the very existence of the organisation was due to the ownership and funding of the public. This matches closely the findings of others that the norms and values of PSBs are especially 'congealed' within the BBC as

¹¹² Conducted 9/5/2017.

an organisation (e.g. Hanretty, 2010). The BBC inculcated this public focus very directly. The interviewee used the example of his/her experience of a policy that required a substantive response within 48 hours to any public request or feedback on programming.

Similarly to the principles of The Irish Times Trust and the Scott Trust, the 'public service mission' of these broadcast outlets can appear quite abstract on the surface and the practical impact of these provisions can be difficult to discern. However, interviewee 17 stated that there is a very close relationship between public broadcasters' staff and the public service mission even if, as we might expect, this is not discussed on a day-to-day basis. Practically, decisions over the allocation of resources and coverage are strongly informed by the charter principles to inform, educate, and entertain and the interviewee pointed to episodes from her experience of the development of new services and platforms as one part of the public mission i.e. the service to certain sectors and often marginal segments of the population. The primary component of the mission in the interviewee's view rested on the 'inform' principle and the provision of substantive objective, quality news coverage that was the pillar around which everything else was built. A news producer and senior editorial manager at RTÉ¹¹³ explained that the public service mission and values manifested in his/her view through a number of major avenues. Firstly, there was a structural component to news production in terms of internal programme guidelines that formally institutionalised the requirements to objectivity and fairness in how each news and current affairs programme within the news, television, radio and publishing (now digital) divisions. Interviewees 17 and 18 also strongly stressed the importance of the regulatory framework requiring impartiality and balance in conditioning the behaviour of RTÉ staff.¹¹⁴

Secondly, interviewee 1 outlined the importance of a culture of collective engagement in news conferences and the development of editorial policy as well as an organisational commitment to consistent reflective, retrospective assessment of the success or otherwise of recent programming and news coverage in matching the fairness, objectivity, and balance required in the guidelines mentioned above. Third, he/she outlined the tradition that informs hiring and firing and the compatibility of prospective journalists and editors with

¹¹³ Interviewee 1 – Conducted 1/3/2017.

¹¹⁴ Conducted 25/5/2017.

the public service mission and the values that underlie it. This commonly involved an assessment of whether the individual hire had demonstrated, or could be expected to demonstrate, the necessary detachment and fair-mindedness in reporting and the production of balanced programming. Finally and relatedly, the interviewee identified a strong resistance within the organisation to any perception of editorialising in reporting and he/she described that editorialising of this sort was the only meaningful type of behaviour that prompted intervention or reprimand from senior editorial managers such as himself/herself.

Organisationally, interviewees outlined that public broadcasters have very clear structures of line management that matches expectations regarding the structure of most public bodies. Interviewee 1 said that line management of this sort served mainly to delineate responsibilities but with respect to news production and editorial presentation itself, this process was typically much more horizontal and encouraged delegation to correspondents and specialists as their responsibilities in the organisation were clearly outlined and they were therefore confident in asserting themselves within their particular roles. This contrasts quite sharply with print media organisations generally, and private entities in particular, where the role of the editor and senior staff is quite expansive and ultimately, the outlet tends to have their individual 'stamp' or voice. The structure of public bodies and the allocation of formalised responsibilities also provides a degree of stability and job security not associated with commercial media outlets (or private enterprises more generally). Practically, the formalisation of roles serves to allow staff to be more forthright and forceful in articulating their views during the process of developing an editorial line or challenging particular decisions prospectively and retrospectively.

Interviewee 17 said that in the case of public broadcasters, television and news were particularly powerful 'political' forces in the organisation as these represented the major budgetary powers and were seen to provide the 'legacy trust' for the organisations. News has become particularly powerful in RTÉ over time building further on a well-established base while news has always been the central pillar at the BBC. This is linked to the central role of the Reithian requirement to 'inform' in the public service mission which is considered to be the preeminent role of the broadcaster with the requirements to educate and

entertain following at a distance. This resulted in an enhanced ability of news divisions to attract resources within the organisation. Interviewee 1 similarly outlined the news division's success in consistently producing internal budget provisions to provide necessarily substantive and extensive coverage of major political events, in particular elections as these constitute the central concrete components of the public service remit. There was little suggestion from the interviewees that in either public broadcaster that there was a concentration of power among any individuals or that any individuals had particular influences over editorial policy generally.¹¹⁵

As is the case for the trust-owned outlets discussed above, journalistic autonomy and the diversity of perspectives that feed into editorial policy approaches at PSBs is perhaps most directly observed by examining the news conferencing process as referenced by interviewee 1 above. At PSBs, interview evidence illustrates that the vast majority of news decisions are largely taken collaboratively at news conferences. These are usually prospective, take place daily, weekly, and more regularly still in the case of special events such as during elections. These conferences include correspondents and issue specialists with the responsible news editors and production editors involved. Managing editors are often although not always present at the more regular conferences and would tend to defer to correspondents and specialists unless dealing with topics of special sensitivity or in the case of special events when there are special guidelines in place to guide coverage.¹¹⁶ Interviewees characterised discussions at these conferences as robust and journalists and production staff would typically be forthright in expressing their views on priorities, issues of fairness and outlining how policy should be amended. Interviewees suggested that the organisational culture of public service broadcasters was such that many journalistic staff felt it was their professional role to raise debate and this was generally an organisational norm. The core of this ethos is that public broadcasters have a responsibility to 'step back' and be self-reflective or self-critical regarding their performance in news coverage although interviewees

¹¹⁵ The sole exception to this pattern identified by interviewees was the case of coverage of Northern Ireland. See below.

¹¹⁶ These events include general elections and referendums where balance and proportionality of coverage are typically required by both law and internal organisational policy.

highlighted that achieving this is something of a constant, iterative struggle within these organisations.

While interviewees contend that editorial staff and management within these outlets seek to inculcate that the public are the ultimate owners with some success in their view, any potential ownership influence at PSBs rests in reality with the government of the day. Interviewee 1 outlined that the "structure of the relationship means there are certainly pressures" and identified potential avenues for influence in his/her view. At RTÉ for example, Director Generals can and have been replaced while the licence fee and its renewal or potential increase is a major source of pressure. However he said that the variety of "editorial venues" i.e. the various types of conferencing and the formalised line management and delineated responsibilities serve as protections against political influence as there are no individuals that have sufficient direct or indirect authority to meaningfully orchestrate editorial decisions and therefore be targets for governmental pressure. He characterised the actual influence as largely minor although political parties and leaders would make frequent contact. The pattern of editorial venues and the decentralisation of control make the organisation resistant despite this frequent contact. For example, a managing editor will listen to the feedback and view being put forward and then moves on as most news production decisions are delegated to others with specific responsibilities.

Interviewee 18 stressed further the importance of the division of authority within a public broadcaster such as RTÉ. He/she said that, unlike a commercial outlet such as a newspaper, there is a separation of editorial responsibility within a number of separate departments and editorial hierarchies in a public broadcaster. For example, she/she outlined that television news, radio news, the news division itself and current affairs all represent separate divisions within RTÉ and therefore editorial decisions on what to cover and how to cover it are taken in a variety of 'editorial venues.' It is therefore extremely difficult from a practical point of view for the government or the responsible minister to apply pressure to influence or alter news decisions as there is no single figure with centralised editorial responsibility in the organisation. This structure also by necessity requires delegation of decisions down the chain and autonomy for reporters, correspondents, and division editors in the news production decisions they make. This was contrasted sharply by the interviewee with the role of a

newspaper editor who embodies a certain central authority even if individual editors and outlets differ in the degree to which decisions are taken centrally or in a collaborative fashion. The interviewee said that he/she had never been subject to editorial influence or instruction in RTÉ and that the disparate editorial venues meant that it was very difficult to identify any true political 'agenda' the organisation could be said to have.

Interviewee 17 was clearer still. He/she characterised the relationship between public broadcasters (BBC and RTE) and government as being largely 'hands-off' and independent. This resulted from both the very strong legislative framework regarding impartiality and balance as well as the development of organisational cultures that separate public broadcasters from the state. The management and staff of the PSBs, in his/her view, see the defence of their model as reliant upon news and current affairs coverage adhering to principles of objectivity and fairness and retaining strong distance from government.

Interview evidence highlights the fact that in reality the relationship between public broadcasters and governments is often more conflictual than deferential. An interviewee said that there is often constant interaction and tension in some cases between both parties regarding editorial decisions or changes to management or funding. A senior editorial manager at both outlets contrasted the BBC and RTÉ with regard to de jure independence because of the differences in funding models.¹¹⁷ In RTÉ's case, guaranteeing the index-linked licence fee into the future was central to ensuring financial independence that forms the fundamental protection for the public model. This was particularly the case for RTÉ as the organisation was approaching bankruptcy during the period that the licence fee was being negotiated. The broadcaster was therefore forced to concede to commercial imperatives. Interviewee 17 spoke in his/her experience as a board member that relations between RTÉ and the FF-led government during the period in which the funding model was being reorganised and the commercial broadcast outlets were being established were often confrontational. The interviewee said that, despite the potential incentives to offer positive coverage, editorially there was no deference to government and in fact, this period was seen internally as demonstrating the organisation's independence. Rather than offer positive coverage, the organisation instead

¹¹⁷ The BBC is entirely funded by the licence fee while RTÉ relies on a dual model of licence fee revenues and advertising.

concentrated its efforts on demonstrating its autonomy while engaging directly in a consultative process with the public. From the BBC, he/she pointed to the case of the disagreement between the government and the BBC over the coverage of Iraq that was seen as a substantive case of the public service remit trumping any potential pressures from government even to the point of risking potential sanction. Interviewee 18 also spoke of programming that he/she was involved in producing during the financial crisis and its aftermath that was seen as critical of both government policy and private sector developers. The programmes were broadcast without any amendment and the interviewee was aware that there was an angry response from the government but that this had no effect whatsoever on follow-up programming. There was also no direct criticism of the interviewee within the organisation or through private channels between RTÉ and government. The independence of the public broadcaster even during a period of substantial economic fragility and volatility does not seem to have been breached.

Interview evidence suggests that public broadcasters' coverage is only subject to substantive government influence under very specific circumstances. Geoffrey Goodman, former *Daily Mirror* journalist, provided an account of direct instructions from the Thatcher government to the BBC to focus miners' strike coverage on the violence of pickets (Goodman, 2009). Interviewee 15, in correspondence, argued that working within the BBC at the time and covering the strike directly, he had strong doubts as to whether such an instruction was issued. Instead, he outlined that the one and only experience of potential interference in reporting of the strike concerned the reporting on the "new faces" of those who were supposedly returning to work. The participant believed the Coal Board had been depressing the total number of men in order to bring forward the day on which they could claim that 50 per cent of employees were back at work and the strike was therefore defeated. The interviewee said, "My expose was broadcast on Today and attracted immediate complaints from Conservative MPs. A week later, I was instructed to report to the secretary to the BBC governors. I was told that my revelations were not regarded as having been "helpful". But I had no difficulty proving conclusively that my figures were accurate and I heard no more."¹¹⁸ The interviewee maintained that apart from this, it was manipulation of the news agenda by the Thatcher government and

¹¹⁸ Correspondence with Interviewee (20/4/2017) and published on interviewee's website.

Coal Board that influenced coverage, for example, their provision of statistics and reports on the miners breaking the strike and returning to work¹¹⁹, rather than the structure of the BBC-government relationship.

Interviewee 1 outlined that one of the only two examples of substantive communication directly from government that meaningfully affected news coverage came during the 2008 Financial Crisis. The Irish Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan contacted senior editorial managers in RTÉ regarding the Liveline programme's coverage of the banking crisis and was considered to have prompted fears that could lead to a potential "run on the banks". In this case, the interviewee said that the criticism was considered largely fair and resulted in a move away from this type of coverage in the subsequent programming during that period. This is an atypical case as the Liveline programme is a phone-in programme in which listeners can call to express opinions. It is therefore not subject to the same editorial and production decisions as typical news reporting and features. In another case during the financial crisis, the government contacted senior editors to express anger regarding the flagship news programme's (Morning Ireland) coverage that featured the Central Bank's governor announcing the country was to receive a bailout. In contrast to the above, the interviewee said that despite governmental opposition, RTÉ saw it as crucial to allow the segment to be broadcast in the public interest. Given the seismic nature of this event, it is a powerful demonstration of resistance to pressure.

The major example of more pervasive pressure from governments on PSBs that arose in interview discussions concerned state security and specifically the coverage of the Northern Ireland conflict. Interviewee 3, a BBC reporter on the conflict, outlined that being young and left-wing at the time, he/she felt that the BBC was too timid in its coverage and sought to include a more expansive set of issues and parties in his/her coverage and delve deeper into the background. While this was facilitated at the *Irish Times*, he/she felt "much more conscious at the BBC" and was ultimately "effectively sacked" by the BBC as the organisation did not renew his/her contract. In this case, there was a very different dynamic at play at different levels of the organisation. The interviewee said, "at high management position the BBC was fighting a rear guard action

¹¹⁹ The interviewee maintained that these figures were "massaged downwards."

against successive governments and in many ways the BBC fought a good fight at that level but at my level, the BBC was really quite constrained". The pressures on more frontline editors and individual journalists are quite different in this scenario. Sensitive matters of this sort may generate a form of self-censorship by staff on the ground as they are making immediate and fine-grained decisions on coverage, framing, sourcing, and tone while the more senior management seeks to defend the organisation's autonomy and public service remit at a more abstract level. Ultimately, the public media coverage of Northern Ireland is noteworthy as uniquely it was subject to legislative action in both Britain and Ireland.

Interviewee 1 identified Northern Ireland as one of only two issues in his/her experience that produced significant influence by the government into the editorial policy and news coverage of RTE. Along with the effects of the established precedent of the sacking of the entire RTÉ managing Authority in 1972 for violation of Section 31, RTÉ was subject to direct formal directives that did serve to limit its coverage and were characterised by Horgan (2001, p.150) as "a major irritant and an obstacle to serious journalism." However, the interviewee did not accept the claim by some scholars (e.g. Corcoran, 2004) that there was an ingrained culture of internal censorship in RTE. Beyond the specific requirements of the directives that prohibited the broadcast of the voices, statements, or views of political groups associated with terrorism, it is difficult to identify the degree to which RTÉ's coverage more generally was influenced by the relationship with government as the organisation and its staff were already quite divided. For interviewee 1 the viewpoint of individuals in RTÉ did have influence on their programmes and there was a "subculture" that pushed very strongly with regard to editorial policy decisions, sources, guests and priorities in the coverage of Northern Ireland. This tallies with a number of detailed accounts of the activism and influence of key figures within RTÉ and the union chapter in pushing for a wider interpretation of section 31 and a more aggressive application of its provisions (e.g. Hanley and Millar, 2009). However, interviewee 1 outlined that there was substantial debate between interest groups on either side within RTÉ but many if not most journalists working in the outlet were not involved or engaged with these disputes. In terms of the effects of the directive, there was an "evolution of the implementation" but the interviewee believed there was "pushback to the extent possible".

It is difficult to discern precisely how representative the influence of government on the coverage of Northern Ireland is of the broader PSB-government relationship. The introduction of legislation in both states to limit and/or prohibit certain types of coverage suggests that the issue is sui generis as this form of direct intervention is virtually unheard of with regard to any other issue. The use of legislation also suggests that the respective governments did not believe that the usual methods of communication and/or influence over PSB output were suitable or sufficient. This seems to illustrate that these outlets are broadly inclined to take an independent stance if left alone.

Overall then, the interview evidence suggests that generally the structure, mission, and ethos of public service broadcasters provide an insulation from the pressures of government ownership. The requirements to inform, maintain impartiality, and provide a balance in news coverage provide a formal regulatory framework that is supplemented by explicit internal guidelines on how to interpret these provisions and achieve these goals. A division of labour and delegation of authority provides journalists and editors with a certain degree of autonomy and by clearly defining their roles and responsibilities, staff develop a professional value requiring a robust articulation of their views regarding editorial priorities and policy. This also helps shield senior editorial staff from direct contact or pressure from government figures. However, these protections from direct or indirect interference appear more contingent than the protections within trust models. Avenues for the direct articulation of government views, the application of pressure, and leverage towards compliance exist in public broadcasters. The interview evidence also highlights attempts by governments to influence the BBC and RTÉ directly and the pressures this brought on the organisations. As these are states where the 'dual' model of broadcasting is well established and public broadcasting is well embedded, this evidence of government influence is quite surprising. While generally resistant, examples from interview evidence show that in highly contentious circumstances these pressures can become quite acute. In states where the tradition of independent public broadcasting is weaker and the 'dual' model less developed, the scope for interference looks even greater. The potential for public broadcasters to comply with government direction, defer, or employ self-censorship appears greatest when security issues are involved and where there is a precedent for adverse consequences where the broadcaster has clashed with governments previously.

Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter examines journalists' and editors' experiences and assessments of the impact of ownership on the process of news production and presentation with illustrations of the concrete impact of the form of ownership on organisational culture, editorial policy and ethos as well as specific cases in which those who controlled the firm influenced how it covered individual issues or actors. In this manner, this chapter provides qualitative evidence for many of the hypothesised patterns of control discussed in earlier chapters.

Broadly, there is quite strong support for the theorised association between individual or family ownership and clearer avenues of influence although the particular methods of owner control vary substantially from one owner to another and indeed from one issue to another. In certain cases, owners are content to appoint editors and senior staff who approximate their worldview and ideology and then broadly leave them to instil these values into the outlet and its staff. However in other cases, owners are prone to interfere more overtly especially with regard to issues where their personal economic interests or political beliefs are very strong. The interview evidence also sheds light on the newsroom processes that facilitate the inculcation of owners' and owner-appointed editors' views. Often, journalistic staff in private outlets learn editorial policy through an iterative process of trial-and-error in which their copy is given less prominence or heavily subbed. Having been through this editing process repeatedly, they internalise the outlet's agenda while in other cases a more vigorous and authoritarian culture is in place which leaves staff in little doubt what owners and senior staff want and the consequences of deviation from this. There is however, significant variation in the degree to which owners interfere. Certain private outlets remain relatively free of both direct and indirect control. The interview evidence suggests this tends to occur where financial control of the outlet is fragile or in flux although clearly some individual owners are indeed personally committed to a principle of editorial independence.

Trust-owned outlets are very different. While this model is rare and currently under significant financial strain, these outlets tend to have very concrete commitments to journalistic autonomy and a collaborative, bottom-up approach to editorial policy, ethos, and indeed editorial selection. While the two prominent examples of this model in action are liberal leaning, journalists and editors

outlined substantial space for a diversity of perspectives and exceptionally minimal use of subbing or editing to make copy fit a particular agenda.

Public broadcasters fall somewhere between the two extremes of trusts and private ownership when it comes to patterns of ownership and control. The interview evidence stresses that the public service remit is well-established and these outlets are capable of and do exercise independence from government on a regular basis with the delineation of responsibilities and multiple inputs not the editorial process providing a certain immunity to most typical pressures from the state. However, the control of the purse strings and the government's appointments to the organisations' governing boards do make these outlets subject to pressure under certain conditions and the independence of public broadcasters therefore relies upon either regulation or embedded norms regarding the regularity with which governments can add or remove governors or alter the licence fee arrangements. In addition, where the state faces highly contentious episodes of social unrest or particularly violent conflict, public broadcasters, and their journalists face great pressure on their autonomy that they cannot always be resistant to. The evidence here is illuminating as it suggests that even where we might expect the independence of public broadcasters to be strongest i.e. where these outlets and their mission are long established and well respected as the BBC and RTÉ are, there are still substantial pressures when contentious social crises arise. Further research is needed to test the implications for less firmly entrenched public broadcasters and the patterns of interference in other media markets where the independence norm is less embedded.

This chapter is one of only a small number of qualitative studies in recent times examining the relationship between ownership and control over media outlets in the British and Irish markets. However, the multiple forms of ownership in print media in these islands including trust ownership and public broadcasters provide strong contrasts with US- or Northern European-based studies and are worthy of further exploration particularly considering the culture and tradition of powerful private owners of media in this region. The exercise of control through hiring and firing is particularly ripe for future analysis that could include, where possible, studies of how the staff selection process operates in outlets with these different ownership structures. The interview evidence also suggests that where financial pressures come to bear on private owners, their grip on

control of the outlet and its editors loosens and future research could examine such cases to explore whether this manifests in content. Similarly, there is scope for further quantitative analysis and qualitative case study approaches specifically examining the consequences of trust ownership and the particular autonomy it appears to give journalists and editors. Finally, given the qualitative findings here and their congruence with the hypothesised patterns in the experimental, observational and content analysis earlier, examination of the impact of differential ownership structures on coverage of a broader range of issue areas should be a significant focus of future work.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The dissertation sought to theorise and test a causal mechanism linking media ownership structures with the production of differential news content and examining the effects of this content on citizens' attitudes. The study focused on the case of news coverage of labour unions as an area where private owner interests are strong but that is unlikely to represent the primary selection criteria for news consumers. To test the causal mechanism, the dissertation examined four research questions in turn:

1. Do differences in the structure of media ownership of news outlets affect these outlets' coverage of labour unions, holding other factors constant?
2. Does differential media coverage of labour unions, their role, and activities affect citizens' attitudes towards unions, all else equal?
3. Do outlets with different ownership structures tend to cover salient events such as strikes differently and if so, can this differential coverage change news consumers' attitudes during the strike?
4. How and to what extent do media owners control the news organisations they own and does the form and degree of control vary depending on the type of ownership?

Certain media theorists contend that media ownership is the ultimate power within a news organisation and that fundamentally the coverage an outlet produces must therefore be conditioned by this (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). However, recent empirical studies illustrate that the underlying consumer base primarily influences the degree of media partisanship although owner effects are more likely where the owners' interests are strong relative to the consumer's (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010). This dissertation therefore investigates whether coverage of a single-issue area, stories about labour unions, where capitalist media owners are believed to have strong anti-union preferences is characterised by ownership effects. The study similarly interrogates whether we can trace ownership effects through to changes in citizens' attitudes.

This study and its findings are of clear social and scholarly importance. Citizens receive the vast majority of their information about political and economic actors from the news media and news coverage frames the way citizens consider a whole host of important social issues and democratic decisions. However if the information and framing of coverage is influenced by media owners and their

interests, this has serious implications for democratic debate. This study examines in a holistic sense the links between ownership, the reporting, and framing of the news and the citizens who consume it.

Coverage of labour unions is important, as many political economy scholars have long contended that commercial media are biased against unions while the membership levels and political strength of organised labour have fallen considerably in recent years. At the same time, citizens have become increasingly reliant on news media to inform them about what unions do and why they do it. Chapter 2 compared the coverage of labour unions at a particular outlet before and after a change in ownership structure to see whether there is a relationship between the type of owner and the tone of coverage. Chapter 3 tested experimentally whether differently owned outlets' coverage of the same proximal news event, a set of Conservative government proposals to alter unions' ability to call strikes and fund political causes, affected the public's views of these proposals. It tested these effects in two separate settings and using both laboratory and survey experimental designs. Chapter 4 used a highly salient strike episode in which the stakes for the participants and the degree of news exposure were both very high to examine whether media effects hold up in a real-world scenario and whether news coverage of these events can, in fact, move public opinion. It also tested whether outlets with very different ownership models provide distinctive coverage of the same proximal event. Finally, Chapter 5 investigated the patterns of direct and indirect influence owners can wield over newsrooms and explored whether journalistic autonomy depends on the capacity that different types of owner have to control their employees.

The dissertation found that different types of ownership do matter for the production of news content and there is a robust effect of this content on how individuals who consume it view social organisations like trade unions. Chapter Two concluded that private ownership is associated with more negative coverage of labour unions than diverse publicly traded ownership as the incentive and capacity to control editors and journalists is much more extensive for individual or family owners (Napoli, 1997). This is despite the fact that at face value both types of ownership are purportedly motivated by commercial concerns or would be expected to be disinclined to support organised labour. These results are robust to comparison with another news outlet that did not experience a change away from family ownership and where the tone of

coverage remained consistent over the same period. Chapter 3 also finds that differences in coverage do affect public perceptions of unions and that the need for strong regulation of labour or a sense that it is too powerful are at least partially related to the news frames individuals are exposed to. This effect holds for both traditional convenience laboratory samples and representative survey panels. These findings show that while the individual effect of a particular story frame may be small, systematic framing under a particular owner could have sizeable cumulative impacts on attitudes. There is also evidence in Chapter 4 that the effects of media coverage on attitudes hold outside the laboratory setting and that where citizens are exposed to relatively negative or positive coverage of a high-salience strike event can have effects on their broader assessment of unions. This can however potentially be partially offset if citizens are exposed to crosscutting media. Finally, Chapter 5 demonstrates that private media owners use a combination of direct instructions, editorial selection, and value cultivation to control their media outlets. Private owners also tend to be associated with journalistic environments that are more restrictive. There are however some exceptions to this rule. Public service broadcasting and especially trust ownership offer something of an antidote to oppressive private control and tend to be associated with greater autonomy for journalists and a more robust, diverse but broadly collaborative approach to making the news.

This project improves our understanding of the relationship between owners, content and the citizenry and attempts to unpack the differential incentives, capabilities, and public effects of different forms of news media ownership. It simultaneously contributes to media and communication literature on the links between ownership and control, theoretical work on the political economy of news and empirical literature on the factors explaining decline in support and membership of trade unions.

The dissertation's findings have clear theoretical and substantive implications. Critical political economy accounts of monolithic commercial media preferences require substantial revision in light of the differences identified in the degree of freedom and autonomy journalists have under different types of ownership structure and the effects this has on the tone, diversity, or impartiality of news coverage. Similarly, many media scholars have long argued that the move towards a corporatisation of news media has led to the promotion of profit goals over traditional public service goals. Many of the same scholars have also argued

that commercial media have simultaneously become more deferential or friendly to corporate interests in their news coverage while marginalising other voices. The findings here suggest that while ownership by large publicly traded corporations may have its drawbacks and may orient news organisations towards profit-making, diverse publicly traded shareholdings may have other benefits in granting the editorial side of the operation more freedom to cover issues as they wish without instituting a 'line' or agenda to the outlet's coverage. This appears to hold even for the coverage of topics such as labour unions where the actors being covered often have interests that diverge substantially from conglomerate owners. In fact, corporate ownership may in fact be the 'lesser evil' when compared to traditional ownership by moguls who generally wish to and are able to exercise control over their outlets. While there may be certain exceptions, individual or family owners still tend to instil editorial agendas that are more right leaning than editors and journalists operating relatively autonomously at corporate outlets.

There are also implications for how we think about the concentration of media ownership. While liberal theorists (and policy makers) often focus on the need for multiple voices in a media market, they often overlook ownership at the meso- or firm-level. While recent work has shown that the concentration of media ownership is increasing slowly in most western states (Noam, 2016), the major 'independent' voices in many Anglophone markets remain under the control of individuals and families. This project illustrates that broadly speaking these outlets tend to be much more subject to control from their owners. However, corporate ownership public broadcasters and the occasional trust-controlled outlet do provide alternative viewpoints in some markets as these outlets inculcate different values in their journalists and editors. Exposure to these alternative views can in turn move public attitudes in a different direction on key issues. This has relevance for both media scholars and policy makers. Consideration of media diversity should therefore also take account of firm-level concentration of ownership when considering the diversity of voices and perspectives in a given market. In particular, public broadcasters and the public service remit remains a critical bulwark against powerful media moguls as news content and opinions become ever more polarised.

While the digital revolution means that new funding models may be needed, placing public broadcasting on a sustainable footing strengthens the

independence of these broadcasters from government and the provides a clearer, more balanced alternative free from the pressures of the market or individuals' agendas. Support for public broadcasters was a major theme of the interviews in Chapter 5 and came as often from the staff of commercial competitors as the public broadcasters themselves. One suggestion is to introduce a communications levy that would then be used to support both broadcast and possibly print journalism. While such a measure has often been strongly opposed by liberal media theorists and may not be popular with the electorate, it may represent the only way to prevent further concentration of ownership and/or a dominance of a small number of wealthy individuals or families sustaining the remaining traditional outlets. The findings also illustrate the strengths of trust ownership. Trust outlets clearly provide very distinct coverage of events and issues and this is built on their traditions of editorial independence and the freedom they provide to their journalists in what to write and how to write about it. The not-for-profit structure and social mission of the Scott Trust and the Irish Times Trust make them highly unusual in the modern media environment but critical to providing diversity in their respective markets. In one sense, the findings of the latter chapters of this dissertation imply that further Scott Trust-style ownership would guarantee a certain diversity of media voices internally and externally in the future. Given the financial difficulties of both *The Guardian* and *The Irish Times* though, the more important implication for policy makers may be the need to devise other guarantees of diversity if these models cannot be replicated elsewhere or themselves sustained in their present form.

The study also offers many avenues for further research. First and most clearly, while the study broadens the theory beyond the study of specific owner benefits from single legislative decisions or judicial judgements (e.g. Gilens and Hertzmann, 2000; Snow Bailard, 2016) this is primarily a study of the news coverage of one topic, labour unions, and its relationship to media ownership. Certainly, the topic of labour unions provides an empirical analysis of common theoretical claims and a plausible test for the causal mechanism. On the other hand, the project does not assess the relationship between ownership, coverage and the effects of coverage in many other policy areas or concerning various other types of social and political organisations. However, the framework used here integrating the causes of media effects and the effects of coverage itself

can and should be applied to the coverage of other issues to see if the patterns here are generalizable. From a political economy perspective, similar studies could include examination of the links between ownership structure and the coverage of corporate governance or taxation, privatisation, welfare state retrenchment or labour market reforms. More broadly still, scholars need a better empirical understanding of ties between owner preferences and news coverage of social issues such as immigration particularly outside of the US market.

Secondly, caution is required in drawing inferences regarding the effective role of public broadcasters in offsetting the coverage of private outlets highlighted in Chapter 4. While this effect holds under various specifications, for some variables the cell sizes in the British Social Attitudes study of the time are small. Unfortunately, the lack of a similar question in the larger British Election Study panel prevents further interrogation of these findings. There is fertile ground for extension of recent research on the conditioning role of public broadcasters (and trusts) in dual media markets where these outlets' ethos and mission may clash with strong private ownership and media corporations.

Third, the results in Chapter 2 are based on a unique quasi-experimental 'shock' to ownership at a single news outlet. There are clear advantages to using this case to isolate the causal effect of a change in ownership structure. However, it would be useful to examine multiple takeovers of broadcast or print outlets to identify to what extent the effect can be generalised fully. While ownership structures are relatively stable at many national news outlets and the secrecy of the Times Mirror-Tribune deal is unusual, takeovers of local newspapers or local radio stations where archival data is available offer an opportunity to expand the set of cases that can be leveraged. More broadly, this natural or quasi-experimental approach can offer significant value to researchers in political communication and media studies where endogeneity problems persist.

Fourth, Chapter 5 illustrates the important role that editorial and journalistic staff selection plays in enabling media owners to inculcate an ideology and worldview in the outlets they control without the need for constant monitoring or communication. Future research should investigate the process of staff hiring in these outlets by exploring through qualitative interviews or acquiring demographics and background information on journalists recruited by different

news outlets. Examining the patterns of new hires and further promotions would provide an opportunity to establish how and to what extent we can see owner interests and ideologies instilled and reinforced in news outlets and their coverage in a way that would otherwise remain unobserved.

Fifth, this project employs dictionary-based coding of the tone of political news coverage as it has clear advantages over intensive qualitative cases studies in its replicability, lack of expense, transparency, and comparability with other studies in the media and political communication literature. However, there is scope for further exploration of the nature and determinants of coverage of trade unions in the media. In particular, future research would benefit from the development of new organised labour topic dictionaries or the employment of supervised or unsupervised machine learning approaches to measure tone. Of course, all approaches to the quantitative measurement of tone, slant, or bias in news coverage have advantages and disadvantages. The benefits of dictionary-coding and the Lexicoder sentiment dictionary in particular were apparent for the specific goals of this project but the literature on ownership and/or consumer effects on media content will be advanced further by employing a combination of supervised and unsupervised methods. Finally, this project concentrates specifically on media ownership in Anglophone, Liberal states. While the inferences about the causal relationship between ownership, control, coverage, and attitudes should generally be expected to hold outside this context, further research should interrogate how differences in the management of media firms, professional organisation of journalists, and the external media market affect the findings.

Chapter 2 Appendix 2.1: Data Collection Guidelines

1. Period identification:
 - a. 1st January 1994 – 1st March 2000 (Pre-Takeover)
 - b. 2nd March 2000 – 31st December 2006
2. Search Term Methodology:
 - a. Keyword phrases in Headlines/Body: "unions" "labor", "union"
 - b. Keyword phrases in Body of stories: "labor unions" "organized labor," "labor organization" "labor movement," "big labor"
3. Sections of Newspaper:
 - a. All news content: News (later called Telegraph), National, Metro, Business, Local
 - b. Excludes editorials, obituaries etc.,
 - c. Examples of excluded results generated by search terms: same-sex unions, credit unions, "labor of love", Labor Day.

Chapter 3 Appendix 3.1: Study 1 Questionnaire

1. Under the new Bill, what is the threshold of eligible members for a strike to be legal in the public service sector?

- 5 per cent
- 10 per cent
- 40 per cent
- 80 per cent
- 100 per cent

2. True or False: the Bill proposes a new ban solely on physical intimidation of strike breakers:

- True
- False

3. True or False: the Bill retains the current system of automatic union member contributions to 'political funds':

- True
- False

4. True or False: The opposition also support the Government's proposed Trade Unions Bill

- True
- False

To what extent do you agree with the following?

1. Trade unions have too much power:

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree

- Disagree strongly

2. There is no need for strong trade unions to protect employees' working conditions and wages:

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly

3. There should be stricter laws to regulate the activities of trade unions:

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly

5. True or False: the percentage of travellers who preferred to travel by car declined in the last year we have data for compared to the previous report:

- True
- False

6. What percentage of journeys taken by car in 2013 were short trips i.e. between 2-4km in distance?

- 12 per cent
- 28 per cent
- 58 per cent
- 72 per cent

- 95 per cent

7. True or False: Less than 50 per cent of residents of the capital city relied on their cars for travel:

- True
- False

8. True or False: The Minister for Transport welcomed the findings in relation to car usage patterns in the report:

- True
- False

To what extent do you agree with the following?

9. Many of the claims about environmental threats are exaggerated:

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly

4. I do what is right for the environment, even when it costs more money or takes more time:

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly

5. We should protect the environment even if it damages economic growth:

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly

Demographic Questions:

1. **What is your gender?** (please tick one)

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

2. **What is your age?** (please tick one)

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

3. **Do you hold Irish citizenship?**

- Irish citizen
- Not an Irish citizen

4. **Which of the following best describes your present situation with regard to employment:** (please tick one)

- Student (Full-Time)

- Employed (Full-Time)
- Employed (Part-Time)
- Unemployed and Seeking work
- Retired

5. Father's occupation (or former if retired or unemployed):

6. Mother's occupation (or former if retired or unemployed):

7. How interested would you say you are in politics?

- Very interested
- Quite interested
- Hardly interested
- Not at all interested

8. If you were voting today, which party would you give your first preference to? (please tick one)

- Fine Gael
- Fianna Fáil
- Labour
- Sinn Féin
- Green Party
- Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit
- Renua
- Independent
- Others

9. Also for comparison, which party would you vote for in a UK General Election if you were voting today? (please tick one)

- Conservatives

- Labour
- Liberal Democrats
- United Kingdom Independence Party
- Green Party
- Others
- Don't know/No preference

10. In Politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10 where '0' means the left and '10' means the right? (please tick one)

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

Chapter 3 Appendix 3.2: YouGov Treatments and Questionnaire

###text1 if split1=1

Prime Minister curbs unions to stop strikes blighting vital services

Curbs on militants will slash the number of damaging strikes in schools, hospitals and the rail network by up to two-thirds according to government proposals. The Prime Minister believes it is right to end the power of union barons to order disruptive strikes on the back of derisory ballots.

The law will force unions to have a turnout of at least 50% for any strike ballot to be legal. Those in essential services like schools, hospitals, the railways and fire service will also have to get the backing of 40% of eligible members for walkouts.

An official assessment has predicted the measures will cut the number of days lost to strikes in schools, hospitals and transport by 65%. If the rules had been in place in the last parliament, the work days lost to strikes in those sectors would have been cut by more than 1.1 million.

Union chiefs reacted furiously and have warned the measures could backfire. One union leader said: "This blatant one sided approach is guaranteed to poison the relationship between workers and their managers. It will lead to even more trouble."

###text2 if split1=2

Opposition vow revenge as Prime Minister declares war on unions and workers' rights

The opposition has vowed to take revenge if the Government pressed ahead with their punitive attack on trade unions. An opposition spokesperson accused the Prime Minister of launching an "ideologically-driven" war against workers' rights that will make it all but impossible to strike.

The biggest crackdown on the unions in decades will make it harder to take industrial action by demanding a 50% turnout for strike ballots. And in key services such as health, education, transport and fire services, strikes will not take place unless 40% vote of those eligible to vote support action.

Union leaders have warned that unions are “ready to fight” the measures. One trade unionist said: “This union is not going to see itself rendered toothless by passively submitting to unjust laws. If the government wish to put trade unionism beyond the law, then they must take the consequences.

“We are ready for the fight, and we will, I believe, find allies throughout society, amongst everyone who cares for freedom and democracy.”

###Randomise order

[Q1] Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement...

There should be stricter laws to regulate the activities of trade unions:

- <1> Agree strongly
- <2> Agree
- <3> Somewhat agree
- <4> Neither agree nor disagree
- <5> Somewhat disagree
- <6> Disagree
- <7> Disagree strongly
- <8> Don't know

[Q2] Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement...

Trade unions have too much power:

- <1> Agree strongly
- <2> Agree
- <3> Somewhat agree
- <4> Neither agree nor disagree
- <5> Somewhat disagree

<6> Disagree

<7> Disagree strongly

<8> Don't know

Chapter 4 Appendix 4.1: Additional Analysis

Media Effects Decay: Unions have too much power Question – Effects on attitudes in 1986 controlling for 1985 views.

	(1) 1986 Model
Union Power 85	2.194*** (0.262)
Express	-0.254 (0.415)
Mail	-0.0939 (0.361)
Mirror	0.145 (0.399)
Star	0.347 (0.605)
Sun	-0.375 (0.372)
Telegraph	0.142 (0.593)
Guardian	0.767 (0.650)
Times	1.132 (0.831)
Constant cut1	3.578*** (0.472)
Constant cut2	5.962*** (0.615)
Observations	323

Table 4.8: Ordinal Logistic Models. Trade Unions have too much power (1= Too Much, 2=About Right, 3=Too Little). Standard errors in parentheses*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Interactive Models of Varied News Diet and Individual Newspaper Consumption

	(1) Base	(2) Base + Voting	(3) Base + Controls
Union Power 84	2.466*** (0.317)	2.281*** (0.363)	2.270*** (0.374)
Express	-15.27*** (1.320)	-14.33*** (1.211)	-15.53*** (1.244)
Mail	-1.978 (1.519)	-1.574 (1.613)	-1.511 (1.678)
Mirror	-0.217 (1.268)	-0.662 (1.244)	-0.588 (1.244)
Star	-16.88*** (1.520)	-15.91*** (1.455)	-17.14*** (1.496)
Sun	1.153 (1.298)	1.394 (1.268)	1.463 (1.307)
Telegraph	-1.129 (1.476)	-1.073 (1.524)	-0.996 (1.494)
Guardian	-2.107* (1.228)	-2.523** (1.193)	-2.496** (1.224)
Times	-16.88*** (1.526)	-15.93*** (1.498)	-16.67*** (1.516)
Varied News Diet	0.0170 (1.147)	0.326 (1.045)	0.451 (1.051)
Express*Varied News Diet	14.42*** (1.416)	13.38*** (1.343)	14.55*** (1.377)
Mail*Varied News Diet	1.728 (1.583)	1.444 (1.669)	1.459 (1.733)
Mirror*Varied News Diet	0.465 (1.342)	0.464 (1.315)	0.467 (1.314)
Star*Varied News Diet	16.94*** (1.655)	15.65*** (1.618)	16.95*** (1.669)
Sun*Varied News Diet	-1.164 (1.388)	-1.401 (1.395)	-1.481 (1.432)
Telegraph*Varied News Diet	1.253 (1.612)	1.479 (1.644)	1.387 (1.627)
Guardian*Varied News Diet	3.011** (1.437)	2.532* (1.363)	2.353* (1.362)
Times*Varied News Diet	-1.230 (1.784)	-0.686 (1.825)	-0.527 (1.860)
Conservative		0.0130 (0.465)	0.160 (0.480)
Labour		1.448*** (0.484)	1.547*** (0.482)
Liberal		1.139** (0.550)	1.147** (0.571)
SDP		-0.357 (0.526)	-0.466 (0.569)
Alliance		-0.455 (0.845)	-0.625 (0.999)
Other		23.48*** (1.205)	24.76*** (1.210)
Not a union member			-0.630** (0.315)
Constant cut1	3.863*** (1.146)	4.208*** (1.084)	3.963*** (1.129)
Constant cut2	6.792*** (1.236)	7.417*** (1.223)	7.212*** (1.272)
Observations	323	323	321

*Table 4.9: Ordinal Logistic Models. Trade Unions have too much power (1= Too Much, 2=About Right, 3=Too Little). Standard errors in parentheses*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.*

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